

with its religious principles as He applied them in His own life, and that this does not depend upon the reality of a miracle to which a thousand objections can be made. This part of the work is the most unsatisfactory and the most obscure of all.

To sum up :—While there is much in these two volumes which gives us matter for reflection, yet we part from them irritated rather than disturbed. If this is the worst that can be said, it cannot affect any evenly balanced mind. The work lacks the attractions of poetry and imagination, which such a book as Rénan's *Vie de Jésus* had. It is prosaic in the extreme ; and, if the author really accepts the portrait of the Saviour which he has drawn, he must in his heart form a somewhat low estimate of Him in many respects.

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RELATION OF CHRISTIANITY TO PAIN.

(REVELATION xxi. 4.)

ALL ages of the world have had some Utopian ideal—some state which they figured to themselves as the condition of ultimate blessedness. The Greek has his Elysian fields, the Spanish explorer his Eldorado, the Mohammedan his sensuous paradise. It is quite a subordinate matter where they have placed its locality—on the earth, in the sun, in the moon. That which makes the difference between one heaven and another is not the where, but the what. Man's paradise is not the *place* to which he is going, but the *state* to which he is going. The moral value of his heaven lies, not in whether he believes it to be up or down, beyond or here ; it lies purely in his answer to the question, " What do you consider the goal of happiness ? "

In this passage St. John gives us a description of the Utopian condition of human life ; and, in relation to other

popular faiths, it presents a feature of paradox. Everything that is here said about the soul's joy is negative. The seer throughout this book dwells more on the redress of injuries than on the conferring of benefits. It is true we have the crystal fountain and the clear river, the pearly gates and the trees with luscious fruit. Yet, none of these things can be called distinctively joys of the *soul*. They are not sources of employment, occupation, permanent interest; their very joy depends on the existence of a previous joy. All the statements here made about the ultimate joy of the city of God are negative statements—declarations of the absence of some present encumbrance. That there is to be no temple with its burdensome rites of worship, no sea with its power of separation, no poverty with its ungratified hunger and thirst, no darkness with its disquieting fears, no death, no sorrow, no pain—these are the main elements which mark the privileges of the city of God. Perhaps in no allegory descriptive of that city has human imagination so restrained itself. The Republic of Plato has revealed its inner mechanism; the paradise of the Koran has exposed its pleasures; John has contented himself with recording the lifting of the chain.

And yet I am convinced that, for a purpose of this sort, the seer of Patmos is in the right. I believe that what is wanted to create perfect happiness in the present world is not a new environment, but the removal of obstructions to the old one. We hear a great deal about the limits of our environment. Yet it is not really in our environment that our limit lies. The powers of our minds are in themselves adequate to more than they ever perform. It is not because our normal powers are weak that we fall beneath our efforts; it is because our normal powers are impeded. The absence of full pleasure in this world is not the result of any defect in the world; it is the result of *interference* with the world. Ask any man why he is not happy. He will

tell you, not that his discontent arises from the actual objects of this universe, but that it comes from some barrier interposed to the reaching of these objects. Blindness, deafness, lameness, bodily defect of every kind, the backward stream of heredity, the clashing of competing interests, the quarrels of friends and enemies, the shortness of individual life—these, and a hundred other privations, are the secret of that pessimism which has so large a share in human nature.

The truth is, however different it is from the common view, St. John has on his side the philosophy of the subject. To be on the *line* of things in this world is what we call happiness; to be diverted from the line, stopped on the line, or driven back on the line, is what we call unhappiness. Unhappiness is always the result of obstacle—derangement from the line of march. Accordingly, St. John takes it for granted that the aim of Christianity is happiness: “there shall be no more pain.” This is only in other words to say that the natural order will be followed out. The life of Christ is a sacrificial life—in this world and in all worlds. But, though sacrificial, it must not be painful. It must move on the *line* of sacrifice, must be unimpeded on that line. Any absence of will would be an arrest to sacrifice. Any sense of disagreeableness would be a retardation of the Christian life. It is a requisite to the progress of that life that a man should enter into joy—the joy of his Lord. He will change his idea of optimism, but he will be an optimist all the same, nay, he will find himself to be in the actual possession of the best possible world—a world which meets all his desires, and which he would not exchange for any other.

