

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 *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE II.

THE MINISTRY OF PAIN.

BY EDWARD M. MERRINS, M.D., WUCHANG, CHINA.

III.

THE first article on this subject indicated the great importance of the susceptibility to pain in connection with the development and nurture of the body, and the value of pain in the diagnosis and treatment of disease and injury. To guard against exaggeration, it also pointed out that pain is not always so dreadful as it seems, as proved by the actual experiences of the sick and wounded, even death itself, in the great majority of cases, being accompanied by little or no physical pain.

In a second article it was shown in connection with the development of mind that the faculty of memory, which makes education possible, was primarily the registration of painful impressions, and that the hardships and pains of the struggle for existence were a powerful stimulus to the acquisition of speech and mental power and to the development of the mechanical arts. Pain was also an aid to man's moral development on the parallel lines of the masculine and feminine virtues. Taking the narrative of Elijah's meeting with God in Horeb as a parable of the experiences of life which, through the emotions, the intellect, and the will, prepare the soul to hear the Divine voice, the slow and painful development of man's spiritual nature was next considered, special points being the lowly beginnings of religion, the modern interpretation of the "fall," the origin of prayer and sacrifice, the place of austerities in human life, the purificatory value

of pain which yet is not to be sought for its own sake, and the spiritual power which comes through the conquest of pain.

(2) *And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.* A movement towards religion commences in the desire of primitive man to discover the cause or the author of every external event or phenomenon. As the only source of activity with which he is acquainted is the action of the will, all objects which move, or which he believes capable of moving,—the heavenly bodies, clouds, winds, rain, fire, rivers, trees, corn, grass,—he concludes are animated by unseen beings or influences. Hence the personification of the forces of nature, and the origin of such myths as that of the earth-bearer, who supports the earth, and from time to time shakes it in anger or amusement. For man, in his ignorance and simplicity, thinks all these nature-beings are endowed, like himself, with will, passions, and feelings. Some of them appear to be friendly, but as he suffers much and in various ways, most of them appear to be unfriendly, and these he tries to propitiate by prayer and sacrifice.

The next step, the perception of the necessity of a Maker, is borne in upon the savage at a very early time, not upon every member of a tribe, but upon some peculiarly gifted individual, who imparts to his fellows the awe-striking idea of a mysterious, all-powerful Creator.¹ The creature who recognizes a Creator can hardly fail to feel his relationship to him as One to be feared or loved, and also there arises the desire to enter into communication with him by means of worship. Thus are produced the two fundamental factors of religion, as mentioned by the sacred writer, "He that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him."

¹Leuba, *The Psychological Origin and Nature of Religion.*

Confronted by the task of discovering secondary causes and of compelling nature to minister to his well-being, the life of man has been full of toil and pain. Indeed, according to St. Paul, the whole creation is groaning and travailing in pain, and will continue to do so until men win their spiritual kingdom, and manifestly become the sons of God. As we now know, Nature is not man's antagonist, but his helpmeet, the interpreter of God to him, and his deliverance is her own. But "at the first Wisdom will walk with him by crooked ways, and bring fear and dread upon him, and torment him with her discipline, until she may trust his soul and try him by her laws." So it has ever been. Toil, sorrow, dread, and the torment of discipline have been his portion. By floods and seas, fires and volcanoes, lightning and tempest, earthquakes and landslides, famine and drought, disease and injury, and in other stern ways, Nature has been teaching men her laws, and visiting with her judgments those who either wilfully or ignorantly neglect or violate them. Much of this suffering seems very cruel and purposeless. So religious a writer as Henry Drummond, describing man's progress in the face of difficulties, says, "Evil dogged each step with sinister and sometimes staggering malevolence." But there is no vengeance or malevolence to be found anywhere in nature. A truer conception is found in the familiar metaphor of Huxley, who compares life to a game of chess:—

"The chess-board is the world, the pieces are the phenomena of the universe, the rules of the game are what we call the laws of Nature. The player on the other side is hidden from us. We know that his play is always fair, just, and patient. But also we know to our cost, that he never overlooks a mistake, or makes the smallest allowance for ignorance. To the man who plays well the highest stakes are paid, with that sort of ever-flowing generosity with which the strong shows delight in strength. And one who plays ill is checkmated without haste and without remorse."

Slowly man has come to understand and obey the laws of Nature. Through much suffering, and when Nature is in her terrible moods, depressed by the sense of his impotence and insignificance, still he has pressed onward, ever at his best when the difficulties were greatest. He has wrested secrets of the greatest importance from her, and progress is now so rapid that every year witnesses increased mastery over physical forces.

“ Out of black disaster,
He arose to be the master
Of Earth and Water, Air and Fire.”

