

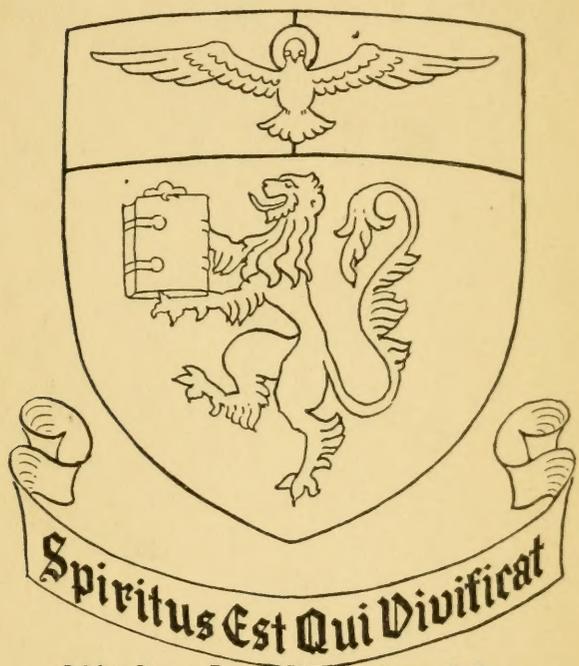
OD AND HUMAN
SUFFERING

JOSEPH EGGER, S.J.

BT160
E35x

let \$-1.30

• Ex Libris
Duquesne University:



Michael J. Connolly

OD AND HUMAN SUFFERING

BY JOSEPH EGGER, S.J.

"What? wearied out with half a life?
Scar'd with this smooth, unbloody strife?"

—KEBLE'S *Christian Year*.

LONDON AND EDINBURGH
SANDS AND COMPANY

ST LOUIS, MO.

B. HERDER, 17 SOUTH BROADWAY

1905

~~231~~

~~E29~~

BT160

E35x

Nihil Obstat :

JOANNES CANONICUS RITCHIE.

Imprimatur :

✠ JACOBUS AUGUSTINUS,

Archiep. S. Andreae et Edimburgen.

Die 22 Augusti 1905.

PRELIMINARY NOTICE

IN order to render the pamphlet more suitable for the use of non-Catholic friends who may find it difficult to reconcile the Biblical and Christian teaching with the idea of a wise and just and kind God, it has been written not from an exclusively Catholic point of view, but from a Christian standpoint in general, and Biblical quotations are mainly taken from the Revised Edition.

Quotations from the Psalms are given both according to the numeration adopted in Catholic and non-Catholic versions. The latter generally follow the Hebrew, the former the Septuagint, reckoning of the numbers of the Psalms. In the Septuagint version Psalms IX. and X. of the Hebrew version are counted as one. The Catholic versions, while counting the verses of the tenth Hebrew Psalm from 1 upwards, as in an independent Psalm, follow the Septuagint numeration of Psalms, and give it as a supplement to the ninth Psalm. Thus the non-Catholic numeration from the

ninth Psalm on, is one number in advance of the Catholic and Septuagint reckoning, up to Psalm CXLVI. Psalms CXLVI. and CXLVII. of the Catholic versions form one Psalm only in the non-Catholic versions. Thus the collection of Psalms in both is 150.

The writer also begs to thank the kind friends who have helped him to offer the suggestions contained in these pages to the consideration of thoughtful minds in the form of a pamphlet. He trusts to its readers for indulgence with various shortcomings, and cherishes some hope that its perusal may enable some readers to take a more cheerful and more hopeful view both of the present and of the future life.

J. E.

INDEX

	PAGE
1. THE PROBLEM	7
2. ATTEMPTS AT EXPLANATIONS OF THE ORIGIN OF EVIL	9
3. HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY AND HUMAN ASPIRA- TIONS	14

I.—ETERNAL REPROBATION

4. A QUESTION ABOUT WHICH WE CAN SAY LITTLE AND KNOW LESS	17
5. ANOTHER QUESTION ABOUT WHICH WE CAN SAY LITTLE AND KNOW LESS	26
6. WHAT SINS WILL BE PUNISHED WITH ETERNAL REPROBATION?	31
7. WHAT NUMBER OF SOULS WILL BE LOST?	34
8. THE SEVERITY OF THE ETERNAL PUNISHMENTS	43
9. THE ETERNITY OF REPROBATION	52

II.—THE FREE WILL

10. IS THE WILL REALLY FREE?	56
11. THE INTRINSIC VALUE OF THE FREE WILL	60
12. FREE WILL AND THE IDEA OF MERIT	63
13. FREE WILL AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADDI- TIONAL MERITS	70

III.—THE MISERIES OF LIFE

	PAGE
14. SUFFERINGS AFFORD OPPORTUNITIES FOR VIRTUE	75
15. SUFFERINGS ARE SOURCES OF MERIT AND HAPPINESS	77
16. SUFFERINGS GIVE OCCASIONS FOR INSCRUTABLE TRIUMPHS OF GRACE	84

IV.—SOME ADDITIONAL DIFFICULTIES

17. MAN BORN WITHOUT HIS CONSENT	96
18. MAN BORN WITHOUT ANY PROSPECT OF FINAL ANNIHILATION	99
19. MAN BORN ACCORDING TO AN ESTABLISHED ECONOMY OF CREATION	103
20. CONCLUSION	106

GOD AND HUMAN SUFFERING

I.—THE PROBLEM

TO millions of our fellow-men the dawn of each successive day means a summons to hard labour and weary drudgery. Morning after morning, the greater portion of the human race have to drag their weary limbs from a cheerless pallet to resume a monotonous round of toil. Millions, less fortunate than these, have not even any employment to go to, but are forced to trudge about in search of work or food and shelter; while a large number, more ill-fated still, lie prostrate and helpless on a bed of sickness and suffering.

Day by day, over 80,000 human beings are born to life, while nearly as many are daily snatched from it by the relentless grip of death.

The earth on which we live, with its broad tracts of ocean, here and there gemmed with picturesque or luxuriant islands, with its mountains and valleys, its hills and dales, its lakes and rivers, and all its checquered profusion of fields and meadows, its cities

and towns, villages and hamlets, its groves and orchards, moors and forests, presents to the eye scenes of enchanting beauty ; but the vast mass of men find beneath its illusive charms little more than one gigantic tread-mill of weary and incessant toil ; or, shall we rather say, one vast arena on which they are forced into a wearisome struggle for existence—a battlefield on which they are engaged in a life-long conflict with adverse influences, to which they must inevitably succumb in the end ?

From every part of this wide battlefield rise sighs and groans of sorrow and suffering, mingled with laughter and rejoicing. Many wring their hands in helpless despair, and curse the day of their birth ; others, by their side, raise their eyes in loving gratitude to God, believing themselves indebted to Him for their present existence and for the sure hope of unending happiness and bliss. How is it that in such a world of suffering and pain there can be men who profess to believe in an infinitely just and kind and merciful Creator and God, and this, too, while many of them are convinced that a great number of their fellow-men will be engulfed in eternal perdition ?

Is not the opinion of others more reasonable, who say : “ If there were a God He would be kind and merciful, and would not abandon millions of His creatures to a life of suffering ; much less would He call human beings into existence only to doom them to eternal torments and never-ending pain. Surely

a kind and a just God would have created mankind in a state of pure and permanent happiness.”

Why should there be all this overwhelming mass of sin and suffering? Who will solve the problem of our existence? Who will unravel the mystery of evil?

2.—ATTEMPTS AT EXPLANATIONS OF THE ORIGIN OF EVIL

Philosophers have been occupied from a very early time with the problem of the origin of evil. Some of them assumed two eternal principles—the one good, the other evil—ever at war with each other, but they did not even attempt to account for the existence of the evil principle.

Some took the crude matter of the visible universe to be the source of evil. Looking upon some grossly material objects and associations as evil—and a prolific source of evil—many shrunk from the most innocent use of the senses as from something wrong and sinful, and condemned even wedlock as contamination. Others, pretending, as some writers think, to assail and to defeat the powers of evil by trying to out-
Herod Herod, in the abuse of the elements of evil, plunged themselves into most hideous kinds of vice and debauchery. But neither those who embraced the severity of the former view, nor those who followed the trend of the latter, gave any explanation of the origin of the material universe nor of the evil tendencies of many of its constituent elements.

In several systems of philosophy various shades of fatalism, more or less pronounced, may be traced. In its fullest sense, fatalism assumes that we are blindly, inevitably, and irresistibly urged on by some kind of undefined power or destiny in everything we do and suffer. Carried to this extent, the doctrine of fatalism is incompatible with belief in moral responsibility, and in the exercise of a free will, while the strange power or destiny which overrules everything remains an unexplained mystery.

Besides these attempts of philosophers to explain the mystery of evil, there existed among the Jews a tradition ascribing the origin of evil on this earth to the abuse of the free will of man. This tradition, carefully treasured from most ancient times as a divine revelation, taught that God created man for the enjoyment of eternal happiness, endowed him with the power of deliberate self-determination or free will, and ordained a token whereby he might show his free submission to his Creator and Lord. Man abused the freedom of his will, and acted contrary to the command of God. This act of disobedience opened the flood-gates of misery upon the human race. Those, however, who serve God to the best of their knowledge will have the reward of eternal happiness, but those who serve Him not, but persist in their refusal of submission even unto death, will be consigned to eternal punishment.

This was the belief of the Jewish nation. From the very beginning the Christians accepted this

tradition, and have maintained even to this day, that it teaches the truth as to creation and the origin of evil.

In the course of the last century the explanation of human inclinations and desires, intentions and aspirations, concupiscences and passions, of the will and of reason, of vices and virtues, has been sought for in a theory of natural development, which ascribes the evils which surround us to passing phases in the struggle for existence, by which the whole teeming world of life is agitated.

Not a few have come to look upon the virtues and vices of men as the natural and inevitable result of the peculiar formation and development of their respective cerebral nerve-centres. Active sections of the criminal classes may see reason to regret that this theory has not yet been made the basis of penal legislation, as it would relieve them of all personal and moral responsibility.

Some of the ancient philosophers, who attributed the sins and evils and miseries under which the world groans to an original evil principle, had the presumption to call themselves "Gnostics," "men of knowledge." In our day, the men of erudition who uphold the theory of natural evolution, and undertake to give "a plain account of evolution" "in relation to the totality of things" "in clear and, so far as possible, simple words,"¹ have the modesty to call

¹ See *The Story of Creation: A Plain Account of Evolution*. Mr Edward Clodd.

themselves rather "Agnostics," and the candour to admit that their theory fails to throw any light whatever on various important points. The first cause or origin of existence, "the whence of the nebula" (from which all evolution started) and "of its potential life" is "an abiding mystery which overawes and baffles us."¹ Everything in the universe is "matter and power," but these are "convenient names for an observed order of facts, of whose ultimate nature we know nothing."² "Of the beginning, of what was before the present state of things, and of what will follow the end of it we know nothing, and speculation about it is futile."³ "The ultimate cause which bringing certain lifeless bodies together gives living matter as the result is a profound mystery."⁴ Mr Edward Clodd sees in the assertion of Principal Tulloch that "soul is only known to us in a brain, but the special note of soul is that it is capable of existing without a brain, or after death,"⁵ "an unverifiable assumption of dogmatic theology,"⁶ and considers⁷ the attitude of physical science towards the question of mind correctly described by Professor Huxley in these words: "If any one says that consciousness cannot exist, except in the relation of cause and effect with certain organic molecules, I must ask how he

¹ Edward Clodd, *The Story of Creation*, p. 5.

² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁵ *Modern Theories in Philosophy and Religion*, p. 328.

⁶ Edward Clodd, *The Story of Creation*, p. 152.

⁷ *Ibid.*

knows that, and if he says that it can, I must put the same question.”¹ “The gulf between consciousness and the movements of the molecules of nerve-matter, measurable as they are, is impassable. We can follow the steps of the mechanical processes of nerve-changes till we reach the threshold which limits the known, and beyond that barrier we cannot go. We can neither affirm nor deny; we can only confess ignorance.”²

In his presidential address to the scientific congress at Leipzig on the 14th August 1872, Professor Emil Du Bois-Raymond denied that science had explained the fact of order and apparent design in nature, of the origin of life and of rational thought and speech or of free will, and he spoke of the nature of matter and force and the origin of motion and of sensation and consciousness as enigmas for which science has found no solution nor will ever be able to find one.

Professor Ernst Haeckel considers these enigmas solved, still he himself writes: “Our only real and valuable knowledge is a knowledge of nature itself. . . . We are incompetent, it is true, to penetrate into the innermost nature of this real world—the ‘thing in itself.’”³ “We grant at once that the innermost character of nature is just as little understood by us as it was by Anaximander and Empedocles 2400

¹ *Fortnightly Review*, “Science and Morals,” Dec. 1886.

² Edward Clodd, *The Story of Creation*, p. 152.