But now a question arises. If the goal of Christianity is the elimination of pain, how comes it that, in every branch of the Christian Church, and still more in the regions outside the Church, Christianity and pain are associated?

How is it that those who have not entered within the pale have uniformly contemplated the entrance as a curtailment? Why is it that, amongst those already within, the greatest saints have generally been regarded as the men who have borne most marks of suffering and exhibited most traces of self-denial? The symbol of Christ in the world is a cross. The cross is to the Christian soldier what a medal is to the secular soldier—a mark of honour, an emblem of eminence. Both individuals and communities have courted privation for the sake of Christ. Men have gone into deserts, immolated themselves, lacerated themselves. Women have sacrificed the joys of family and home, have relinquished the leading of fashion and the homage paid to beauty, that they might spend their lives in serious thought. Kings have thrown away their crowns that they might sit in sackcloth and ashes. A tendency so widely spread, so variedly spread, must have some root in human nature, some root in the facts of the case. Why is it that Christianity, professedly the ultimate abolisher of pain, should yet throughout the cycles of time have been linked with pain in the thoughts of the human heart?

Now, if we look at the passage before us, I think we shall find at least a suggestion of the answer. The passage in our Authorised Version reads, “neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” Here, the passing away of previous things is made the reason for the passing away of pain. I think this a superior rendering to that of the Revised Version, which treats the latter clause as a mere redundant repetition. What I understand the seer to say is that pain shall pass away when the *need* of it passes away. At present it is bound up in the constitution of nature because there are elements in the life of man which make its existence desirable. Pain exists now because it has a function, and a beneficial function. Whenever those elements which make it desir-

able shall be either removed or transformed, it will lose its function, and therefore will cease to be.

If we accept this reading, we shall find an answer to the paradox within the passage itself. Christ, the ultimate abolisher of pain has a present use for pain. He has a function for it in the existing order of things. It is not a state which could be tolerated in a perfect organism, but in the present imperfection of the organism it has advantages to the life of the individual. It cannot pass away until the passing away of that which makes it necessary, that which retards the progress of the human spirit and impedes the development of the race of man.

There is, then, a present good in pain—something which justifies Christianity in being the *custodian* of pain. What is it? I think, in the present system of things, there are two moral benefits of pain. It serves two ends, which, so far as I know, no other phase of our being can fulfil. Let us glance at each of these.

And, first, pain is, so far as I know, the only protest in the human constitution against something which is wrong. It is the one Protestant movement in the body-politic of man's organism, the only thing which raises its voice against existing abuses. Pain is a signal—in the moral world the only signal. It indicates danger on the line. Without it the danger would be equally great but not equally remedial. It is the declaration that our health is bad, or, at the least, that something is required to perfect our constitution. Hunger is the protest of the physical nature against further abstinence; lassitude is the protest of the mental nature against further work. Always and everywhere pain is the Martin Luther of the organic framework; it placards the walls of the city with the announcement that there is something wrong.

There are two states in which man experiences painlessness—at the top, and at the foot, of the hill. In perfect

health we have no pain; in perfect disease we have no pain. In the one case our members are so full of vigour that they are unconscious of their own life; in the other they are so mortified that all sensation has ceased. Pain is never the lowest thing; it is always on the middle road between the highest and the lowest. It is that which leads from the one to the other. It is the protest of to-day against yesterday on its way to tomorrow. That is its function; that is its power.

Now, when this function exists in the moral nature we call it by a particular name—conscience. Conscience is simply the hunger of the moral nature. In itself it indicates convalescence. It reveals the turpitude of a man's state, but it does not *create* it. The revelation implies a higher altitude. Sin cannot reveal sin any more than night can reveal night. Pain is a mirror lit from above. The forms projected on its surface are impure forms, but the light by which we see them is God's light. Of all present things pain is that which has the most optimistic aspect; just because it is a protest, it is a prophecy. It is the function of conscience to tell the mind what it is the function of headache to tell the body—that disease is not a normal thing, and therefore not a permanent thing. As long as disease lasts, physical or mental, it is desirable that pain should last. Disease without pain is disease without protest—hurrying down a steep place into the sea. It is destruction unfelt, and therefore unopposed; it is peace where there is no peace. That is why, in the present state of dilapidation, Christianity has not only preserved, but polished, the mirror of pain. The first gift of God is the quickening of the Spirit—the wakening into conscious suffering of those members of Christ's body who, from deadness in sin, have been insensible to anguish.