But this is only part of his conquest. In the long and hard struggle he has gained spiritual insight and strength, winning many a victory over primal fears and instincts, even in the presence of physical defeat. Undaunted by the certainty of suffering and death, in shipwrecks, fires, mining accidents, and other perils and dangers, men have performed the bravest deeds, the most thrilling acts of self-sacrifice. When the ship “ Birkenhead ” was sinking in shark-infested waters within sight of the African shore, not England only, but the whole world was proud of the four hundred and fifty soldiers and sailors who, summoned suddenly from their hammocks to assemble on deck to meet their fate, in quiet order obeyed the word of command as calmly as if they were parading on shore, none trying to save themselves, as to do so meant the sacrifice of the women and children. Such deeds are an inspiration to the race, and glorify the pain which makes such heroism possible.

But the conflict is unconfined, and the heroism takes different forms. Not only the practice of medicine, but the investigations and duties of men of science generally, are often attended by considerable peril, from which they do not shrink

if mankind can be benefited. A recent instance may be cited of one who did much to make the X-rays more serviceable to military surgeons, who succumbed to a long and extremely painful disease induced by over-exposure of his body to the action of the rays. In a public appeal on his behalf, it was said that "words cannot depict the awful condition of the man who has sacrificed his means of livelihood, and shortened and distorted his life, for the benefit not only of his country, but of the whole human race." The account of his affliction acted as a warning to other workers in the same field, and as apparatus has now been devised for guarding the body against the undesired destructive effect of the rays, it is probably true that "his suffering, his martyrdom to the sacred cause of science, means the alleviation of pain and sickness in the future of countless thousands of suffering and tortured human beings throughout the world."¹

Notwithstanding the marvelous conquests and discoveries man has made, it may not be possible, perhaps it is not altogether desirable, that he shall have the power to avert all physical disaster, for the mystery, the grandeur, the terrible-ness of nature, lift the mind in awe and reverence to the Creator of all; and it cannot be denied that the fires, earthquakes, storms, and accidents, before which man is helpless, and which cause so much injury and loss of life, bind communities and nations together as nothing else does, in sympathy and brotherly helpfulness. But with increase of knowledge fear more and more departs. To those who know Nature's laws and live and work in harmony with them, her aspect is benignant, and to them she imparts her secrets. Fire and hail, snow and vapor, wind and tempest, are all seen to be fulfilling God's word. The uniform and unchangeable order of Na-

¹ *The Lancet*, January, 1910.

ture leads us to trust him when we enter the spiritual realm. The mountains are the symbol of his righteousness, and his cleansing judgments are as the great deep. It is in the great, lonely deserts, which bring home to the mind the littleness of man and the reality of the Eternal, that religious leaders of the world have found strength and inspiration. Taking a broad survey, the religious difference is very great between primitive man's abject fear of the multitudinous ghostly malignant powers which he believes are behind the forms of nature, and the love and admiration for God and nature expressed by the modern poet and religious seer:—

“And I have felt
 A Presence that disturbs me with joy
 Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean, and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and the mind of man:
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.”

Science also bears her testimony, even more strongly than the poets, to the order and beauty of nature. She affirms the words of the Psalmist that the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork, and there is no end to his greatness. As our knowledge increases, and veil after veil is removed from the face of nature, the more august and beautiful does it appear. And the marvelous discoveries now being made, so far from completing our knowledge, are but opening up new worlds. Addressing a society of distinguished scientists a year or two ago, its president closed with the words: “The sum of knowledge is at present a diverging, not a converging series. As we conquer peak after peak, we see in front of us regions full of interest and

beauty, but we do not see our goal, we do not see our horizon; in the distance tower still higher peaks, which will yield to those who ascend them still wider prospects, and deepen the feeling whose truth is emphasized by every advance in science, that great are the works of the Lord."

To reach the heights whence such glorious visions are obtained, a long, dark, and dangerous road has been traveled, yet who will dare say that the knowledge of God and of nature which man has gained, is not worth the journey and its dangers?

It may be objected that many have been wounded, and others have fallen by the way; in other words, that in the search for truth, many have failed to find their way to God through nature. Such lost travelers, when the quest was undertaken with a sincere and humble mind, are entitled to sympathy and respect, for they suffer vicariously for their kind. If we are indebted to geographical explorers who do no more than bring us the knowledge that the lands they have visited are bleak, desolate, uninhabitable, are we not indebted to those whose search for truth takes them to regions of doubt and negation, and proves to us that such regions can never be the permanent abiding place of the human spirit?