³ *The Riddle of the Universe*. Ernst Haeckel, ch. 16, p. 104.

years ago, by Spinoza and Newton 200 years ago, and by Kant and Goethe 100 years ago. We must even grant that this essence of substance becomes more mysterious and enigmatic the deeper we penetrate into the knowledge of its attributes, matter and energy, and the more thoroughly we study its countless phenomenal forms, and their evolution. We do not know the 'thing in itself' that lies behind these knowable phenomena. But why trouble about this enigmatic 'thing in itself,' when we have no means of investigating it, when we do not even clearly know whether it exists or not?"¹

3.—HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY AND HUMAN ASPIRATIONS

Besides these and similar speculative points, which the foremost exponents of the theory of universal natural evolution declare it impossible to explain, two questions of considerable practical importance demand solution before the world can reasonably be expected to forego its old and time-honoured belief in the freedom of the human will. Among all civilised nations, legislation—civil and criminal—and its penal sanctions are based on belief in the moral and personal responsibility of man for his actions. If man is not free, all our notions of duty, of moral obligation, and of personal responsibility must be false and untenable. Unless he be a free agent he

¹ *The Riddle of the Universe*. Ernst Haeckel, ch. 20, p. 134.

is not responsible for his actions, nor capable of undertaking a duty. Deny him free will, and the whole fabric of our social, civil, commercial, and criminal system must be changed.

On the other hand, if man is free, but there is no God to reward the good and to punish the wicked, what is there to restrain him from enriching himself at the expense of justice and virtue? What motive has he for self-denial? Why should he refrain from wrong-doing if he can thereby rise to a position of honour and influence? What inducement is there for the practice of virtue and charity when it entails—as it so often does entail, especially when it is most useful—some painful sacrifice of ease and comfort, of vanity or self-will? In such a world there would be little encouragement to the honest and conscientious, to those most devoted to unselfish deeds of kindness and charity, or, in fact, to all who at present strive to work and act “as ever in their great task-master’s eye.”

The victims of unprovoked slander, of unscrupulous deceit, and of undeserved cruelty and injustice, would be without consolation and without any effective motive to bear these injuries with patience and resignation. Can the demand for justice and equity which naturally exists in our hearts be left for ever unsatisfied, unless in the few cases which are dealt with by the halt and cumbersome methods of our civil and criminal courts? or is it possible that unselfish devotion to duty, un-

seen and unnoticed acts of patience, forbearance, and kindness, and deeds of noble heroism are left without substantial, lasting, and soul-reaching rewards?

Man has an inborn craving after endless happiness. Is not the hope of this happiness as a reward of the effort to obey the will of God a reasonable hope, and the fear of the loss of this happiness by disregard of the will of God a reasonable fear?

By those who accepted Christianity in early times—that is, by all the most civilised nations of the Greek and Roman world—and by the large number of men of all lands and races who profess it even to the present day, these questions have been answered in the affirmative. And, indeed, looking upon the problem of our existence in this light, any man endowed with average common sense could scarcely help feeling in sympathy with the Christian view of God and of everlasting life, were it not for the appalling idea of millions upon millions being buried alive in eternal misery and pain. Is the idea of eternal punishment, as set forth by Christian teaching, compatible with the idea of a just and kind and merciful God?

I.—ETERNAL REPROBATION

IT is alleged that the Christian faith contains some most terrible doctrines concerning the severity of everlasting punishment, and the number of souls inevitably doomed to never-ending pain. The view taken of several important questions concerning eternal reprobation by various Christian communities or divines deserves some closer examination.

4.—A QUESTION ABOUT WHICH WE CAN SAY LITTLE AND KNOW LESS

Is it an article of the Christian faith that children who die without baptism will suffer eternal pain?

Some Christian writers seem to have thought so. It was never the opinion of all Christian divines; few, if any, think so now. Many, however, teach that children who die unbaptised will not be admitted into heaven. This view demands some attention in connection with the question before us. To do full justice both to our question and to their view it may, perhaps, be best to begin with briefly stating the general principles on which they seem to base their opinion:

There are only two final states of existence—heaven and hell. Heaven means the possession and enjoyment of supernatural, divine happiness—such happiness as God Himself enjoys. An animal or a person who has not the use of reason, cannot enjoy intellectual pleasures; they are above the animal nature; to enjoy them the healthy use of the intellect is indispensable. Divine joys are supernatural; they are above the reach of a created, finite intellect. To enjoy them a higher supernatural life-power is required, namely, sanctifying grace, which makes men, in a certain sense, “partakers of the divine nature.”¹ Without sanctifying grace even the angelic nature would be quite unfit for the joys of heaven. Those, therefore, who depart this life in the state of sanctifying grace are perfectly certain of heaven, but without sanctifying grace the soul is absolutely incapable of the enjoyment of heavenly bliss.

The question, therefore, comes to this: Are infants in the state of sanctifying grace when they die without baptism? If they are, they are certain of heaven; if they are not, they are absolutely unfit for it.

The first parents of our race had received sanctifying grace, not only as a personal gift, but also as a parental privilege. It was entrusted to them as a sacred heirloom to be handed down to all future

¹ 2 Peter i. 4. Literal quotations are mostly taken from the Revised Edition.

generations, together with the gift of natural life. By sin they lost this supernatural heirloom. Owing to the merits of the divine redemption, sanctifying grace may be recovered, but only as a personal gift; as an heirloom it is lost. Hence, man is born without the supernatural life of sanctifying grace, in a state far below his appointed perfection, and he is said to be born in sin; not as if the child itself had committed sin, but because this fall from divine grace, this loss of supernatural life has its source in moral guilt, seeing that it originated in the sin of the responsible parents of the race.

The divines whose views we are considering look upon baptism as the only means of spiritual regeneration appointed by Christ. They allow, however, that, if baptism cannot actually be received before death, sanctifying grace and eternal life may be obtained by two classes of persons—by those who are put to death for the faith of Christ, and by those who have a sincere desire to receive baptism, provided they repent of sins they may have committed. They see good reason to believe that, even if a person has never heard of baptism, an earnest general desire and intention to do the will of the Supreme Being, and to act in submission to it to the best of his knowledge and conscience, amounts to an implicit desire of baptism, and is a disposition of soul sufficiently loyal, to allow the God of infinite mercy to raise it to the state of divine grace. The millions and millions, therefore, of those who have never heard

a word about Christ or the Christian religion have a chance of admission to heaven from the moment they come to the full use of reason, especially as it is certain that Christ was born, suffered and died for the eternal salvation of each one of them, and that God gives to every one of them, as long as they live on earth, sufficient, and more than sufficient, grace to save their souls and to obtain eternal salvation.

This is as accurate a statement of the view most generally taken by those divines who hold baptism to be absolutely necessary for salvation, as we are able to give in a few words. What do these divines teach regarding the fate of millions who die without baptism before they attain to the use of reason?

Though it would be sufficient for our purpose to deal with what may be considered the severest opinions now held by any considerable number of divines, we may be excused for observing in passing that many of the early Gnostics, Manichaeans and Pelagians did not consider baptism indispensable for salvation. At present the Socinians, Baptists, and Unitarians do not look upon baptism as necessary, and many members of various Protestant Churches, whose divines formerly believed in its necessity, do now no longer insist on it. Calvin, who, on several other points connected with the question of predestination, took a very severe view, maintained that baptism was enjoined by Christ, but thought that children born of Christian parents

would be admitted into heaven without baptism. Wickliffe seems to have taken the same view in the fourteenth century. Cardinal Caietan, a voluminous theological writer of the sixteenth century, expressed an opinion that a child which could not be baptised might be saved by the prayerful wish and vicarious desire of his parents. Some of the theologians assembled at Trent in 1547 spoke in terms of disapproval of his expression of such an opinion, on the ground that Christ had said explicitly: "Verily, verily, I say to thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."¹ They argued that neither in Scripture nor in historical tradition a vestige of positive evidence could be found that heaven was assured to any class of persons dying unbaptised, except those who were put to death for the faith of Christ,² or who were of that personal disposition of mind and heart which Christ commended in these words: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."³

Many divines of the present day observe a similar attitude, and refrain from, and disapprove of, hopeful expressions concerning the admission of any children dying unbaptised to supernatural life and happiness. They allow that it is not impossible to God to give

¹ John iii. 5.

² Matt. viii. 35.

³ John xiv. 21.

a moment of light and grace to such children, and so to enable them to obtain supernatural life; but they do not consider it right to assume that God deals with such children in a way so different from the ordinary lines of His natural dispensation as to border on a miraculous interposition, while Christ has not only given no hint of such an assurance, but has said in express and explicit words that no man can enter into the kingdom of God unless he be born of water, and of the Spirit. They are afraid lest this important positive scriptural statement should be belittled through a natural sympathy, which can in no sense be of any advantage whatever to the infants who are its object. For, as Bellarmine pointed out,¹ the condition of children who die unbaptised can in no way be affected by any opinion theologians may choose to hold. Children already dead can neither derive any benefit from a tender and hopeful, nor suffer any harm from a severe and gloomy, view being taken of their condition. Were theologians to hold out hopes of salvation for any class of unbaptised children, not clearly and positively warranted by assurances divinely given, the result might be that some parents would be less careful lest their children should die unbaptised, and so, for all we can know, not a few children might eventually be deprived of the supernatural happiness of heaven in consequence of such teaching. Let us suppose that Napoleon the Great had inserted a clause in

¹ Tom iv., libr. vi., cap. 2.

his code of laws to the effect that no one born outside France could inherit any property in France, unless his birth was registered by a French consul. Would, in this case, a lawyer have been justified in assuring his clients, that, though this registration were omitted under certain circumstances, their children born abroad would not be precluded from such an inheritance, unless he could point to some other provision in the code, or to some precedent which showed that the clause was not carried into effect in certain cases? Should divines who undertake the responsible task of explaining to the people the positive code of revealed truth, consider it right to propound a system of salvation, and to raise or to encourage hopes for which they not only find no divine assurance, but which seem to them precluded by a positive statement made by the divine Teacher?

To enter into more minute details of the various opinions regarding the fate of children who die without baptism is outside the scope of our inquiry. The task we have set to ourselves is to consider, whether what is regarded as revealed truth by the generality of professing Christians, and especially by the most numerous and important of the severer schools of modern religious thought, is compatible with the idea of a just and kind and merciful God.

What, then, does the teaching of those recent divines who seem to take the severest view of the fate of children dying unbaptised amount to? What

they say may be summed up as follows: In consequence of the sin of the first parents, they are born, not in the state of sanctifying grace, but of what is commonly called original sin; God made them for eternal happiness; Christ became man, and died for their redemption; they cannot enter heaven unless they obtain sanctifying grace; baptism is the only means spoken of by Christ as appointed for the spiritual regeneration; Christ has declared that without this regeneration a man cannot enter into the kingdom of God; it is impossible for us to know for certain how God will deal with such children; the opinion of a very great number of divines is that they will not only suffer no pain whatever, but will enjoy a certain measure of natural happiness; many, indeed, think that they will be favoured with the fullest eternal enjoyment of the highest possible natural happiness; inasmuch, however, as hell is the loss of the beatific vision, the state of existence of these children must be called hell, because it is not the beatific vision of God; whatever the case may be, it is perfectly certain that nothing will be done to them that is not consistent with God's infinite justice; God will deal with them, not only with infinite justice, but with equally infinite mercy, love, and kindness.

Is such teaching incompatible with the belief in a just and merciful God? It mainly amounts to an acknowledgment of faith in God's justice and goodness, and of ignorance concerning the precise destiny

of the vast number of infants who die without baptism. Could we honestly complain of the lot of these children being unjust or hard, when we have to admit that we do not definitely know what it is?

Certainly, there is an immeasurable difference between the highest possible natural happiness and the supernatural enjoyment of heaven. There is, therefore, an immense responsibility on the part of responsible persons, to leave nothing undone to ensure the regeneration of infants. But in the sight of God man has no claim to supernatural life and grace. The majority of men are passionately fond of the present life, miserable and paltry as its enjoyments are. But for the hope of supernatural happiness, most of them would gladly continue in this life for ever, were freedom from death and the severer forms of suffering assured to them. Natural life and happiness is a most precious gift. The numerous school of divines who, at the present day, most scrupulously refrain from holding out any hope of salvation to any children who die unbaptised, raise no objection against the opinion that such children will feel no disappointed desire of the supernatural joys of heaven, and will not only suffer no pain, but will enjoy a full measure of natural happiness. Can Christian teaching on this point be called incompatible with God's kindness and justice, when, in the opinion which may be regarded as the most restrictive of hope, children who die unbaptised have nothing

to suffer, nothing to complain of, but a great deal to enjoy and to be thankful for?

5.—ANOTHER QUESTION ABOUT WHICH WE CAN
SAY LITTLE AND KNOW LESS

There seems to be little room for doubt that there were divines who believed some men and angels to have been “fore-ordained to everlasting death.”¹ At present, it is safe to say, that no theologian holds the opinion which these words would seem to imply. Our question is this: Can, and do the divines who believe in eternal punishment, explain “predestination” in a way which commends itself as reasonable and consistent with the infinite justice and kindness of God? We cannot enter into the details of different opinions; it must suffice to point out their general outlines:—

God knows by one eternal act of intuition who will be in heaven and who will be left to pine in outer darkness: these will be lost as He foresees it, but not because He foresees it. He foresees it because they will be lost; they will be lost because of their final abuse of their free will and grace.