But there is a second function of pain in the present system of things; it is the longest line of human sympathy

—the line by which the heart can travel further than by any other route. There are various lines of sympathy in the present order of the world. Their defect is not that they are inadequate or wanting in intensity. What they want is length of rail ; they need to be extended. Kindred, *e.g.*, is a strong bond of sympathy ; and, if the membership in Christ's body were realized, it would be a *universal* bond. But by the mass of mankind kindred is limited to special streams of heredity, and sympathy becomes merely the union of a clan. Again, community of taste is a bond of sympathy ; but, because tastes are varied, it is for that very reason a source also of division. More than either of these, a common joy is to higher natures a bond of sympathy ; but it is only to higher natures. To lower natures it is the reverse ; the jealous heart is not drawn to another by seeing him in possession of the same joy. None of these lines go round the circle of humanity ; they all fail to bind man as man.

But there is one thing which can, which does—the element of pain. What kindred cannot do, what race cannot do, what identity of taste cannot do, what even common joy cannot do, is achieved in a moment from the lowest ground. The sympathy with pain is the widest sympathy in the world. There is nothing on earth which so equalises men. The pains of nature are more potent in their uniting power than the pleasures of nature. The beauty of the landscape is a sealed book to the unrefined soul ; but the ills which flesh is heir to, make their appeal to all. In nothing did Christianity more show its wisdom than in attaching itself to the element of pain ; in nothing did it so evince its discernment as in stooping to the lowermost. Had the Son of Man, in the descent of His ladder of humiliation, paused at any height short of the ground, He would not have touched humanity as a whole. The secret of His success, humanly speaking, is His appeal to that

experience of pain which lies at the foot of the ladder, and is therefore the ground-floor of humanity. Even Buddha never stooped so low; he told men that their pain was a delusion. Christ started from the reality of pain. He took up the cross of man. He proclaimed His religion to be the bearing of the cross. He called to Himself all that were labouring and heavy-laden; and there answered to His summons the representatives of all mankind.

Pain, then, has a second function in the present system of things. There is something besides disease which prevents it from passing away—the limitation of human sympathy. It is at present the only chain that constitutes the conscious brotherhood of man; destroy this chain, and there is no conscious brotherhood. Whenever the time shall come when this, like the previous function, shall be unneeded, St. John says pain will disappear. Science declares that in the world of evolution a thing will cease to live when it ceases to have a use. So, says the seer, shall it be with pain. When it has no longer a service to perform, it will die. When the former things have passed away, when the constitution of human nature has been altered, when the recuperative principle of the organism has ceased to experience decay, when the limitations of the heart have yielded to the universal power of love, then will pain lose its function in the world, and with its function it will itself disappear. It will have no more place in a system not diseased; it will have no more room in the perfection of a sympathy whose movements are already impelled by love. When that which is perfect has come, that which is in part shall be done away.

Meantime, I cannot but remark that every step of modern civilization has been a progress towards the abolition of pain. Although pain is the natural heritage of culture, the history of modern culture has been a history of the minimising of suffering. We have seen a gradual

mitigation of those retarding elements whose extinction the man of Patmos desired. We have begun to "behold no temple" in the ideal city of God—to relax the bonds of discipline that divide one church from another. We have begun to realize that there is "no more sea," through the swift modes of travel and the rapid transmission of messages. We have experienced the illumination of processes which used to be conducted in secret, illustrating the words, "there shall be no night there." We have restrained many forms of death—by the reduction of war, by the increase of sanitation, by the development of medical skill. We have reduced the actual sum of sorrow and sighing—proved by the fact that suicide is no longer a glory. We have minimised bodily suffering by the power of anæsthetics—by chloroform, by morphia, by cocaine; and we are aspiring not in vain to do it by mental force. And the secret of all this strength has been Christianity itself—man's interest in the wants of man. The treasures of this wisdom existed latently from the beginning; the Christian love of man revealed their hiding-place. The spirit of sacrifice has been the true enricher of the city of God; the Lamb is the light thereof.

GEORGE MATHESON.