"To all who think, the world must at times appear overwhelming in the perplexity of causes; and some will always feel bound to say that they see no track through the maze. Such agnosticism, — reverent and tentative, not blatant and aggressive — is the cost some men must pay if mankind is to find truth at last. We who are Christians remember that the Godhead never shone forth in Christ so effulgently as in the moment when he felt himself forsaken of God, and we shall not think ill of those who, in the search for truth, fill up what remains of the sufferings of Christ."¹

Whatever touches and ennobles us in the lives and in the

¹ Temple, *The Nature of Personality* (1911).

voices of the past, writes Martineau, is a divine birth from human doubt and pain.

(3) *And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire.* All sharp, painful experiences of life, the fiery trials, whether national, social, or individual, which we encounter, constitute the spiritual discipline which acts particularly on the will, refining and subduing it, and bringing it into harmony with the will of God.

First, as to national adversities. In these days, public sentiment in civilized lands is steadily becoming adverse to war on any pretense, and it is certainly hard to justify it by the fundamental principles of Christianity. In the past, however, in spite of all the misery and demoralization which followed in its train, it has done much to promote the spiritual interests of mankind. Just as it is well for society that degenerate family strains shall disappear, so it is well for mankind at large that degenerate nations shall disappear. Nowadays they perish by slow decay, but in former times they were usually exterminated by war. In all wars, each nation is fighting to uphold a certain character or ideal, though the issue may not be clearly perceived by the combatants at the time. It is fitting, therefore, that the better should survive. Between the Canaanites and the Hebrews, if one or the other had to perish, surely it was better for the race that the Jews survived, for salvation came of the Jews. But Christians need not go out of their way to defend the slaughter of helpless women and children, and all the other horrid cruelties of war common among barbarous and semi-barbarous peoples. The time came when the tree of Judaism itself had to be cut down to the roots, in order that a better stock should grow. Conquered and carried into captivity by the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Jewish people in their deep humiliation and

distress formed truer and more profound conceptions of their God. No longer solely as the God of their own small nation, one among many other gods, they now regarded him as the supreme ruler and moral governor of the whole world, and they realized, as never before, the necessity and power of prayer. As a nation they were purified by adversity and pain. "Ho! All ye that pass by the way, look ye and see if there be a pain like mine, the pain which was given me, with which Jehovah grieved me, in the day of the burning of his anger." In their turn, they were softened towards all the suffering they beheld around them, and knowing its connection with disobedience to the laws of God, they perceived their mission to other nations as the servant of God, and that in its performance they must suffer vicariously. So the Jewish nation became "our Mother of sorrows, at whose knees men learned their first prayers of confession and penitence. Other nations have been their teachers in art, and wisdom, and government. But she is their mistress in pain and in patience, teaching men with what conscience they should bear the chastening of the Almighty, with what hope and humility they should wait for their God."¹

Within a nation itself there is often a struggle between opposing spiritual tendencies accompanied by persecution, sorrow, and pain. The question arises, Are religious ideals worth suffering for, or are they not worth the shedding of a single drop of human blood? The long course of religious history gives no uncertain answer. A nation's life and prosperity are bound up with its ideals. When these are low and perishing, it must be saved by reformation, or its end is nigh. When reform does come, those who proclaim the new and higher ideals inevitably suffer at the hands of those who cling to the

¹ G. A. Smith, *The Minor Prophets*.

old ways, so that a man's foes may be those of his own household. But suffering accomplishes the ends desired. The ideals may be opposed successfully for a time, but they do not perish. "Be of good cheer, Master Ridley," said Latimer at the stake to his friend, "we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as I trust shall never be put out." In suffering so borne, the triumph of the human spirit over pain and death is plainly seen. Of Cranmer it is written: "He burnt, to appearance, without motion or pain; he seemed to repel the force of fire, and overlook the torture, by strength of thought." The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, and of all godly liberty and progress. Passing to the individual, with his many troubles of mind, body, and estate, we may take disease, with its pains and incapacities, as the typical fiery trial which purifies and spiritualizes his nature; for, in one way and another, sickness has always directed the thoughts of men to the Unseen. The Lord is not in the fire, but often his voice is heard during or immediately after it. In early times the belief that disease was due to the departure of the soul from the body, or to demoniacal possession, led to the cure of disease being wholly a religious ceremony, sacrifice and prayer being offered to the gods or demons who were supposed to have inflicted it. A far higher conception was reached, as among the Jews, when all disease was regarded as the punishment of sin inflicted by the God of holiness. The conception is still true if it be granted that no disease occurs without physical cause, that it is the inevitable penalty for the neglect or violation of the beneficent laws of physiology and sanitation which God has ordained, though it is not always due to the ignorance or sin of the patient himself, and that, no matter how pious people

may be, sickness and pain will not disappear until all men live in perfect harmony with these laws.