God is wholly beyond and above time and its changes. In His mind one act does not follow another, one resolution does not give way to, or displace another—all is embodied in one eternal act; but if we wish to understand His mind and purpose contained in this one eternal unchangeable act, we

¹ The Confession of Faith, Westminster, ch. iii. 3.

have to study the wealth of its complex simplicity in the changing effects developed in the evolution of created existence: we have to analyse it by the marvellous refractive prism of God's creation. Let us think of the three divine Persons in the repose of Their eternal Godhead, before the first act of creation, before the first beginning of time. They were in the fullest enjoyment of infinite bliss. In Their divine goodness, They desired to communicate the blessing of happiness: there was no one on whom to bestow this favour, so They resolved to call beings into existence. God created a multitude of angels. He chose to raise them by the very first act of creation above their created nature, and to communicate to them by sanctifying grace a principle and a power of supernatural action analogous to the divine nature, a living spark, as it were, of His own divine life, so that they might be able to see, to love, to possess, and to enjoy God and His own divine happiness.

In order to exalt even more the spirits of whom He had conceived the idea, God resolved to enable them to enjoy eternal happiness as their due, and to possess it in their own right. Accordingly, He did not put them immediately in possession of eternal bliss, but left them to exercise the free will He had given them in the light of their natural intelligence. His intention was that they all should use the gift of their free will to their eternal advantage. This all did not do. Some refused to depend on God, and so

fell into sin. God's wisdom and goodness were not defeated by the sin of the angels, they were only challenged into more marvellous action. We may imagine that God wished to save the rebellious spirits, and resolved that the evil they had done should be made good, that the sin they had committed should be atoned for, and that an opportunity of repentance and pardon should be given them. We are not obliged, but free to think so. We have no proof of this divine intention, beyond the intrinsic weight of the idea.

For all we know God could have pardoned sin without satisfaction being made for it, though it is not clear that He could have done so consistently with His infinite holiness, unless the rebellious spirits had repented. To force them to repentance would have been incompatible with the freedom of the will He had given them. We are free to think that God wished full reparation to be made for the sin of the rebellious angels. But no creature could make adequate atonement for sins against the infinite sovereignty and majesty of God. Only a divine Person could make full reparation, provided the divine Person could place Himself in a state of existence capable of merit. Merit implies a state of servitude and dependence. In His Godhead a divine Person could not merit, being infinitely above all merit. He could assume the nature of an angel, but as far as we can see, a spiritual intelligence assumed into personal union with God, must needs enjoy the

beatific vision and bliss of the divine Person, a state of existence essentially incompatible with merit. God, therefore, we may assume, devised a nature not purely spiritual, with a view to one of the divine Persons uniting it to Himself for the purpose of atonement and redemption. The human nature is admirably suited for this purpose. The soul is essentially spiritual, with an innate habitude to organic union with its material body as an integral part of its natural existence. By personal union with a divine Person, His beatific knowledge and blessedness is communicated to the intellectual soul, but the lower actions and functions of man's complex nature may be in keeping with the condition of his life on earth. As this condition is one of servitude, these actions, while pertaining to a divine Person, would not only be truly human in their nature, but also meet all the conditions required for merit. Had man never sinned, and the Son of God become man in paradise, His every thought, word, and action, even without the faintest touch of suffering, would have been infinitely meritorious. We may picture to ourselves that a vision of the divine Redeemer was vouchsafed to the rebellious angels, and that opportunity and grace were given them to accept His redemption, that they disdained it with wilful final obstinacy, and that the glorious edifice of the visible universe, raised to be a temple of redemption, was then appointed as the prison-tomb of the fallen powers.

As a matter of fact God created man. Men were to form a great, well-organised society, and He devised a plan by which He placed His creative action at their disposal, in order to make even their numerical propagation and increase dependent on their own action. Together with the breath of life He gave the higher life of divine grace to the first parents. Their descendants were to receive this supernatural life of grace together with the natural life, as it were by way of birthright. He placed them in a paradise of pleasure, appointed a token by which they were to show their submission to Him, and, if they did so, they were to step into the sphere of eternal bliss, without a single shadow of suffering or sorrow ever falling on their path.

But man also fell into sin. We have no certain proof that God intended the redemption of the angels, but we have clear proof that God has arranged for the redemption of man, and wishes all men to be saved. Even if man fall ever so often into ever so many and ever so great sins, as long as he is in this life, God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; He wishes that he turn from his way and live.¹ God leaves nothing undone to save men. Only one thing He does not do: He does not force men. He does not deprive them of the gift He has given them, the great, the glorious, the sublime, the most astounding gift of the free will—a gift which only a God of infinite wisdom could dare to bestow

¹ Ezekiel xxxiii. 11.

on a creature. If man, in spite of the divine redemption, in spite of all warnings of his conscience, in spite of the threat of eternal punishment, in spite of the unceasing help and influence of grace, dies in sin and in final impenitence, then God consigns him to eternal punishment. In point of time, this decree is not of later date than that of his original destination, creation, and redemption to eternal bliss. All these decrees or divine intentions are co-eternal, blended into one eternal act, quite beyond and above all conception of time; but considered in their effective results and in their logical analysis, they are distinct decrees, the one of eternal reprobation being from eternity superinduced and made absolute in view of a sinner's final impenitence, from eternity foreseen by God, but unwilled.

6.—WHAT SINS WILL BE PUNISHED WITH ETERNAL REPROBATION?

This is a very important question, and different answers are given to it. All agree in this, that all sins may be repented of and forgiven, but there is a great difference of opinion as to the conditions on which pardon may be obtained. It would be impossible to discuss this question without plunging into the deepest depths of scriptural controversy. As controversy is entirely beside the modest scope of these peaceful pages, it seems wiser to waive this question, and to leave it to the honest common sense of each one's individual conscience, to satisfy to the best of

his knowledge the Lord Who searches the heart and tries the reins, to give every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings.¹ The question which forces itself on our attention, rather, is this: Do all sins, which a man may not have repented of before death, render him liable to eternal punishment?

A great number of people are of opinion that there are two kinds of sins—sins which do, and others, less grave, which do not deprive the soul of supernatural life and the right to eternal happiness. Those who hold this opinion, not infrequently choose to call the former sins “mortal,” and the latter “venial.” They would point to the black catalogue given by St Paul, as to sins of their nature grave enough to be considered “mortal.” “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”²

Some think that all sins will be forgiven eventually, and that all punishment of sin after death will be merely of a temporal and purgatorial nature. Others, who make no distinction between sins which may and sins which may not be forgiven after death, incline to the severe view that sin of any kind unforgiven during life will utterly exclude from

¹ Jeremiah xvii. 10.

² I Cor. vi. 9, 10.

heaven. If this were so, a person who gives way to a slight wilful neglect or irreverence in prayer, or tells a wilful but harmless untruth, or offends slightly against charity in thought or word, and dies without having repented and obtained forgiveness, is condemned for all eternity, along with those guilty of obstinate perseverance in the grossest sins, although it is written, "A righteous man falls seven times";¹ and again, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."²

Suppose a man were to die in such a sin without having repented of it, and so obtained pardon for it, what would become of him? Can the soul enter heaven, be the taint ever so slight? "There shall not enter into it anything unclean."³ Is he, then, to be punished for such a trifling fault for all eternity? The number of those who think so is decreasing rapidly.

In the opinion of those who allow an essential distinction between sins of gross and grave wickedness and sinful frailties, to which a righteous man is liable, persons who die guilty of minor offences will have to undergo some term of temporal punishment, but are absolutely certain of the eternal happiness of heaven. Only those are given over to final reprobation who die obstinately impenitent in wilful "mortal" sin. Moreover, an act of its nature ever so sinful is not imputed as a "mortal" sin, unless it be committed with full knowledge and full consent.

¹ Proverbs xxiv. 16. ² 1 John i. 8. ³ Revelation xxi. 27.

7.—WHAT NUMBER OF SOULS WILL BE LOST?

Ascetical writers have not failed to dwell upon the alarming number of souls who will be lost, and the small number of elect. They quote the words, "Many are called but few chosen";¹ and "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many be they that enter in thereby. For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, which leadeth unto life, and few be they that find it."² According to others, Christ spoke directly, and, in the first place, of the small number of Jews who embraced the Church of His faith. These words of our Guide from on high ought to serve as a warning to those who thoughtlessly indulge in heedless indifference, or in a sense of false security, but it would be vain and unprofitable to argue about the relative numbers of those who will be lost and saved. It is impossible to know for certain that any person has died guilty of a grave unrepented sin. For God's invisible grace is busy even in the heart of the most abandoned sinner while he lives.

Usually those who impugn the goodness of God, do not fail to point out how often votaries of one creed pronounce the case of anyone who adheres to another as utterly hopeless; how especially the Roman Catholic Church holds out no hope of salvation to anybody outside her own communion,

¹ Matt. xxii. 14.

² Matt. vii. 13, 14.

may, how, in her teaching, even her own members are debarred from pardon and salvation, unless they confess their sins to a priest, and have the assistance of a priest when they are on their death-bed.

In bygone times, it was, indeed, the fashion for the members of every sect to look upon those of any other as doomed to perdition. Not seldom, people who had lived to an age credited with wisdom, and who trusted in themselves that they were righteous,¹ would view the world around them in the spirit of that precise Highland dame, who was so sorely distressed at the liberty of thought and conduct gaining on the rising generation, that she used to say, "It's come to this, there's nobody saved but me and the minister, and whiles I have my doubts about him." These narrow views have gradually widened out into broad sympathies, and, perhaps, a somewhat hazy, but general hope, that "we are all tending to the same place." If we except the Roman Catholics, there are now but few Christians who do not see some chance of salvation at least for all their fellow-Christians. The Roman Catholics are probably the most restrictive of all, and as they are more dogmatic and definite in what they hold concerning the hope of salvation, the teaching of their church on this point deserves some special attention.

They hold that theirs is the one church instituted by the divine Redeemer, and, therefore, that out of

¹ Luke xviii. 9.

their church there is no salvation. How they understand this may be seen from the following quotation: "Just as Catholics lose the sanctifying grace that is necessary for salvation by a mortal sin, so also do baptised non-Catholics lose it by an offence against God in a grave matter, committed with full knowledge and deliberation. Non-Catholics have not the powerful helps available to Catholics for the recovery of lost grace. According to Catholic teaching, there is only one means for the forgiveness of sin, besides the actual reception of the sacraments, and it consists in this: That a person shall, for the love of God, have a true sorrow for his sins, joined with a willingness and a disposition to fulfil entirely God's will for the salvation of his soul. From this it is clear that the attainment of salvation is not impossible to non-Catholics, for, according to the mind of the Church, those who are in good faith and disposition are already Catholics, though they may not be aware of it themselves.

"Here two opposite questions may be raised. 1. If non-Catholics, who have a good will to accept the truth and to do what is required for their salvation, can thus work out their salvation, how is it that the Catholic Church claims to be the only institution of salvation? The answer is found in the statements already made. Non-Catholics will be saved, not through what the Church pronounces erroneous, but through their co-operation with Christ, which renders them inwardly members of the true

Church and of the communion of saints ; hence they will be saved through Christ and His Church, notwithstanding their errors — these do not prevent their salvation in so far as they are held in good faith.

“2. On the other hand, some might consider this view harsh and intolerant, but it must be admitted, that everyone who is firmly convinced of the truth of his own belief, must pass this same judgment on others from his own point of view. If Protestants are of opinion that Catholics can be saved, they do not attribute it to confession, or to Mass, or to other things which they consider errors, but they judge of us exactly as the Catholic Church judges of them, *i.e.*, they attach the hope of our salvation to the good faith and good will which they perceive in us.

“With regard to the unbaptised and the heathen, the Church has declared that the desire of baptism serves as a substitute for the actual baptism with water, when the latter is not possible. Cardinal Gousset says, ‘It is certain that God imparts the necessary means of salvation to the heathens as well as to heretics.’ The heathens are bound to seek and to use the best means to discover the truth, but if, through no fault of their own, they fail to attain to its knowledge, they are not guilty. They are also obliged to obey the natural law, and when they fail, they can obtain remission of their sins in the way indicated above. They can also, without belonging

outwardly to the Church, become inwardly members of it, and as members of the communion of saints, heirs of heaven. Upon those who work out their salvation in this way, the Church pronounces no judgment.

“The doctrine that the Church is the only institution of salvation does not require us to regard any one as lost; it does not permit us to abandon hope of salvation of a single man; it puts upon all the obligation to seek the truth, and provide for their salvation according to their best knowledge and capacity, and it makes it a duty for the faithful to pray, according to the words of St Paul, that all men may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.”¹

“The sentence: ‘Out of the Church there is no salvation’ is very true and very misleading.

“IT IS VERY TRUE:—I. The Church of Christ embraces all those who are in His grace, His service, His friendship—that is, all those who have part in His salvation; there is therefore no salvation outside it.

“2. As to the visible Church of Christ on earth: IF CHRIST ESTABLISHED A VISIBLE CHURCH HERE ON EARTH WITH A VISIBLE HEAD, AS HE CERTAINLY DID, IT IS HIS WILL THAT ALL MEN SHOULD BELONG TO IT, AND IT IS, THEREFORE, THE BOUNDEN DUTY OF EVERYBODY TO BELONG TO IT.

¹ Angebliche Intoleranz der Katholischen Kirchendisziplin (Alleged want of Toleration in the Discipline of the Catholic Church). By Augustine Egger, D.D., Bishop of St Gall.

Those, therefore, who know that they are bound to belong to the visible Church of Christ, but refuse to do so, act contrary to His will, live in sin, and if they continue in this sin, and die outside His Church, they can have no part in His salvation. (See Matt. vii. 21.)

