

ART. IV.—THE PHYSICAL CAUSE OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

MR. FRAZER'S theory that the Crucifixion was only an annual ceremony which the Jews brought back with them from the Captivity raises again the question of the physical cause of our Lord's death. Some brief notes on the subject may be useful at this season.

I find in the British Museum a treatise by Dr. William Stroud (London, 1847), "On the Physical Cause of the Death of Christ." In this he shows that death was due to actual rupture of the heart—that is, a rupture of the heart-wall. The escaping contents in these cases exhibit after death exactly and unmistakably such a stream of blood and water as flowed from our Lord's side. This condition is not infrequently found by anatomists in post-mortem examinations in such cases, as I have, at least once, personally verified. Many of these are on record in the medical text-books, where both the quantity and the quality of the blood escaping from the ruptured heart has been carefully noted. Dr. Frederick Roberts says that "this rare lesion is almost invariably induced by some exciting occurrence, and is much more frequent in males and old persons, and is generally the result of some *structural* change in the cardiac walls, great dilatation, cardiac aneurism, hæmorrhage into the walls, or fatty disease, especially degeneration. It is much more frequent in the left ventricle, and the direction of the laceration is generally parallel to the chief fibres of the heart. Death may be instantaneous, or very rapid after *sudden* insensibility, preceded by 'a loud cry' or shriek." Sophocles, the greatest of Greek tragedians, expired thus, on its being announced to him that he had been awarded the palm of victory over all competitors. Dr. Stroud, in the work I have referred to, notes, amongst many other cases of broken heart from mental emotion, that of a father dying in this way on being told that three of his sons had been crowned as victors in the Olympian games in one day.

Post-mortem examinations now reveal many such instances, formerly attributed vaguely to joy, grief, or anger, but actually due to rupture of the heart, producing immediate death. The muscle is rent or torn by the *sudden* violence of its action, and the blood, issuing from the laceration thus produced, stops the action of the heart by its pressure upon the pericardium, the envelope by which the heart is surrounded and enclosed. When rupture of the heart takes place, and the blood passes from it into the enclosing sac, it coagulates slowly, the watery part separating from its thicker substance,

and the escaping contents then exhibit, after death, a mingled stream of blood and water. In the death on the Cross we have the literal fulfilment of Ps. lxix. 20, 21, "Reproach hath broken my heart," etc.

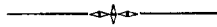
Professor Walshe, in his classic treatise on "Diseases of the Heart," when treating of the symptoms indicating death by rupture of the heart, says, "The hand is suddenly carried to the front of the chest, a piercing shriek uttered," and all is over. Dr. James Begbie, of Edinburgh, Sir James Simpson, Sir John Struthers and others, on being written to by Dr. Hanna, my old Sunday-school teacher, drawing their attention to Dr. Stroud's treatise, entirely endorsed his conclusions as to the actual physical cause of Christ's death, as described by the eye-witness, John.

The whole physical aspect of the subject is exhaustively dealt with by Dr. William Hanna, of St. John's Free Church, Edinburgh, son-in-law of Dr. Thomas Chalmers and colleague of Dr. Thomas Guthrie, in his work on "The Last Day of Our Lord's Passion" (Edinburgh, 1862). He also fully explains, in this connection, the actual physical meaning of the words, "not by water only, but by water and by blood," in the most interesting and convincing manner.

This view of the physical cause of Christ's death disposes of an objection of M. Renan, in his "Vie de Jésus." "A few hours' suspension from the cross," says Renan, "seemed . . . altogether insufficient to produce such a result." Renan's position is rendered untenable by the fact that a sufficient cause of death is shown. On this point Sir John Struthers says that any intelligent medical man will be satisfied, and adds: "No other hypothesis will satisfactorily explain the separate escape of blood and water from a wound in that region." Sir James Simpson puts it in detail thus: "Let me state the arguments for this view in the form of a few brief propositions: (1) Death was not the mere result of crucifixion, for, firstly, the period was too short; a person in the prime of life not dying within six hours, as He did, but usually surviving till the second or third day, or even longer. Secondly, the attendant phenomena, at the time of actual death, were different from those of crucifixion. The crucified die, as is well known, under a lingering process of gradual exhaustion, weakness, and faintness. On the contrary, Christ died with a loud voice, and spoke once and again, all, apparently, within a few minutes of His dissolution. (2) No known injury, lesion, or disease of the brain, lungs, or other vital organs, could account for such a sudden termination of His sufferings in death, except (*a*) arrestment of the action of the heart by fatal fainting, or syncope, or (*b*) rupture of the

walls of the heart, or larger bloodvessels issuing from it." After showing that it was not syncope, and quoting Dr. Walshe to the effect that the symptoms were those of rupture of the heart, "a piercing shriek uttered," etc., Sir J. Simpson goes on to say that (3) "the details regarding Christ's death are most strikingly peculiar in this respect, that they offer us the result of a very rude dissection, as it were, by the gash made in His side after death by the thrust of the Roman soldier's spear, and I do not think anything could possibly account for the appearance of 'blood and water,' as described by the Apostle, except a collection of blood effused into the sac of the pericardium in consequence of rupture of the heart, and subsequently separated into the usual red clot and white or limpid serum. . . . (4) Death by mere crucifixion was not a form of death in which there was much, if, indeed, any, shedding of blood. The whole language and types of Scripture, however, involve the idea that the atonement for our sins was obtained by the *blood* of Christ shed for us during His death on the cross. . . . (5) He was ultimately 'slain,' not by the effects of the anguish of His corporeal frame, but by the effects of the mightier anguish of His mind; the walls of His heart—like the veil, as it were, in the temple of His human body—were rent and riven, as for us 'He poured out His soul unto death'; in that awful hour 'the travail of His soul' thus standing out greater than even that of the body." Dr. James Begbie, late President of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, affirms also that "such a lesion accounts for the phenomena recorded in the Scriptures regarding Him, namely, the earlier than usual cessation of life during crucifixion, and the issuing of blood and water on the piercing of His side with the spear, thus literally fulfilling the prophetic words, 'Reproach hath broken My heart,' in the Old Testament writings concerning Him."

J. MOIR.



ART. V.—THE LIFE AND TIMES OF GREGORY OF TOURS.

II.

THESE "weaker vessels" were too powerful for the Church to restrain or punish, and with others the Church, as represented by Gregory, was hardly more successful. Thus, a certain Ingeltrude had built and furnished a monastery, and her married daughter was appointed Abbess. But the latter's