The Christian church holds that physical suffering is sent by God, as its ancient collects and exhortations bear witness: "Dearly beloved, know this that Almighty God is the Lord of life and death, and of all things to them pertaining: as youth, strength, health, age, weakness, and sickness. Wherefore, whatsoever your sickness be, know you certainly that it is God's visitation." Where this belief prevails, great epidemics affect profoundly a nation's spiritual life. During the terrible epidemic of the Black Death in the fourteenth century, an unexampled spirit of remorse seized the minds of people everywhere. The fear of Christ fell upon all, noble and lowly, old and young. The melancholy chant of the penitent alone was heard. Enemies were reconciled, men and women vied with each other in splendid works of charity. Human nature would be exalted, writes the historian, if the countless noble actions which were performed in secret in times of most imminent danger, had been recorded for instruction of future generations.¹ But in every epidemic, from the earliest times down to the recent epidemic of pneumonic plague in Manchuria, there has never been wanting the spirit of splendid self-sacrifice among those attending the sick and dying.

The myths produced to account for these visitations, which were so mysterious to previous generations, have not been without value, as they preserved the idea of the necessity of vicarious suffering. One of the most striking is a Slavonic myth, in which the pestilence is personified as a gigantic human being, traveling through the land:—

"There sat a Russian under a larch tree, and the sunshine glared like fire. He saw something coming afar; he looked again:

¹Hecker, *The Black Death*.

It was the Pest-maiden, huge of stature, all shrouded in linen, striding towards him. He would have fled in terror, but the form grasped him with her long outstretched hand. 'Knowest thou the Pest?' she said, 'I am she. Take me on thy shoulders and carry me through all Russia; miss no village, no town, for I must visit all. But fear not for thyself, thou shalt be safe amid the dying.' Clinging with her long hands, she clambered on the peasant's back; he stepped onward, saw the form above him as he went, but felt no burden. First he bore her to the towns; they found there joyous dance and song; but the form waved her shroud, and joy and mirth were gone. As the wretched man looked round, he saw mourning, he heard the tolling of bells, there came funeral processions, the graves could not hold the dead. He passed on, and coming near each village heard the shriek of the dying, saw all faces white in the desolate houses. But high on the hill stands his own hamlet; his wife, his little children are there, and the aged parents, and his heart bleeds as he draws near. With strong grip he holds the maiden fast, and plunges with her beneath the waves. He sank; she rose again, but she quailed before a heart so fearless, and fled far away to the forest and the mountain."*

So it has been in every epidemic; the saviours perished, but they stayed the plague.

It is hardly necessary to dwell on the power which lies in prolonged bodily suffering to purify and ennoble the character of the individual, as instances must surely have come within the experience of all. "Before I was afflicted," writes the Psalmist, "I went astray, but now I observe thy word." When pain does its perfect work, there is acquired an indescribable beauty of the spirit rarely or never seen in those who have not suffered. There is neither rebellious complaint nor fretfulness. As some one has observed, if we want to judge of a religion we must try to study it as much as possible in the mind of its Founder; and when that is impossible, try to find it in the lonely chamber and in the sick room. The Christian religion bears this test supremely well. Its saints,

* Hanusch, Slav. Myths; Tylor, Primitive Culture.

smitten with sickness, in time bless God for all that has happened, and find, in their suffering, a ministry peculiarly their own. These are they:—

“To whom the night-watch is appointed. See!
 They lift their hands and bless God in the night!
 Whilst we are sleeping, those to whom the King
 Has measured out a cup of sorrow, sweet
 With His dear love, yet very hard to drink,
 Are waking in his temple; and the eyes
 That cannot sleep for sorrow or for pain
 Are lifted up to heaven; and sweet low songs,
 Broken by patient tears, arise to God.
 Bless ye the Lord, ye servants of the Lord,
 Which stand by night within his holy place
 To give him worship! ye are priests to Him,
 And minister around the altar, pale
 Yet joyful in the night.”

This victory over suffering, it has been well said, is one of the strongest intimations and evidences of the immortality of the soul.¹ It is also an inspiration to all to suffer bravely.

“It is a tremendous moment when first one is called upon to join the great army of those who suffer. That vast world of love and pain opens suddenly to admit us one by one into its fortress. We are afraid to enter, yet how high is the call. It is as a trumpet speaking to us that cries aloud—‘It is your turn—endure. Play your part. As they endured before you, so now, close up the ranks, be patient and strong as they were.’ Since Christ came, this world of pain is no accident untoward or sinister, but a lawful department of life, with experiences, interests, adventures, hopes, delights, secrets of its own. These are all thrown open to us as we pass within the gates, things that we could never learn, or know, or see, so long as we were well.”²

The sufferings of little children, which cannot be the result of their own intelligent and wilful wrong-doing, who are too young to profit spiritually by it, are to many far more dis-

¹Hardy, *The Gospel of Pain*.