“3. Christ instituted His visible Church on earth as an institution of salvation. Another institution of salvation He did not establish. Though He does not confine His graces to the visible ministration of His visible Church, but gives graces to all, even to Pagans who never hear of Him or of His Church, still He made the ministration of His Church the one regular, the one appointed channel of His truth and grace, and HIS VISIBLE CHURCH EXCLUSIVELY THE ONE AND ONLY INSTITUTION OF SALVATION.

“THE SENTENCE IS, HOWEVER, MISLEADING. At first sight it might seem to imply that nobody can or will be saved, who dies outside the Communion of the visible Church of Christ. This is not so. All those, and only those, will be saved and enter heaven who die without mortal, *i.e.*, without very grave, conscious, wilful sin. Of those, therefore, who die outside the visible Church of Christ:

“1. Those are perfectly certain to be saved, who have been baptised, never committed a grave sin with full knowledge and consent, and, through no grievous fault or wilful neglect on their part, failed to come to a clear knowledge of their obligation to join the one true Church of Christ.

“2. Those also are perfectly certain to be saved, who remain and die outside the true Church in good faith, and committed ever so many and great sins, but, not aware of the obligation we are under of confessing them, are sorry for them because they love God.

“3. It is also certain that God will deal mercifully with all those, be they baptised Christians, Pagans, Jews, or Mahometans, who strive sincerely to do what is right according to their conscience, and to live up to the light of grace given them, be it ever so little; there is reason to hope that God, in His infinite goodness and wisdom, somehow or other will give also to those the happiness to die in His grace, and so to obtain the eternal salvation, for the Son of God became man to bring ‘PEACE TO MEN OF GOOD WILL’ (Luke ii. 14).”¹

From these passages just quoted, it is clear that the Roman Catholics do not look upon those who profess another creed as hopelessly lost, whatever their dispositions may be.

It is interesting to notice that the Greek and the Roman Catholic churches have a whole catalogue of canonised saints, authoritatively and solemnly declared to be in the enjoyment of heavenly bliss, but that no authoritative pronouncement has ever been made about the eternal reprobation of a single human being. Many divines seem inclined to think

¹“What must I do to be Saved?” *Catholic Truth Society of Scotland*. The passages in large type are so in the original.

that the words of Holy Writ concerning Judas Iscariot, "Good were it for that man if he had not been born,"¹ preclude the hope of his eternal salvation. Whatever meaning one may choose to see in these words, there is no other passage in the Bible which warrants an inference that any other particular person has been consigned to eternal perdition.

When we consider that God conceived the idea of angels and men, created them and endowed them with original grace for the purpose of making them partakers of His own infinite eternal happiness; when we consider that the Son of God became man and lived, worked, prayed, suffered, and died for the redemption of man; when we consider that He holds out unceasingly, even to the most abandoned sinners, graces and chances of pardon up to the last breath of life; when we consider that, in the opinion of the greater number of Christians, God deposes an angel to watch and guard and guide every human being born to life, and that He continually seeks to lead men to salvation by the voice of conscience, and the outpouring of countless graces into mind and heart; when we further consider that, at least in the opinion of the adherents of the Greek Church, the Anglican High Church, and especially of the vast and world-embracing organisation of the Roman Catholic Church, the divine Redeemer, not content with the invisible and undefined infusion of grace into the

¹ Matt. xxvi. 24.

souls of men, has established a visible, organised, ever-active, and living institution of salvation, that He instituted in His sacraments, visible, certain, and infallible means and channels of grace, that He entrusted the power and the commission to pardon and to forgive the sins of repentant sinners to men among men, when He said to His apostles, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you; . . . Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them,"¹ and that He, moreover, in establishing the Christian priesthood, empowered and commissioned the apostles and their successors to hand down this power of pardon and forgiveness from generation to generation, in every part of the inhabited globe: what reason is there to complain that the Christian faith is incompatible with the idea of a just and merciful God, because some have expressed an opinion that a large number of souls will be lost? If one half of the opinions just reviewed be true, surely God has done more for men's salvation than human ingenuity could have devised. No man can have the remotest idea of what number of souls will be lost, but, be it great or small, if men fail to be saved in spite of all God has done, and is continually doing, to warn, to encourage, and to help them in every way, it is wholly and solely because they refuse the graces which are so plentifully proffered by God.

¹ John xx. 21-23.

8.—THE SEVERITY OF THE ETERNAL PUNISHMENTS

“Be the number of those who are lost ever so great or ever so small, it is an appalling thought that any living being should be eternally roasted in fire. Read the descriptions of the eternal torments given by various writers; look at certain prints representing men buried alive in fire; listen to sermons preached at missions and revival meetings, and ask yourself whether a being who could delight in practising such cruelties deserved the name of God!”

This is the pith of one of the commonest arguments advanced against the existence of God. Strange feat of logic! The idea of reasoning away a grand central fact on the strength of a minor conditional contingency, wholly depending on the very truth in question! There are many who say, “God exists and is infinitely kind, but to consign a being to endless torments is incompatible with infinite kindness, therefore there is no eternal punishment.” The assertion that a being infinitely kind cannot inflict eternal punishment may be untrue, but there is, at least, logic in the argument, for, unless either of the assertions be untrue, the conclusion must hold. But where is the force of logic in the argument against the existence of God? Either there is a hell of eternal torments or not. If there is

none, it neither proves nor disproves the existence of God; if there is one, then there must be a God. Disprove the existence of God, and the very idea of eternal punishment is out of question; but neither the idea nor the severity of eternal punishment can, in any sense, serve as a factor in any logical argument against the existence of God.

It is worth noticing that the only dogmatic and authoritative pronouncement made on this matter by the only church which claims infallible authority and commission to teach, is to the effect that the punishment of the finally reprobate in hell is eternal. No definition of the nature of the fire, or other torments of hell, has been given by the church in question, but it seems to be the common, we should say almost unanimous, opinion of her divines, that the fire spoken of in the Scriptures must be understood, not merely in a figurative, but also in a literal sense, as implying material fire of some kind. All agree in this, that the bodily sufferings, be they ever so severe, are a small misery compared to the loss of the beatific enjoyment of God, and of the happiness of heaven. Some ascetical writers and preachers of various denominations have given appalling descriptions of the torments of the doomed, and of the danger of eternal damnation. Many, however, look upon this style of writing and preaching with increasing disfavour. They allow it to be the duty of those to whom people look for guidance in the way of salvation, to draw attention to the unfortunate eternity

which awaits the wicked, and to the dangers to which many thoughtlessly expose themselves, but they disapprove of exaggeration, and of speaking and writing in a way calculated to create an impression that it is almost impossible to save our souls, and that God is a being more to be feared than to be loved and confided in.

If there is a hell of eternal punishment for the wicked, it is right that we should all work out our salvation with a certain kind of fear and trembling,¹ but not without that spirit of filial and confiding love, and hope, and trust, which enables and emboldens us to say, "Abba, Father!"² There is, thank God, a large class of men and women who strive to live good lives, and to do what is right. Many of them, in their humility, look upon their daily unavoidable failings as grave offences, and are often uneasy about their eternal salvation. Such souls are apt to think continually about their own shortcomings rather than of the goodness, the benefits, and the love of their Lord and Redeemer. Glaring descriptions of the torments and dangers of hell are liable to do them harm, and to deepen their sentiments of mistaken humility and fear. What they need is words calculated to warm and to widen and to elevate the heart.

A selfish fear of the eternal punishments, unless it be mellowed and chastened by a spirit of confiding love, has in it a certain element of dis-

¹ Phil. ii. 12.

² Rom. viii 15 ; Gal. iv. 6 ; Luke xi. 2.

honour to God. It checks the growth of a spirit of generosity, and the practice of some of the holiest virtues; but still it is an unmistakable safeguard against a life of reprobation. The danger of eternal damnation is very remote for those who live in dread of it. But even more secure are those who strive to serve God and to do what is right from gratitude and from filial love.

It might be supposed that the consideration of God's mercy and love would be sufficient to soften the hearts of even the most thoughtless and abandoned sinners, and would turn them from their evil ways. Unfortunately this is not so. There are large numbers with hearts too callous to be affected by motives of gratitude and hope alone, who can be reclaimed to repentance and a better life, or at least restrained in their tendency to unbridled vice, only by the vivid and startling fear of eternal punishment. The following incident may serve as an illustration:—

A certain contractor in the South of England took a gentleman he was showing round his large engineering works into a temporary building, which he had set up as a club and reading-room for the navvies in his employment. The gentleman was surprised to find, among the books supplied, some copies of "Hell open to Christians," and asked: "How do you come to have such a book as this here?" "I had a very troublesome set of workmen," replied the contractor, "and chancing

to see this volume at a bookseller's, bought a few copies for the reading-room, with the result of finding a marked improvement among the navvies."

We can form no idea of the condition of the reprobate, except from what is said about it in the Bible. The following passages are unmistakably severe: "He shall say to them on the left hand: depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels."¹ "The son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that cause stumbling and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."² "If anybody was not found in the book of life he was cast into the lake of fire."³ "The fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."⁴ "And the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day and night who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name."⁵

Suppose we heard a speaker address a crowd in

¹ Matt. xxv. 41.

² Matt. xiii. 41 and 42.

³ Rev. xx. 15.

⁴ Rev. xxi. 8.

⁵ Rev. xiv. 11. See also Mark ix. 43-48, and Matt. xviii. 8 and 9.

Hyde Park, or on the Glasgow Green, to the effect that the legal punishment for wilful murder was hanging, but that the sentence was very seldom carried into effect, that it was commonly commuted into imprisonment for life, and that, after a certain number of years, the prisoner was almost certain to be released; that the law authorised the judge to punish forgery, embezzlement of large sums, burglary, and similar gross crimes, with imprisonment and hard labour for 15 or 20 years, as the case might be, but that, as a rule, only a couple of years or months imprisonment without hard labour was awarded; that, by the terms of the law, being drunk and disorderly could be punished with thirty days' imprisonment, but that a person guilty of the offence was never sentenced to more than a fine of half-a-crown: should we not be inclined to wonder what the speaker meant? Should we not be surprised to be told that he was an earnest political and social reformer, desirous of reclaiming the criminal classes from vice? Should we see no reason to fear that such language might be calculated to encourage men to crime rather than to deter or reclaim them from it?

Would it then be reasonable to expect that preachers and ascetical writers whose office it is to warn people against sin, will water down the penal code of revealed faith, and make little of the impressive warnings of Him, Who will not break a bruised reed nor quench smoking flax till He send forth

judgment unto victory,¹ but Who is ordained judge of the quick and the dead,² to Whom an account will have to be rendered of every idle word,³ and Who will pass judgment without mercy on him that has shown no mercy?⁴

All that those teachers can do, besides quoting Bible-texts, is to draw on their own imaginations. Nobody who believes in Christianity can blame them for doing so in moderation, for the purpose of rousing hardened hearts from the lethargy of sin, or of warning the thoughtless against its seductive attractions. If we are sometimes tempted to think that they dwell too much on an awful subject, a glance at the slums of our cities and the wards of our prisons, or at the records of cruelty to wives and children, will bring us back to the realities of life, and convince us that even at this advanced stage of its progress, the world is still as much as ever in need of the fear both of temporal and eternal punishments.

There are many who hold that man is so much a creature of circumstances, that he should not be punished for any offence whatever, but only placed under reformative restraint. But no nation seems to be inclined to put such theories into practice. In any case, no nation is likely to call upon the criminal classes to revise and determine the penal code, or to ask habitual offenders or persons await-

¹ Matt. xii. 20.

² Acts x. 42.

³ Matt. xii. 36.

⁴ James ii. 13.

ing their trial, how they would like to have the prison furnished. Neither is God likely to ask those who remain wilfully obstinate in wickedness, what accommodation He should provide for them. Whether men think the punishment threatened to them too severe or not, it will make no difference. If there is any possibility of eternal torment in hell, no reasonable person will run the risk of such punishment.

A certain Italian nobleman had lost all faith, even faith in the existence of God. A clergyman, who was an intimate friend of his, had a long correspondence with him, but his efforts to convince the nobleman by letter were in vain. On a journey to Italy he called on the nobleman, and was soon engaged in discussion with him. The discussion proved long and fruitless. At last the clergyman rose and said: "Sir, either there is a God or there is none. If there be no God, you lose or risk nothing by believing in one. But if there is a God, how will you fare, if you have to appear before Him, Whom you disregard and deny?" With these words the clergyman took his leave. His friend pondered on the words, felt the force of their logic, and resumed the practice of his religion. The question of the eternal punishment of the wicked resolves itself into the very same dilemma.

Is the fear of sin and hell too excessive on the part of the average Christian sinner? Are we

sure that our idea of the perfection, the holiness, and the justice of God is not woefully inadequate? What do we know of the wickedness of sin? Shall not God take a very different view of the punishment due to unrepented deliberate sin, from that we are tempted to take, living as we do in a mist of ignorance and error?

It is not likely that anybody will actually have to suffer pain, unless he be guilty of wilful, unrepented, personal sins; as for the severity of the pains of eternal punishment, all we can say is this: either a certain kind and degree of pain is justly deserved by a reprobate soul, or it is not; if it is so deserved, there is no room for just complaint; if it is not justly deserved, it will not be inflicted. It must not, however, be forgotten, that God is not only infinitely merciful, but also infinitely just. He is as just as He is merciful; in this life He shows mostly, in fact almost exclusively, His mercy; in the other not only His mercy, but also His justice will be fully made manifest.