²Canon Holland in the *Life of Romanes*.

troubling and more perplexing than the sufferings of adults.

“What purpose hath pain? Nay, thy quest is vain;
Earth hath no answer: If the baffled brain
Cries, 'Tis to warn, to punish, Ah, refrain!
When writhes the child, beneath the surgeon's hand,
What soul shall hope that pain to understand?
Lo! Science falters o'er the hopeless task,
And Love and Faith in vain an answer ask.”

Since the introduction of anæsthetics, children in civilized lands do not writhe under the surgeon's hand. The solidarity of the race and the law of vicarious suffering again point the way to the solution. Vicarious suffering may be either voluntary or involuntary, but in either case it must be borne until the race has been redeemed. The sufferings of children are vicarious, because due to the sins of others against, or in ignorance of, the laws of physiological righteousness. Such ills and pains constitute a most pathetic appeal to remove the evils which cause them. They can be removed, for science tells us that few, if any, diseases are really inherited; as if nature mercifully makes a fresh start with each child born into the world.

There would be less complaint and arraignment of the wisdom and love of God, if all innocent victims of chronic and incurable disease could be led to discern that they belong to the noble army of martyrs who are suffering because of evils in the world, which can and ought to be removed. Even when the burdens are unwillingly borne, as when Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry the cross of Jesus Christ, the testimony is still of value; but it is ennobled and emphasized when the pain is accepted bravely and cheerfully. It is these stricken ones who bear the burden of the ignorance and iniquity of the human race, and who set the pace of the march of the world's progress, for an army cannot desert its sick and wounded. It

was the perception of this truth which braced and consoled a young clergyman who died recently at the beginning of a most promising career:—

“You sought to be the leader of the host,” he wrote, “you chose to be a maker of the road; you would have been a helper or a singer in the throng. It could not be. Your task was nobler yet. You are a burden-bearer of mankind. There is the burden of the race, the burden of its folly and its wrong, its ignorance and its stupid prejudice, its sin, its wilful violation of the law, its innocent transgression of the rule. Some one must carry that—must carry that great sadness and great pain, and weakness, that ineptitude, that care—must carry that others should go free, that mankind should go forward and go up.”¹

Jesus, the great Example of vicarious suffering, claims them all as his fellow cross-bearers.

“Who best can drink his cup of woe,
Triumphant over pain,
Who patient bears his cross below—
He follows in his train.”

It is part of the message of Christianity, which gives it much of its strange power, that self-sacrifice, the loving acceptance of suffering for the sake of the good it brings to others, is a universal law. God himself does not hold aloof from the sufferings of his creatures. In all their afflictions he is afflicted, and the angel of his presence saves them. He became incarnate in Jesus Christ, to save men from the sin which is the cause, directly or indirectly, of all the pain and sorrow of the world. The willing acceptance by Jesus of a painful and shameful death in order to win men to himself and goodness, is the measure to some extent of that eternal spirit of self-sacrifice in God which has ever been manifested for the good of his creatures. To follow Jesus Christ, therefore, is not simply to believe in him intellectually; it also

¹ Alexis Stein, *The Outlook*, October 1, 1910.

means the acceptance, in a spirit of loving obedience, of the suffering which is inseparable from the life of those who truly serve their brethren in the highest things. And in suffering so accepted, the relation with God becomes so intimate, there is found in it such a healing and purifying power, such an inner joy and exaltation, that the cross is bravely endured and the shame is despised. In a mysterious way sorrow itself becomes the ground of the highest joys, it is itself turned into joy.¹

It may be objected that much of the pain we see appears to be morally and spiritually fruitless, and even positively harmful, causing increased estrangement from God. "There are chastisements which do not chasten; trials that do not purify, and sorrows that do not elevate; pains and privations that harden the tender heart without softening the stubborn will." This is so. All good things may fail, at least for a time, to accomplish the purpose for which they are intended, pain among them. But apart from the sufferings of those of unsound mind, of which it is very difficult to speak, it is doubtful if it does altogether fail in any case. Souls rebellious at first under misfortune, may in the end submit and make their peace. The publicans and harlots, though there may be no outward change in their lives, because of the unhappiness which attends careers of extortion and impurity, may learn to hate their sins, and so be more ready to turn to goodness and enter the kingdom of heaven, than self-righteous scribes and Pharisees who are strangers to the pains of repentance. Further, the pain which has failed to purify here, may yet purify hereafter. The selfishness of Dives was being burnt away in the fires of his torment, as evidenced by his solicitude for the welfare of his brothers. Let us trust boldly

¹ Hinton, *The Mystery of Pain*.

that somehow good will be the final goal of all ill. As Westcott says, in the next world we may be allowed to see that not one pang of the innumerable woes of men has been fruitless in purifying energy. If pain, at the last, brings such spiritual deliverances and blessing that the sufferer, if the choice were offered, would not willingly lose the painful experience if it meant the return to his old unhappy state of spiritual alienation from God, then pain from this point of view ceases to be an evil, and is a perplexity only to those who demand an answer to the unanswerable question, Could not the same ends be accomplished by other means?

In a brief essay it is impossible to deal other than superficially with the great problems of human suffering, but it is hoped enough has been written to indicate in a general way some of the beneficent uses and results of pain in connection with man's physical, mental, moral, and spiritual development. If a complete answer to all questions were vouchsafed, perhaps pain would lose much of its disciplinary power, for it is a profound remark, that he who would always know before he trusts, who would have from his God a promise before he would expect, is the slayer of his own eternity. However that may be, the Christian does not, in this world, expect the full explanation of all mysteries. There are two fundamental convictions, already mentioned, to which he clings tenaciously, and so finds peace.

The first is found in the teaching of Jesus that our heavenly Father exercises a constant and gracious care over all, extending to the smallest detail of our lives. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are numbered." Those who have been in the depth of despair tell us: "This is the last word that can be said. Noth-

ing can go beyond it, and at times it is only the ground which we feel does not shake under our feet. All life is summed up and due account is taken of it according to its degree. Looking at the masses of humanity drawn this way and that way, the Christian teaching is apt to be forgotten that for each individual soul, there is a vocation as real as if that soul were alone upon the planet."

"One adequate support
For the calamities of mortal life
Exists, one only — an assured belief
That the procession of our fate, however
Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
Of infinite benevolence and power,
Whose everlasting purposes embrace
All accidents, converting them to good."

The other foundation is the conviction that God's one unchangeable purpose in creating and sustaining man is to make him a partaker in his own blessedness, by making him a partaker in his own righteousness, and therefore that all the experiences of life, even the most sorrowful, are educational rather than punitive or probationary, being the means by which we are trained and led to this great consummation. Considering man's lowly origin, his inherited passions and instincts, it can only be through self-renunciation and suffering that the soul can win its true self and with it eternal joy. There is left to us the choice between "the noble pangs of spiritual child-birth, of painful-joyous expansion and growth, and the shameful ache of spiritual death, of dreary contraction and decay."

As the troubles of life sooner or later come to us all, and the way in which they are met by the individual affects his spiritual destiny, the question is very practical: What is the conduct under suffering of those who reject the meaning of pain as offered by Christianity, or find it inadequate?

Some are driven by suffering into active rebellion; they "blaspheme the God of heaven because of their pains." The strain of an attitude of defiance cannot long be borne by the human spirit. The end is madness, as depicted by Shakespeare in the tragedy of King Lear, or death.

Akin to this, though far nobler, is the attitude of those who meet the trials of life bravely and without railing against fate or Providence, but still with a hardening and resistance of the spiritual nature as if assailed by hostile influences, the contrary of that patient and willing acceptance which seeks to find the blessing which may be extracted from all the painful experiences of life. Of a well-known painter who died recently, it is said: "Courageous in an eminent degree, physically, and morally courageous, he fought his maladies as if they had been so many desert wolves or hyaenas; he grappled with them, rebelled against them, and would not be beaten." This attitude of mind is well expressed in the lines of Henley:—

"Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods there be,
For my unconquerable soul.

"In the fell clutch of circumstance,
I have not winced nor cried aloud;
Under the bludgeonings of chance,
My head is bloody but unbowed.

"Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horrors of the shade;
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me unafraid.

"It matters not how straight the gate,
How charged with punishment the scroll;
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul."

Few have the strength to maintain this self-reliant attitude to the end, and the most that is gained is a forced and desperate peace.

There is also the attitude of passive rebellion, when a person thinks he has been hardly and unjustly dealt with, and goes through life murmuring, filled with pessimistic discontents and irrational disgust; or there is a sullen, passive acceptance of the ills of life, which may assume the guise of religious resignation, the sufferer feeling and perhaps openly declaring, that as things cannot be helped, there is nothing to do but submit.

“It is easy to see how these and other rebellious attitudes arise. We like our own way, and are vastly pleased with ourselves as long as things go smoothly. But when checks come, — either serious troubles or the petty worries we often feel as keenly, — rebellion is the impulse of the natural man. It often overcomes the best of us in a first assault; and with most of us it is more or less chronic, for there are few who have not brooded over their trials till they are at times more than half persuaded that life is nothing but misery. The grumbling temper they have in common is not only the most profoundly irreligious of all tempers, but the most fatal to reasoning action, and even to healthy thinking. How can truth or reason or healthy action be expected from those whose wills are more or less concerned by rebellion? If the earthquake and the storm have slain their thousands, these rebellious passions have slain their tens of thousands.”¹

Those who bear the crosses of life unwillingly, only add to their burden, and the crosses must still be borne.