But though God will pass judgment without mercy on those who have shown no mercy,¹ the mercy of God reaches even into the deepest depths of reprobation: no one, not even the most abandoned infidel or the most wilful sinner, will fail to receive a reward for any good he may do. The reward may be happiness in this life or abatement of punishment in the next. Large numbers, both of the elect and of

¹ James ii. 13.

the reprobate, will suffer little or no punishment for numerous grievous sins of which they have repented. When a man falls into a great sin, he forfeits the supernatural merits he may have gained, but the moment he obtains the pardon of the sin by his repentance, he is reinstated in his former merits. Anybody who dies free from unrepented grievous sin, will receive, throughout all eternity, the reward of all the good he ever did in the state of grace, though he may have repeatedly lost the merits he had gained by relapses into sin ; in other words, it is impossible for man to gain any supernatural merits, for which he will not receive an eternal supernatural reward, if God can admit him into heaven at all ; while no lost soul will suffer any punishment which was due to it for sin, but which was at any time forgiven together with the sin : a sin once forgiven, is forgiven for ever ; a punishment once remitted, is remitted for ever.

9.—THE ETERNITY OF REPROBATION

Many have no difficulty in believing in future punishment, however severe, but question the justice of the eternity of its duration.

It cannot be denied that, from our present point of view, it may seem hard to reconcile our minds to the thought, that the punishment of the wicked will never come to an end. In the schools of natural divinity many divines argue that there must be

eternal punishment for the wicked from the fact that God, in His infinite holiness, had to provide an efficient sanction for the moral law, and that no punishment of a purely passing nature were sufficient to deter the evil-minded from crime and injustice. To meet the objection that there is no just proportion between a sin of a moment and an endless punishment, they point out that the guilt and gravity of sin must be chiefly determined by the infinity of majesty and holiness of God, against which sin is an offence, on a principle analogous to that on which the morality of an action is mainly derived from its object.

For our purpose it is sufficient to remember, that there can be no eternal punishment unless what is inflicted by an infinitely just God ; therefore there is no eternal punishment which is not justly due to sin committed.

We cannot change these facts and principles, and shall not stay to consider the arguments advanced for the justice of eternal punishment. They are too dry and scholastic, and the facts with which the question chiefly deals, lie beyond the horizon of our present existence and intelligence. Let us, however, pause one moment to ask, how should we expect God to arrange for the eventual admission of the reprobate into heaven?

To enter into heaven they would have to repent and to receive the supernatural life of sanctifying grace into their souls. How is this to be brought

about? Man has a free will. Is he to be forced into repentance? Can a forced repentance be called repentance? Can we expect that God, after giving a free will to man, will be so inconsistent as to cancel the gift, and force him into a certain line of action against his will? God made man from the beginning and left him in the hand of his own counsel.¹ Before man is life and death, good and evil, that which he will choose shall be given him.² God has done and does everything that infinite wisdom, goodness, and power could devise and do to deter men from the choice of evil and death, and to induce and help them to choose life; but force them He will not, after He has once given them a free will. But will not the reprobate eventually repent of their sins?

Can we believe that God will never set a term to His indulgence with the abuse of their freedom, and that they will be allowed to play fast and loose with Him for ever? Would it not serve as an encouragement and incentive to vice were God to permit His creatures to choose their own time for repentance? Would it not be equivalent to saying: "Commit no sin, do no wrong, but, however much you may indulge in sin, you may change when you are tired of it and then enjoy an eternal happiness?" Would not millions put this interpretation on the certainty of final salvation?

Can true repentance ever be expected of men who

¹ Book of Ecclesiasticus, xv. 14.

² *Ibid.*, xv. 18.

obstinately continue in vice, even when God's love and goodness as well as the terrors of eternal misery are clearly put before them? or is God to force men into some sort of saving repentance, and so to put a premium on continuance in vice, in the shape of the certainty of final eternal happiness?

If a man were bidden, on pain of instant death, to refrain from expressing deadly hatred and revenge against persons who had never done him the slightest wrong, we might naturally expect that he would not refuse to do so. Yet when the troops of Versailles entered Paris in 1871, out of thousands of Communists who were challenged at the bayonet-point to declare themselves, few refrained from gratifying their implacable hatred by uttering threats of vengeance against their opponents, even though they knew that their chance of life depended on the word they uttered. This unbending disposition affords, perhaps, a faint but striking illustration of the final spirit of determined obstinacy in sin on the part of the reprobate.

II.—THE FREE WILL

IT is sad that a man should have to suffer eternal misery even through his own fault. Why did God not create all men in the actual possession of eternal bliss? Why did He give them a free will? He must have foreseen its final abuse.

10.—IS THE WILL REALLY FREE?

In all beings endowed with sentient life there is appetite, and this appetite of a kind that is in keeping with the nature of that life. By virtue of it the sentient being feels an innate, connatural craving or longing for, or desire of the pleasures or goods proportioned to its respective nature. Man is endowed with reason, hence there is in him, over and above his animal cravings, also a rational appetite. The proper object of this rational appetite is what is good for a rational, intelligent being, and this rational will is drawn to nothing with irresistible necessity except to what is clearly understood to be desirable in every respect. Finite goods and the infinite good as conceived by reason in our present

condition of intellectual vision, are not apprehended as good in every respect, therefore this rational will is not constrained by an inward necessity during our life on earth, nor is it subject to physical compulsion, being a spiritual power and as such beyond and above the range of physical forces. It is free, not in the choice of its own connatural and essential object, but in making its own intrinsic, rational, and deliberate choice between various things that may appear good and desirable under various aspects, after balancing the advantages of, and the reasons for and against such a choice.

This rational will is, in the right order of nature, the ruling power in man. Accordingly it is also naturally free in its own inward choice of outward actions. It is not always strong enough to carry out this choice, but certainly sometimes, in fact, generally. Outward actions may be enforced or prevented by physical violence in opposition to the will. Moreover, a man may be carried away by force of habit, uncontrolled fear or passion, nervous excitement, or morbid and diseased cravings of natural appetites, to do some actions in spite of the disinclination or without the deliberate consent of the will; but this is not commonly the case when a man is in a normal condition of health, physical strength, and the right adjustment of the nervous system. This kind of involuntary action under such exceptional influences and conditions shows that the will is not always strong enough to assert complete

control over all outward actions under all circumstances, but it is no proof that the will is never free in the choice and performance of outward actions, much less that it is not naturally free in determining its own attitude of resistance or consent.

What are some of the chief proofs of the freedom of the will understood in this sense ?

1. By virtue of its rational and spiritual nature the will is beyond and above physical force, nor does, in the present condition of our knowledge and intelligence, the intellect propose everything, nor, in truth, anything, as good and desirable in absolutely every respect. The will is, therefore, not necessarily constrained either by irresistible intrinsic necessity, nor by compulsion from without.

2. If the will were not free, there could be no question nor enforcement of moral or legal obligations, nor of duty, nor of responsibility, nor of justice, nor of punishments for evil deeds, nor of merit deserving rewards. Yet all these are matters fully and generally recognised in every language and in common life and intercourse among all nations.

3. If the will were not free, the whole system of criminal and penal legislation and of the administration of justice in use among all civilised nations would be unjust and preposterous.

4. If the will were not free, the prevalent system of commercial intercourse and enterprise and of civil jurisprudence and legislation regarding formal promises, transactions and contracts of every kind,

and especially also regarding marriage, would be false, unreal, and absurd.

5. In many cases, men are clearly conscious, at one time, that they may do a thing or not do it, at pleasure ; at another, that they are able and free to do several things and to make up their minds which they will choose to do. A man may choose to take a walk or not to take it ; he may take a walk or a drive, go to some church service or to visit a friend, take a rest, play some game, read, write, or do some other work. He feels that he is free in his choice, and that he can and does reason about it. He can make up his mind ; he can reconsider his choice and change his mind again if he wishes to do so.

6. It is a recognised fact that we are capable of remorse and repentance, and we are ourselves fully conscious of it. A man feels regret when he has accidentally and unwittingly done harm, *e.g.*, killed somebody or done some damage, but there is a regret, a remorse, a self-reproach of a quite different kind and complexion ; he may feel that he has done the wrong consciously through his own fault, *i.e.*, wilfully.

7. A man can form a resolution to battle against an evil inclination, temptation or habit, to change his life if he has led a bad one, to practise some virtue, to do good actions, etc.

8. There are cases of most determined resistance to temptation even under most violent attempts at outward compulsion, and under persecution and

torture; there are also instances of most heroic valour or fidelity to duty or virtue under most trying and discouraging circumstances.¹

There have been countless martyrs to duty and conscience. They are all unmistakable witnesses to the freedom of the will. So are all the codes of civil and penal legislation of all civilised nations; so are all the various systems of commercial, civil, political, and social life from one end of the globe to the other. "The final evidence on the subject every man has within himself in the most vital facts of his own experience,"² for, as Dr Johnson said, "We know our will is free; and there's an end on't."

II.—THE INTRINSIC VALUE OF THE FREE WILL

We may assume that God could have placed both angels and men in possession of supernatural bliss from the first moment of their creation. The question is, how could He have done this? Could he have created them without a free will at all? or with a free will but in the actual enjoyment of heaven?

Would it have been desirable that God had not given us a free will at all? The soul of man has

¹ Further information on the will and on objections against and proofs of its freedom may be found in *Psychology*, by Michael Maher, S.J., Longmans, Green & Co., 39 Paternoster Row, London.

² *The Old Riddle and the Newest Answer*, by John Gerard, S.J., F.L.S.

two powers, the intellect and the will. Would we wish that God had made our souls all intellect, without a will? or should He have given us a soul with will as well as intellect, but, if such a thing be possible, without freedom of will?

Free will is an advantage of inestimable value. How people value power, influence, liberty! How they shrink from subjection, servitude, dependence! How they chafe under restraint, moral or physical! How keenly they dread and resent the loss of liberty! In every nation forced restraint is one of the recognised methods of punishment. People are very sensitive to demands on their purse. Yet imprisonment, even without hard labour and the severer forms of prison discipline, is considered a punishment graver in its nature than that of pecuniary fines. Yet a prison only partially curtails the outward freedom of the body; it does not even touch the essence of liberty, the inward freedom of the soul. The will itself cannot be put in fetters. No chain can crush the will of a determined man; no prison wall is able to deprive him of his manly strength of will and of the mental dignity of liberty itself. Would it be kind, on the part of God, to deprive all men of their freedom of soul because some abuse it?

Surely the abuse of a thing on the part of some is no reason for depriving everybody of its advantages? What would we be reduced to, if this were generally done? Some people abuse the power of

speech. Should all, therefore, be condemned to perpetual silence, or have the tongue plucked out? Some people make a bad use of money. Should money, therefore, be abolished? Some people make a bad use of the printing press and of books. Should all books, therefore, be destroyed, and printing altogether forbidden? Would not a measure like this give rise to an outcry of indignation from one end of the country to the other? Should God, then, because some evil-minded people abuse their free will, have withheld it from us altogether?

Suppose it were possible to hypnotise a man into the most perfect state of intellectual clairvoyance, and to put him in possession of the deepest and widest knowledge possible to human nature, but, at the same time, to deprive him so completely of the use of his own free will that he should be entirely subject to the will of another: would not this condition be truly deplorable? We justly pity persons who have not the use of their reason: the free will is a companion power to human reason and intelligence. It is difficult to say which is the more excellent of the two. In the supposed case of hypnotism, the man would not be deprived of the power of the free will itself, only of its exercise: yet what an unnatural and pitiable condition would he be reduced to! Take away the free will from man, and all his manly virtue and energy is crippled; he is no longer a person; he is incapable of possessing any rights; his intellect might be a marvellous show-

plate of knowledge, but his personal independence and dignity are gone. Certainly he could do no moral wrong, but neither could he do anything morally good; incapable of sin, he would be also incapable of virtue; he could do nothing either demanding punishment or deserving reward. Without the freedom of his will his life and existence would be frozen into a kind of stagnant, colourless, mental necessity!

12.—FREE WILL AND THE IDEA OF MERIT

What God could have done without any prejudice to the essential constitution of our nature, our freedom, or our natural dignity, is this: He could have created us with a free will, but in the actual enjoyment of the happiness of heaven from the first moment of our existence. Some ascetical writers and speakers now and then make use of expressions, which seem to imply that part of the angels committed sin in heaven. This is probably the reason why some people are under an erroneous impression that the angels were created in heaven. This was not the case. They were created in the full perfection of their angelic nature, imbued with the supernatural life of grace. From the first moment of their existence they, no doubt, enjoyed a high degree of natural intellectual happiness, but not the divine vision. The first state of their existence was one of painless trial and probation. Had they been created in

heaven, they could not have committed sin. There is no possibility of anybody committing sin in heaven, not from want of freedom, but on account of the fulness and clearness of knowledge enjoyed in the beatific vision.

The object of the will is essentially what is good. To this it is drawn by a kind of inward necessity, which is its own natural desire and choice. The will only finds satisfaction in what is or appears to be good; it cannot embrace, but naturally and spontaneously shrinks from anything, which it clearly perceives to be evil in every respect. In the light of the beatific vision the will of God and the order He has established are seen as they are, all wise, all holy, all good, and sin is clearly understood to be evil in every respect. In the light and enjoyment of the beatific vision, the will, therefore, though perfectly free, cannot incline to sin; because, seeing sin as it really is, it cannot choose to will it.

Had God, therefore, created angels and men in the immediate enjoyment of the happiness of heaven, they could never have committed sin; they could neither have done nor suffered evil. Since God foresaw that many would abuse their freedom and be eternally lost, was it not unkind of Him to expose His creatures to this danger, when He could have created them in the enjoyment of eternal happiness?

It certainly would have been kind, on the part of our Creator, to put us all straight into heaven;

but was it not, perhaps, kinder still to put us first on our trial, as He has chosen to do, so as to enable us to gain merits?

The original idea and intention of God was this, that we should all come into possession of the eternal divine happiness, but that we should, in virtue of our free will, have it in our power to earn and to increase the happiness for which we are destined, by rendering Him a free and willing service and submission, without pain or trouble or care, in a paradise of natural happiness.

By being gifted with a free will and allowed a time of trial previous to the actual possession of heaven, the happiness we shall enjoy in it receives a two-fold eternal increase: it is increased by additional rewards which we merit, and, through being made a reward, it is enhanced by a very special motive and feature of enjoyment.

At a school treat, races and sports are held, and prizes are given to the successful competitors: suppose exactly the same toys were given to the children without being competed for, would they have the same joy and pride in possessing them as they experience when they earn them as prizes?

Suppose two neighbours have each a boy at a certain school. On the speech day, one boy brings home a splendid edition of Shakespeare, or a gold watch, as a prize for good conduct or application. The other boy receives no prize whatever, but his father buys him the same edition of Shakespeare,

or a watch of exactly the same make and value. Which lad will feel the greater pride and joy and satisfaction? The natural pleasure one feels in possessing a thing is enhanced by the fact that it is a reward which one has honestly earned.

We may come to possess an object of value in various ways. A gentleman possesses a valuable book, an exquisite painting, or some other object of special value. He shows us round his establishment, invites us to admire his cherished treasure, and gives us an account of the way in which he obtained possession of it, with evident satisfaction. He may tell us that he inherited it from his father, that he received it as a present from a valued friend, or that he made or earned it himself. If he inherited it from his father, he rejoices in the cherished association; if it was given him as a present, he finds pleasure in the remembrance of the giver and his friendship; if he either made it himself, or earned it by industry, or some deed of valour, he feels special satisfaction in the thought of his own merit. Thus the right and title by which we possess a valuable thing is itself a source of gratification which gives zest, and, as it were, a new distinct flavour to the enjoyment of its possession.

We shall possess the joys of heaven by right of inheritance, being made, by sanctifying grace, children of God, and, if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.¹

¹ Romans viii. 17.

The sweet fragrance arising from personal associations of love and friendship entwined about a gift, cannot be wanting to our enjoyment of heaven, for whatever other rights and titles we may have to its possession, these themselves are a gift of God, as God has given us, of His own free will and choice and love, the existence, the life and the grace, without which the possession of heaven, or of any other blessing, would be clearly impossible.

We could enjoy both these titles to the heavenly bliss, had we been in its possession from the first moment of our existence, but we could not have earned it, so as to be able to enjoy it as a reward. A reward can only be earned by service of some kind. Now, though a creature must, of necessity, be subject to and dependent on God, the happiness of heaven precludes the idea of servile dependence; in its nature it is a happiness in which the beatified soul is raised to complete union with God, and shares as a partner in the very joy and happiness of God Himself. The beatific existence in heaven is one of possession, and of union with God incompatible with the condition of servitude required for merit.

God in His goodness wanted to give us also the eternal joys and advantages of the right and title of merit, by virtue of which we might claim and enjoy heaven as a reward. He, therefore, appointed to us a period of trial on earth, in order to enable us to earn eternal happiness as a reward, by virtue of His own promise due to us in justice for service rendered.

No doubt, God is under no obligations to a creature. He cannot act contrary to the infinitely high and perfect standard of His own justice and goodness, but, considering the matter from the standpoint of creatures, a creature has no rights of his own in the sight of God, as men have rights regarding men, which put men under obligations of justice founded on laws objectively established outside and above themselves. It is clear that God can be under no such obligations to a creature. But God, of His own choice, has undertaken obligations towards men analogous to those of our human idea of justice, by giving men a distinct and positive promise or assurance of supernatural rewards of heaven for the service we render Him, and the good we do in the state of His grace. Christ bids those rejoice who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness: "Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven."¹ He calls the man blessed who does charity for charity's sake, because he shall be "recompensed in the resurrection of the just."² "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds:"³ "Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is."⁴ Then "each shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are God's fellow-workers."

¹ Math. v. 12.

² Luke xiv. 14.

³ Math. xvi. 27.

⁴ Rev. xxii. 12.

⁵ I Cor. iii. 8.

God wanted not only to give us the eternal enjoyment of heaven, but also the satisfaction of enjoying it as our own and as due to us. This is the reason, or at least one of the reasons, why He chose not to place us straightway into heaven at the very first moment of our creation, but rather to allow us a period of trial, during which He could enable us to establish a just claim, a personal right, and an inalienable and inviolable title to a share in His eternal happiness. Who can form an idea of the sublime position to which man is raised, and of the peculiar satisfaction, zest and relish, which this feeling that we possess heaven by our own right, will give to its eternal enjoyment and possession?

What is man in the sight of God? "All men are earth and ashes."¹ Man's "days are as a shadow that passeth away,"² for it has been said to him: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."³ Yet the Providence that sends him forth for the purpose of probation, on a weary pilgrimage to the grave, has so arranged that, on its very brink, he can stand in the sight of the infinite God, and say: "Abba, Father!"⁴ and claim heaven with its divine and eternal wealth of beauty and glory, joy and happiness, as due to him in justice. St Paul gave expression to the feeling of satisfaction derived from the confidence he felt, that the eternal happiness was

¹ Ecclesiasticus xvii. 31.

² Ps. cxliv. 3. (Other editions, Ps. cxliii. 3.)

³ Genesis iii. 18. ⁴ Rom. viii. 15. Gal. iv. 6.

due to him as a just reward, in these words: "The time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not only to me, but also to all them that have loved His appearing."¹ The apostle sees in eternal happiness the crown of righteousness to be awarded by the Lord as the "righteous judge."

Therefore, he gave the assurance to the Hebrews, who ministered to the saints: "God is not unrighteous to forget your work, and the love which ye showed toward His name."²

13.—FREE WILL AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADDITIONAL MERITS

According to St Paul each man "shall receive his own reward according to his own labour"³ at the hand of the "righteous judge." Christ assured His disciples that not even a cup of cold water given for His sake, will be without reward.⁴ "We are God's fellow-workers,"⁵ and can, every moment, gain supernatural merits, by which our eternal happiness will be increased. Were we in the actual possession of heaven we could not gain these or any other merits. As we are, every least thought, word, enjoyment, or

¹ 2 Timothy iv. 6-8.

² Hebrew vi. 10.

³ 1 Cor. iii. 8.

⁴ Math. x. 42. Mark ix. 40.

⁵ 1 Cor. iii. 8.

suffering, is meritorious while we are in the state of God's grace, or, at least, may be made so by a good intention, even if, apart from this intention, it be ever so indifferent. How immeasurably may our eternal happiness be increased by the merits of a lifetime spent in the grace and service of God! The least of these merits means an increase of supernatural happiness for all eternity, higher not only in degree, but in nature and in kind, than any happiness of which we can possibly form an idea in the present state of our natural intelligence. Why should God have created us in heaven, and have deprived us of the possibility of so vastly increasing our eternal joy, because some people choose to abuse the freedom of their will?

It is impossible for us to make an estimate of the value and importance of our probation on earth; we can form no idea of the extent to which those who try to serve God increase their eternal happiness by the merits they gain in this life. Both the nature of the eternal rewards and the generosity of God are entirely above our comprehension. There is nothing in human life that can serve as an illustration of the way in which God deals with men, and of the extraordinary indulgence He shows to repentant sinners. To illustrate the manner in which God deals with us from the standpoint of human transactions, we would have to invent some supposition which would jar on common-sense as extravagant and absurd. There is something unsatisfactory about impossible supposi-

tions ; however, if it can help us to view our present condition of existence with greater contentment, let us unbend from our attitude of punctilious precision and stoop to devise the following absurd supposition :—

The Raja of Andipoor, one of the native princes of India, made over his territory to the British crown. The officers of his little army were not only recognised as British officers, but were to receive, in addition to their regular pay, special additional rewards for everything they did in the service of the government. Some of them joined an insurrection which broke out. The government issued a proclamation, calling upon the disloyal officers to return to their allegiance, holding out a promise of free pardon to those who would make their submission by a certain day, and threats of banishment or imprisonment for life to those who would fail to do so. The insurrection was put down. The insurgent officers who persevered in their rebellion were banished ; those who had returned to their allegiance received back their former rank and pay, and from the moment they made their submission, they were, like the officers who had remained loyal throughout, magnificently rewarded with honours, decorations, and increased pay for every least service they rendered to the crown.

A short time afterwards the Raja of Lindore offered his territory to the British Government.

The British representative proposed that his officers should be honorary officers of the British army, with the pay of their respective rank, but they were to have no commission, and were not to be called upon for active military service.

The Raja and his officers demurred to these terms. They expected the same terms which the government had offered to the officers of Andipoor. The British representative pointed out to them that some of the officers might prove disloyal, as was the case with those of Andipoor, and that insubordination would have to be punished with the utmost severity. To prevent such a misfortune, he proposed to give them only honorary ranks and titles.

Was this reasoning likely to reconcile the prince and the officers to this proposal? They might have acquiesced in it if they had been told that it was impossible to offer them more favourable terms, but if the representative of the government assured them that the exchequer could well afford to give them, over and above their pay, ample rewards for anything they might do for the government, and that the sole reason for not giving them a commission was the fear that some might prove disloyal and so get into trouble, surely they would have answered: "We have no intention of being so foolish. If any turn traitors, that is their own affair. Those officers of the Raja of Andipoor who actually did revolt, but eventually made their submission,

are now enjoying a higher rank, higher pay, and, by far greater advantages than any of us can ever hope to attain, however loyal-minded we may be: why should we be deprived of most valuable advantages and debarred from promotion, merely because there is a chance that some may misconduct themselves and get into trouble? None will do this unless they be foolish, wicked, ungrateful, and inexcusably obstinate. Do such deserve more consideration than those who are loyal?"

God can afford to give us incalculable eternal rewards for whatever we do in His service. Should He have created us in the immediate enjoyment of heavenly bliss, and thus have deprived millions upon millions of His creatures for all eternity of absolutely incalculable honour, and happiness, and joy, because, as He foresaw, some would obstinately force eternal ruin on themselves? With the exception of those who are hopelessly obstinate in wilful folly, ingratitude, wickedness, and final impenitence, all men will derive immense eternal advantages from the opportunity God has given us of gaining merits on this earth. Placed as we are, we can, every moment during the whole period of our trial and probation on earth, lay up treasures in heaven which fail not,¹ and so increase our eternal happiness and joy beyond all possible calculation.

¹ Luke xii. 33; Matt. vi. 20; *cfr.*, Matt. xix. 21; Mark x. 21, and Luke xviii. 22.

III.—THE MISERIES OF LIFE

14.—SUFFERINGS AFFORD OPPORTUNITIES FOR VIRTUE

IT may be urged that whatever can be said of the advantages of a period of trial previous to the enjoyment of eternal happiness, this period of probation need not have been one of sorrow and suffering. God might have put men into an earthly paradise, and, in the event of any of them committing sin, He might surely have found some way of dealing with them personally, without consigning the whole human race to a life of toil and misery of every description. As it is, even helpless, innocent infants are subject to neglect, sickness, pain, and death. A little consideration will, however, show that all that is noblest and most beautiful in human life is revealed, and can only be revealed by the existence of poverty and sickness, of temptation and suffering, of difficulty and trial of one kind or another.

Suppose not a shadow of misery had flitted across the face of the earth, and no wrong had ever been done in the world, would there have been any

possibility for the practice of patience and forbearance, of repentance and forgiveness, of fortitude and compassion, or for the exercise of many other virtues, which bring out and develop greatness and nobility of soul in its most beautiful and perfect types? Charity, a seraphic gem which shines brightest in the midst of poverty and suffering, would have remained little more than a virtue in name, while benevolence, kindness, prudence, courage, humility, disinterestedness, and generosity would, at best, have been jewels of very pale tints indeed. Unless seen, in some way or another, by the intuitive penetration of the beatific vision, we could never have obtained even the faintest idea of most of these virtues; none of them could possibly have been brought into exercise, or, in a sense, into actual existence even so far as to deserve the name of virtue.

In mining, a great deal of dirt and rubbish is brought to the surface; the work itself is not only dirty, but hard and often dangerous. Is it wrong to open mines, to dig out heaps of rubbish, and to put thousands of men to an irksome and repulsive task to obtain various metals, coal, and other minerals from the bowels of the earth?