There are also the modern Epicureans who seek to avoid all pain, who deliberately shut their eyes to the sight of it, will not hear of it, and try to banish the thought of it from their minds. Their life is spent in the effort to make themselves comfortable with the good things of this world. When care and sorrow do intrude, they find comfort in the pensive

¹Gwatkin, *The Knowledge of God.*

reflections of Omar Khayyam, or they seek to clothe their agnosticism with some of the garments of Christianity. At best, as said long ago, Epicureanism is the philosophy of tranquil and indifferent natures animated by no strong moral enthusiasm. The true secret of happiness is not to escape toil and affliction, but to meet them with the faith that in and through them the destiny of man is fulfilled.

It is evident, without going further, that there is no better philosophy of life than the one furnished by the Christian religion, which faces all the terrible facts of sin and suffering, and yet is not dismayed by them.

“Walk where thou wilt, seek what thou wilt, and thou wilt find no higher way above, no safer way below, than the way of the cross. Dispose and order all things as thou wilt and as thou seest; and thou wilt never find but that thou hast always something to suffer, either willingly or unwillingly, and so thou wilt ever find the cross. Thou canst not escape it, for whithersoever thou goest, thou carriest thyself with thee. But if thou carry thy cross willingly it will carry thee, and bring thee to thy wished-for end. For surely if there had been something better and more useful to the salvation of man than suffering, Christ would certainly have shown it by word and example.”

We are told there has been recently a great and steady falling away from the churches, and it appears to be true. As the existence of pain, sorrow, and evil is the cause of much unbelief, perhaps the teaching of the church on these points is not as strong, clear, and helpful as it might be. Strength and joy should be found in religion in spite of all pain, and love should cast out fear. We need to be told more plainly that in the struggle with evil, God is wholly on our side: and there is but one God, there is no other beside him. Certainly in the physical world science knows of no dualism. Its witness is clear and decisive that in the universe, so far as it knows, there is but one power, one plan. It knows of no alien

power to which physical evil can be assigned. As Christians, we believe this one universal power is a personal God; so we must conclude that moral evil is here by his permission, not by compulsion of some second ultimate power. If by God's permission, then as he is wholly good, wise, and loving, evil must be serving some necessary though temporary purpose, and when that is accomplished evil will disappear.

"To know that love alone was the beginning of nature and creature, that nothing but love encompasses the whole universe of things, that the governing hand that over-rules all, the watchful eye that sees through all, is nothing but omniscient and omnipotent love, using an infinity of wisdom to raise all that is fallen in nature, to save every misguided creature from the miserable work of its own hands, and make happiness and glory the perpetual inheritance of all the creation, is a reflection that must be quite ravishing to every intelligent creature that is sensible of it."¹

Surveying the long and tragical course of human history, it strengthens the heart, gives courage and hope, to be told that God has always been sustaining by his holy will and unflinching loving kindness, the tottering footsteps of all mankind in its toilsome ascent towards spiritual goodness.

Further, the church should not leave it to the Christian Scientist alone to proclaim so insistently that the evil of this world, alike in its essence and in all its forms, is not eternal but transitory. Modern social progress is proving that most of the great positive evils of this life are removable, and will, if human affairs continue to improve, be in the end reduced within very narrow limits. Particularly is this true of the woes of poverty and disease, which are almost entirely conquerable by human care and effort.

Again, men are crying out for a more hopeful message with regard to the conquest of evil in the next world. Even there

¹ Law, *The Spirit of Love.*

evil cannot be eternal in the same sense that God and his attributes are eternal. There is the biblical promise that hereafter there shall be no more pain, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. "I saw not sin," writes a mystic, "for sin is only known by the pain it is cause of. Pain is something for a time, for it purgeth, and maketh us to know ourselves, and to ask for mercy. It is sooth that sin is the cause of all this pain, but all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." There is a wonderful Eastern legend, told in one of his sermons by Westcott, the great New Testament exegete and textual critic, of a Buddhist saint who had reached by successive lives of sacrifice the stage next Nirvana. At that point he could by one effort of will obtain for himself eternal and untroubled calm. But when the decision had to be made, he set aside the tempting prize, and chose rather to live again in the world while conflict could bear fruit. "Not till the last soul in every earth and in every hell has found peace," he said, "can I enter into my rest." Is the message of Christianity, particularly to Buddhist and other non-Christian peoples, to be less hopeful and loving? Are we to say that the saving work of Jesus Christ, of him of whom it was said that he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied, is in its spirit less comprehensive and glorious than the desires of a Buddhist saint?