God cannot will that wrong should be done, and yet He willed the creation of the world as it is. He foresaw that men would abuse the gift of free will and do wrong. He did not intend this abuse, and sought to prevent it by moral sanctions. One

of the reasons why He did not absolutely and physically prevent this misuse, and found creation good in spite of the evil which would arise from it, was, doubtless, because He knew that wrong gave innumerable opportunities for the exercise of most admirable and sublime virtues.

The dark cloud of sin and misery which broods over the face of the earth, has a certain lining aglow with the sweet radiance of countless acts of virtue and heroism; it has proved, as it were, a prism refracting unnumbered rays of moral goodness and excellence, which by no other means could have been developed in such variety and kindled into equal beauty.

15.—SUFFERINGS ARE SOURCES OF MERIT AND HAPPINESS

Nor are the countless acts of virtue which would have been impossible but for sin, merely ornamental wreaths of beauty, which, seen against the dark background of human misery and sin, may delight the eyes of angels and of saints, and may, perhaps, on some few occasions, win admiration from the dull and narrowed vision of the earthly pilgrim; they are not mere barren gems, which, like diamonds, emeralds, and rubies, produce nought but a pleasant gleam and twinkle of light and colour in the eyes of men: but even the least act of virtue is a seed fruitful in blessings to the soul, and a jewel beautiful even to the eye of the infinite God.

Our Divine Master emphatically assures us that even a cup of cold water, given for His sake, will not be left without its reward;¹ what, then, must be the merit of daily acts of charity to the poor and needy, to widows and orphans, to the sick and dying! How meritorious must be countless acts of love and kindness to neighbours, relations, friends, and even enemies in their hour of need! It is impossible to form the remotest idea of the value of such merits. They are bound up with the immensity of eternity, of God, and of God's unbounded goodness and generosity!

Are we sure there is no merit in suffering as such? Suppose two baptised infants were both to die before they reach the faintest use of reason, the one after enjoying good health and spirits and every luxury an unconscious baby-soul can possibly enjoy, the other after a precarious life of illness, pain, and privation: what certainty have we that the child of tears will not have greater joy in heaven than the other, which constantly beamed over with happy smiles? Many divines, at least of the Eastern and of the Latin churches, seem to be of opinion that the infants who were killed by Herod enjoy special glory, not only by virtue of their innocence, but also by virtue of their martyrdom, though theirs was wholly unconscious. Are we impressed with the idea that there is no merit whatever in suffering, when we read the parable of Dives and Lazarus,² or the words of

¹ See Matt. x. 42, and Mark ix. 41.

² Luke xvi. 19-25.

Him Who bids the suffering look up and lift up their heads, because their redemption draweth nigh¹ and says: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted;"² "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven;"³ "Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you, ye that are full now! for you shall hunger. Woe unto you, ye that laugh now! for you shall mourn and weep."⁴ "Blessed are ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven!"⁵

It is calculated that Adam and Eve lived about 900 years; after their fall, we may presume, their life was one of repentance, hardship, and toil, by which they gained a certain amount of merit. Had they lived 900 years in paradise without committing sin and had their love of God been exactly the same as

¹ Luke xxi. 28.

² Matt. v. 4.

³ Matt. v. 10-12.

⁴ Luke vi. 24 and 25.

⁵ Luke vi. 20-23.

it was after their repentance, is it likely that they would have obtained as great merit and happiness as they did by their life of penitential labour and endurance?

The question as to whether there is merit in suffering as such, may be confidently left in the hand of God, Who arose to judgment to save all the meek of the earth.¹ We may implicitly trust that God, Who executes righteous acts and judgment for all that are oppressed,² will bestow whatever rewards He possibly can on all those who "mourn,"³ and who labour and are heavy laden.⁴

The merit of what we do and suffer largely depends on the motive by which we are animated. Any supernatural motive, be it of hope or even of fear, adds to the merit of what we do; but what especially enhances merit is the motive of love; the more unselfish and free from the dross of natural sentiment the love is from which an action springs, the greater is the merit.

As a strong antiseptic prevents the growth of germs of disease, so suffering checks the taint of base and selfish feelings, which so easily insinuate themselves into the folds of our hearts, and impair purity of our motives and intentions. Suffering chastens the soul and its aspirations, the mind and its views, the heart and its affections, the will and its motives. Our aspirations are purified by hardship and suffer-

¹ Psalm lxxvi. 9 (lxxv. 10.)

² Psalm ciii. 6 (cii. 6.)

³ Matt. v. 4.

⁴ Matt. xi. 28.

ing, as water is cleansed from baser elements by the layers of the filter. Whatever tends to free us from selfish motives, must help to increase the merit of our thoughts, words, and actions.

Suffering increases merit by ensuring not only greater purity, but also greater earnestness of motive. It has a bracing influence upon the will, and gives tone and vigour to its exercise. A raging storm demands from the ship-captain an exercise of seamanship, which a gentle summer breeze does not call forth. To advance unflinchingly on the field of battle in the face of blazing guns is an act of manly, loyal valour, of which a soldier has no chance of giving proof when he rides a trim, prancing steed at a festive parade, or raises the sparkling cup in response to the royal toast. Difficulties and sufferings bring out manliness and strength of will and nobility of soul. They try earnestness of purpose. They are an unmistakable test of solid virtue. There is beauty and merit even in each least aspiration of virtue breathed on the playful wing of joy, but there is greater and more solid merit in the depth and vigour of determination evinced in the practice of virtue under difficulties, temptations, and trials.

Suffering, therefore, is a rich source of merit, because it tends to purify and to strengthen the sources of merit, the motives and the earnestness of our good actions, and because it enables and even compels us to practise many virtues, for which there would, otherwise, be little or no occasion. It often

literally makes a virtue of necessity, or rather, perhaps, a necessity of virtue. In temptations and sufferings, unless people deliberately give themselves over to a spirit of rebellion against God, they cannot help practising such virtues as faith, hope, patience, endurance, submission and resignation to God's will, nor can they fail to gain great merits by the practice of virtues so unpalatable to natural self-love.

There is no trial, temptation, or suffering, which cannot be turned into a blessing by the will of a conscious sufferer. We cannot see this in every case. Therefore we are bewildered at the sight of so much sin and suffering, and questions may obtrude themselves on our minds concerning God's plans and dealings with men, to which we cannot hope to find a full and complete answer, as long as we cannot read it in the light of God's own eternal, unlimited knowledge. It is difficult for us to avoid mixing up time and eternity. We may imagine God looking forward to the conduct and the eventual destiny of men from some period prior to their creation. This view gives us an utterly false and misleading idea of God's knowledge, and of the plan of His actions depending on it, because God does not exist in time. Yet this is the view people usually take. The consequence is, that they find themselves lost in a maze of perplexity the more they think about the problems of human existence, sin, and misery.

We may also think of God as knowing the conduct and final destiny of each and all by His eternal

knowledge. This is the true point of view from which alone His dealings with men can be justly appreciated, but this point of view we cannot take, for we live in time, and we cannot possibly place ourselves out of time, not even in imagination. It is, therefore, impossible for us, in our present state of existence, to see the progressive development of the destiny of creatures as God sees it, especially in so far as it depends on personal free will. God sees by clear, unerring intuition, every detail, and, at the same time, the whole complex sum of the results and consequences of His plan of creation. All-knowing and all-wise, He cannot err in justice, wisdom, and kindness. We can only see a few results brought about in the unfinished development of the plan of creation, and even of these we have only a very limited and one-sided view. It would be unwise to expect that we, who exist in time, should fully understand the ways in which the Eternal deals with men. There is, however, no one, not even an agnostic, who can fail to see that, if there is a God, He must be infinitely just and kind, and that whatever he does must be consistent with His infinite wisdom and goodness. If God created those whom He foresaw would suffer, or sin, or even be lost in eternal punishment, He must have had good reason to do so, though we may not be able to see it to our satisfaction. What we can see is, that God knows how to turn all the sufferings of this life into a source of eternal bliss for those who do not, through their own

conscious fault, frustrate His plan, and that, even in the case of men who may be eventually lost, there can be no just cause for complaint, as no lost soul will suffer anything except what it justly deserves, and what it brought on itself by its own fault.

16.—SUFFERINGS GIVE OCCASIONS FOR
INSCRUTABLE TRIUMPHS OF GRACE

“Trials and troubles borne in the right spirit may be very meritorious, but I feel so impatient and rebellious, so fretful and wicked under them, that, far from gaining, I am sure to lose merit, if not my soul itself.”

Such is the pathetic complaint often made by sufferers in response to kindly efforts to console and encourage them. Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?¹ Have you not read that He shall not break a bruised reed, and smoking flax He shall not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory?² We know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain,³ but in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him Who loved us,⁴ for the Spirit helps our infirmity.⁵ Therefore, we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.⁶

¹ Matt. viii. 26.

³ Rom. viii. 22.

⁵ Rom. viii. 26.

² Matt. xii. 20, and Isaiah xlii. 3.

⁴ Rom. viii. 37.

⁶ Rom. viii. 28.

God by His grace can insinuate Himself unperceived into the inmost folds of our hearts, and influence and strengthen the will without interfering with the natural course of feeling and sentiment. Natural feeling and sentiment are only in so far imputed as merit or sin, as they are under the command or influence of the intellectual will; if the will has no part in them, they have no weight, one way or another, in the balance of our moral responsibility. As all personal sin, so all personal merit ultimately pivots on the intellectual will as such.

Such sentiments or affections as impatience, ill-will, and resentment are natural to our fallen nature, and spring up as circumstances occasion them. There is a close natural affinity between them and the will; they are in a line with and analogous to it; in our compound nature they are nerves and fibres, as it were, or lower ramifications of the sensitive functions, which have their culminating power and perfection in the will. The will, therefore, is naturally drawn into their trend, unless it be restrained by reason or divine influence. We are naturally highly sensitive to the rise and fall and all the changes and movements of our feelings; we are not often clearly conscious of an act of the will, except when we deliberately make up our mind; but apart from such distinct acts, the habitual attitude of the intellectual will does not obtrude itself upon our notice. People are, therefore, very liable to look upon feelings and sentiments as wilful, even when the intellectual will

has no part in them. Those who make it their special study may succeed in subjecting their feelings habitually to the control of reason and of the will, but theirs is a triumph won only after years of patient, constant, and careful attention.

Even in answer to earnest prayer God does not, as a rule, interfere with the natural flow of feelings and inclinations, nor quell the freaks or soothe the moods of temper and character; He merely enables the will to maintain a kind of latent habitual protest against unworthy and unchristian sentiments, and to withhold its consent from what is sinful or even faulty. The help of grace thus insensibly but effectually given, instead of leading to an easy but conscious practice of virtue mildewed by self-complacency, insures to the soul every possible advantage of virtue truly humble and solid. Unholy and rebellious feelings of our fallen nature continue to obtrude themselves on mind and heart, but God in His wisdom gives grace to willing souls, to accept trials with resignation, and to withhold their consent to evil effectually and yet so unconsciously, that, abashed and abased by the sense of their sinfulness, they gain the merit of humility as well as of the particular virtue in point, practised in spite of inward as well as of outward difficulties. These virtues are all the more meritorious because practised unconsciously.

To those who hold a narrow view of the doctrine of exclusive salvation by faith, it must appear very

appalling that so large a proportion of the human race should be born in the most abject misery, and, at the same time, with so slight a chance of acquiring a knowledge of Christian truth. Witness the condition of the mass of the poor in pagan and Mahometan countries all over Asia, Africa, Polynesia, parts of America and Europe, and of what is left of the native population of Australia and New Zealand! Witness the millions of those who are born or carried off into slavery; witness, in Africa, and in many of the islands of the Pacific Ocean, the victims of shocking superstition and cannibalism, burnt or tortured to death!

Again we stand in the face of a mystery of the inscrutable Providence of God! For the whole world before Him is as the small dust of the balance, and as a drop of the morning dew that falls down upon the earth. But He has mercy upon all because He can do all things. He overlooks the sins of men for the sake of repentance. For He loves all things and hates nothing that He has made: He did not make anything hating it. How could anything endure if He would not? or be preserved, if not called by Him? But the Lord, Who loves souls, spares all, because they are His.¹ He heals the broken of heart, and binds up their wounds.² He brings the wicked down to the ground, but upholds the meek.³

¹ Book of Wisdom, xi. 23-27.

² Psalm cxlvii. 3 (cxlvi. 3). ³ Psalm cxlvii. 6 (cxlvi. 6).

God has wisdom and power to give light and grace, sufficient for the salvation even of the lowest, dullest, most ignorant, and most neglected of men. Was not He Who unfolded the book of Isaias anointed to preach good tidings to the poor, and sent to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are bruised?¹

In this spirit of mercy He died for all.² May we, then, not trust that He Who executes righteous acts and judgments for all who are oppressed,³ will deal in mercy with those whose helpless misery on earth kindles a spark of sympathy and pity even in our cold and selfish hearts?

We cannot know the mysteries of grace which are daily wrought in the hearts of those who suffer hunger, hardship, oppression, and wrong; but we have reason to believe that God is very ready to hear their cry, and to listen to their rudest attempts at prayer, for blessed are they that mourn, they shall be comforted,⁴ and the mercy of God is beautiful in the time of affliction as a cloud of rain in the time of drought.⁵

This earth is now no paradise, yet a bird's-eye view of it from a point a hundred or a thousand miles above our terrestrial atmosphere would reveal a marvellous wealth of varied beauty; but were the

¹ Luke iv. 18; *cf.* Isaiah lxi. 1.