It is not urged that the church should preach a gospel of ease and pleasure, and that it should not dwell on the awful consequences of sin. This is forbidden even by modern psychology, which makes us realize as never before the depths of human personality in which no experience ever completely vanishes, and therefore that forgiveness of sins is one of the greatest and most marvelous boons which God can bestow on mankind. On the contrary, the church in her life and mes-

sage is to be more austere, especially if it is to win the nations of the Orient. Perhaps religion in the West has been too much associated with comfortable living and utilitarian ends, as if material prosperity was the measure of a nation's spiritual greatness. There is said to be anxious searching in these days for some fundamental human relationship so independent of the accidents of life as to be capable of appealing to all men everywhere, inciting them to stronger effort for themselves, and a more spontaneous recognition of the rights of others. The Christian church with its belief in the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, who is the leader and inspirer in the warfare against all evil, ought to provide this relationship. Yet it must be confessed that the influence of the church in politics, business, society, and the home is not so strong and pervasive as it should be. For this the Christian laity is in large measure to blame. The clergy can lay down principles, but in the main it is for the laity to translate these principles into action, in the places where it is most necessary to exhibit them. It is for the laity to fight resolutely and unitedly against the evils encountered by them personally in politics, business, and society. In the Middle Ages a great Christian brotherhood was formed of the lay members of the church, of men belonging to every rank of society from the prince to the peasant; they pursued their usual vocations bound only by the spirit of their order. They were pledged to restore all ill-gotten goods; to be reconciled to those with whom they had quarreled; to devote themselves to the practice of charity; to avoid all unnecessary expenditure; to comfort the sick; to instruct the ignorant; to reclaim the fallen. In fine, they practised all the virtues of the cloister without retiring from the world. In those dark and perilous times, the brotherhood

did a work the value of which historians state it is impossible to overestimate.

It is not suggested that in addition to the numerous existing societies another should be formed on these or similar lines. But if a large number of Christian men — statesmen, politicians, lawyers, doctors, merchants, farmers, mechanics, and others — were pledged to live in simple, unswerving obedience to the spirit of the teaching of Jesus Christ, as indeed most of them are, and at any and every cost eradicate all the evil they could, each of them declaring, — to slightly alter the words of Blake,—

‘ I will not cease from mental strife,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem,
God’s holy city in our land, ’—

who can doubt there would be a surprising spiritual advance, and much of the evil and misery of the world, of which men now so bitterly complain, would quickly pass away. If it be said that to attempt to live in accord with the principles of Jesus Christ, modern society being what it is, would mean for many financial and social ruin, it only proves the point that without vicarious pain and sacrifice the world cannot be redeemed. The price must be paid. In old time, of those who resisted the evil of their day, some were tortured on the wheel, and refused release in order that they and others might rise to a better life. Others had to face taunts and blows, chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were tortured, they were sawn asunder, they were put to the sword; they wandered about clothed in the skins of sheep or goats, destitute, persecuted, ill-used, — men, of whom the world was not worthy, — roaming in lonely places, and on the mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground, dying

without seeing the realization of their hopes, but leaving the world better for those who came after them (Heb. xi. 35-40). If we in our day are not willing to incur any risk whatever, at least let it not be said that Christianity itself, as a religion, has failed.

Perhaps we need to realize more fully the nobility of our calling and election. It may be no limitation of the actual omnipotence of God to hold that even he is not able to evolve highly organized physical beings without the long and painful struggle for existence; or to give human beings moral training without allowing the existence of sin and pain. But these are only means to an end. God wills the goodness and happiness of all his children, and as quickly as possible. But with amazing self-restraint he does not interfere with their freedom, although abhorring all evil and ever at war with it. In this warfare he needs our help, for men cannot be saved from evil and pain apart from their own desires and coöperation. We are called upon, therefore, for our own and our brethren's sake, literally to be co-workers with God in this tremendous struggle. If we suffer, he also suffers. Surely that is the teaching of the Christian religion. God became incarnate in Jesus Christ to remove the sin and pain of the world, and it is by his own agony and bloody sweat, and by his own cross and passion that he delivers us. Therefore, the suffering of Christ, the willing endurance of shame, pain, and death to redeem mankind, hallows all suffering and brightens it with a glorious hope.

"As I shall be uplifted on a cross
In darkness of eclipse and anguish dread,
So shall I lift up in my pierced hands,
Not into dark, but light,—not unto death
But life,—beyond the reach of guilt and grief,
The whole creation."