² 2 Cor. v. 15.

³ Psalm ciii. 6 (cii. 6).

⁴ Matt. v. 4.

⁵ Ecclesiasticus xxxv. 26.

sun suddenly to vanish from the universe, our globe would instantly be reduced to a cold, black, hideous mass. What a dark, what a pitiful, what an appalling picture of misery would we have in mankind, were there no just and merciful God! Certainly there are many who seem to enjoy life. But the gloom of the bewildering wilderness of so much vice, injustice, ignorance, poverty, privation, and suffering would be brought into even more painful relief by the apparent happiness of those who are in the transitory enjoyment of health, success, honour, and wealth. But look at this mass of vice, injustice, and misery under the control of a God of infinite wisdom, power, goodness, and mercy! Poverty, privation, grief, sorrow, pain, every suffering, whatever its nature or its name may be, can be changed by the will of the sufferer, with the unfailing help of God's grace, not only into an occasion for virtue, and a stepping-stone to a higher level of grace and perfection, but into a rich source of merit and of eternal happiness and joy!

See how the triumphant rays of the sun, breaking against the sullen gloom of a receding thunderstorm, unfold a brilliant and enchanting harmony of colours, which rises in a graceful and majestic arch towards the sky; or, again, how they clothe the edge of a sombre cloud with radiant silver sheen! So God's omnipotent mercy, unless it be prevented by man's own deliberate and obstinate evil-mindedness, transforms, by an unseen ray of grace, the darkest days of tribulation, into dazzling marvels of everlasting glory,

and the bitterest trials into mystic well-springs of eternal bliss!

Sin, indeed, is sin and evil still, but its dark and hideous stains may be wiped clean away and become occasions for repentance, humility, and similar most winning and meritorious virtues, beneath the mystic ray of God's mercy and grace.

Sin is wicked and evil, and remains so in the unrepenting soul; but many of the most admirable and most beautiful virtues and perfections of God could not have received outward expression, but for sin. As a rain-cloud helps to unfold the wealth of colour and beauty hidden in the rays of the sun, so human misery, even sin itself, serves to bring into action and to show forth in marvellous beauty many of the attributes and perfections of God, the existence of which we otherwise would never have divined. But for human sin and misery, what idea should we have had of the divine humility, forgiveness, patience, forbearance, longanimity, mercy, compassion?

However regrettable may be the misuse of free will on the part of intelligent creatures, we cannot, with certainty, point to a single instance in which the misuse has proved prejudicial either to the intelligent being guilty of it or to anybody else, except to such as force evil consequences on themselves through wilful obstinacy in some kind of wickedness. So far from being allowed to harm others, as would, in the natural course of events, inevitably have been the case, every misuse of free will, from the first to the

last, has given opportunity for the triumphant wisdom of the eternal Goodness, to defeat the evil done by making it an occasion, if not a source, of incalculable advantage to men of good will.

What a magnificent answer to the apostacy of the angels was the idea of a new creation—the creation of a material world and of a race of persons with a nature in which matter and spirit are blended into a marvellous organic union—a nature which the Divine Son could assume and unite to Himself in a personal union, so as to be able to become one of His creatures! How admirable was the conception which thus enabled the divine Son to make infinite reparation for all sins ever committed, and to offer complete pardon and redemption to all willing to accept it? Remedial resources to counteract and to more than counter-balance the evils of the baneful disobedience of the human race were already amply provided for in the plan of the second creation.

Could divine wisdom, love, and goodness, have received more striking outward expression than they did in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God? How low and contemptible was our fallen race, abandoned as it was to sinful oblivion of its Maker, and to utter intellectual, moral, and social ruin! When a crowned monarch once in his life enters the humble homes of a few of his poorest subjects, and gives with his own hand a few coins of gold to some poor widows, or speaks a few words of comfort and encouragement to the feeble and the sick: how do

centuries ring with praises of his kindness, condescension and benevolence! Who will call the praise unjust and undeserved? To the poor whose humble dwellings were honoured by the royal visit, the memory is a source of satisfaction and pleasure to their dying day, and to their children and their children's children after them. The Son of God looked down on the dust-born race of men, and filled, not with disgust and disdain, but with pity and yearning at the sight of our degradation and helpless misery, put on the beggar's garb, our mould of clay, to become one of us. Stooping to our poverty, frailty, and misery, He became a speechless child, a working man, a man of sorrows,¹ in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.² He identified Himself with us. He took upon Himself our infirmities,³ was despised and rejected.⁴ He bore our griefs and shared our sorrows.⁵

Who can fathom the mystery of this love and condescension? Who can measure the extent and the depth of the influence of his sympathy on the thoughts, the aspirations, and the lives of those who look, with due sentiments of admiration and gratitude upon the Son of God as their fellow-pilgrim in the dust? What strength and comfort may be found in this idea in life and death! What a bond of union for us with God is the thought that the divine Son is our flesh-born brother, with Whom we can say: "Our Father!"⁶ What a mystic well-spring of

¹ Isaiah liii. 3.

² Hebrews iv. 15.

³ Matt. viii. 17.

⁴ Isaiah liii. 3.

⁵ Isaiah liii. 4.

⁶ Matt. vi. 9.

consolation in sickness, affliction, and every trial is our knowledge, that our Lord Himself bore our infirmities and toiled and suffered in our flesh!

On the strength of certain passages of Holy Writ,¹ the Christians of the Latin church, of the Greek church, and of the other Eastern churches, both those which are, and those which are not, in union with the see of Rome, as also a considerable number of Anglican churchmen and Scotch Episcopalians believe that the Son of God has perpetuated and multiplied His bodily presence among His people on earth under the appearances of bread and wine; that He gives Himself to those who receive the eucharistic communion for the nourishment of their souls to eternal life, and that those who so receive Him are linked into the closest mystical union with Him, so that they abide in Him and He in them.²

Millions, undoubtedly, derive so much moral and devotional strength and consolation in life and death from their belief in the eucharistic presence of the Son of God, that students of human suffering and of the various influences which help to send a ray of comfort into its gloomy depths, may well pause and ask: Is this widespread belief with its mystic consolations a gigantic illusion, or is it possible that God has shown such love to men?

Those who believe in the resurrection of the dead

¹ Matt. xxvi. 26-28; Mark xiv. 22-24; Luke xxii. 19-20; John vi. 51-69; I Cor. xi. 23-29.

² John vi. 56.

see a dawn of fresh hope rise from beyond the tomb. They cherish the hope that our bodies will rise to everlasting life and glory. Sin entailed unutterable degradation on the highest angel-spirits, and on the mind and soul of fallen man. This degradation dwindles into insignificance compared with the glorious elevation and transformation of matter into divine beauty and glory. What is lower and more contemptible in the scale of existence than the dust we tread under foot? It contains many of the very elements which constitute our bodies. With a view to divine atonement and redemption, God called into existence an order of spirit-souls encumbered with organic dust; but He Who is able to raise children to Abraham from the stones which lie by the roadside,¹ will raise the dust-bound bodies of His elect from the humble abode of death and decay to a spiritual, a divine, an eternal life of ineffable beauty and bliss. Behold, I tell you a mystery. The dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall death be swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?²

The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed

¹ Matt. iii. 9; Luke iii. 8.

² 1 Cor. xv. 51-55.

in us.¹ Then shall the righteous shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.² Even now the bodies of the righteous are living temples of the Holy Ghost Who is in them,³ and we are, therefore, to glorify God in our bodies.⁴ Our bodies are members of Christ,⁵ and we are exhorted to live so that Christ shall be magnified in our bodies.⁶ If now we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified with Him.⁷ For He will fashion anew the body of our humiliation:⁸ sown in corruption, it will be raised in incorruption; sown in dishonour, it will be raised in glory; sown in weakness, it will be raised in power; sown a natural body, it will be raised a spiritual body.⁹ It will be conformed to the body of His glory,¹⁰ transformed into the same image from glory to glory.¹¹ By the inscrutable wisdom of God's almighty goodness, all traces of the ravages of sin and evil will be wiped out even from the dust, and dust and ashes will be raised to seraph heights of spiritual life and freedom, bliss and beauty!

¹ Rom. viii. 18.² Matt. xiii. 43.³ 1 Cor. vi. 19.⁴ 1 Cor. vi. 20.⁵ 1 Cor. vi. 15.⁶ Philip. i. 20.⁷ Rom. viii. 17.⁸ Philip. iii. 21.⁹ 1 Cor. xv. 42-44.¹⁰ Philip. iii. 21.¹¹ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

IV.—SOME ADDITIONAL DIFFICULTIES

17.—MAN BORN WITHOUT HIS CONSENT

SOME fail to see how it is that men are brought into a life liable to suffering, and are placed into a state of what seems to them alarming uncertainty as to their eternal happiness or misery without their consent.

1. How would they suggest that their consent might have been obtained before they existed? Those who will insist, wisely or unwisely, on laying stress on consent of some kind or other on the part of man might be requested to consider that there are few who would prefer not to exist at all rather than to live as they do. Probably there neither is, nor ever was, or ever will be, a man who at no time of life is ever glad of life, but would all through life positively wish not to be. In any case, we have no proof whatever that any person ever was or will be called into being, who never, in time or eternity, consciously rejoices in the gift of existence.

It is perfectly certain that all those will be glad of their existence who will be admitted into heaven, and

also all those who attain to some kind of natural happiness, as, in the common opinion of Catholic divines, will be the portion of children who die without baptism. Those who are doomed to positive eternal pain may loathe their existence, but few, if any, even of these, would have preferred not to be while they lived on earth.

2. It is clear that in point of time, God cannot get man's consent to his creation ; God had either to act as He did or He could not possibly let the development of the human race take its present natural course. He foresaw the exact sum of advantages and disadvantages which accrue or would accrue, both to each and every individual and to the human race in general, from every possible plan of dealing with men. A mind of such all-comprehensive knowledge, and such a mind alone, can be trusted for the choice of the best plan of dealing with men. God has chosen a plan, and common sense bids us, if we choose to believe in God at all, to trust to the choice He has made as the wisest and best, even if we had ever so many and grave misgivings about what we see or believe to be the case.

3. From the foregoing considerations this is clear, that even in our present state of probation, in which submission to and trust in God is not meant to be always an intellectual treat, but rather a test of some difficulty, we can see that God is acting on a plan full of wisdom and kindness, and on lines most conducive to the greatest possible happiness of all men of good-

will. Can any man, whose views deserve any consideration at all, wish for something better or for something else ?

4. God is, of necessity, absolute and sovereign Lord, for whom there can be no law except that of His own essential, infinite, personal justice, but from this highest standard of infinite justice He cannot depart. On the one hand, man can have absolutely no rights in His sight, except those which God Himself gives him ; on the other, no rights of his own could give him more perfect and reliable protection than he has in God's own infinite justice and kindness. Those who are inclined to consider it a grievance that they have been born to life, as it is, without their consent, lose sight of this principle or fail to understand its practical value. In real truth all rests on this principle. It is satisfactory to have a general idea of the lines on which God deals with His creatures, and in view of the growing tendency to disbelief this has become almost necessary ; but, after all, all comes back to this : if there is a God, He is and must be infinitely wise and just and kind, and we either are on the road to unending happiness, or, with His grace and a little goodwill on our part, we can easily put ourselves on it, if we are not already there ; or there is no God, and then all is wrong at best ; there is no certainty and much confusion, much misery but not much happiness around us, and not the slightest hope of lasting happiness before us.

5. It is clear that the grievance in question does

not fall within range of ordinary human customs, views, and considerations; still, even looking upon it simply from our human point of view, surely there is no ground for complaint if a man bestows useful gifts for an honest and useful purpose on somebody who has not the actual power to decline them. Without any injustice or unkindness, property may be left to an infant or to a minor, even if it be certain that it will expose the legatee to jealousy, persecution, and danger in his or her minority, nay, even though the child-legatee might express unwillingness to be appointed heir to the respective property on this very ground. What God gives to men, independently of their will and previous consent, is existence, life, the body, the soul, chances of natural and safe hopes of eternal and supernatural happiness, means and helps of grace to realise these hopes and to turn even accidental trials, hardships, and sufferings of life to unspeakably great and eternal advantage.

Surely all these are inestimable benefits and advantages which it would be utterly unreasonable to decline, were it in the power of man to do so, and at which no man of goodwill will ever have reason to repine.

18.—MAN BORN WITHOUT ANY PROSPECT OF ANNIHILATION

Might not God annihilate the finally reprobate?

1. God has given to man a soul which is, of its nature, immortal and indestructable. Can it be

reasonably expected that God should be so inconsistent as to destroy what He made indestructible?

2. God is and must be infinitely just as He is infinitely kind. What ground have we for asserting that the demands of justice would be fully satisfied if the wilfully and finally reprobate were eventually removed from existence? To some it may seem that justice would be fully satisfied, but there are divines who deny that this would be the case. Natural reason as such cannot come to an absolutely certain and final judgment on this question. Who can maintain that the human idea and standard of justice comes up to the ideal of the divine and infinite justice? What do we know of the gravity of the guilt of mortal sin or of the various kinds and gradations of the eternal punishment? The fact that eternal punishment seems to some excessive is no proof that it is so.

We shall not be able to judge of what exceeds or falls short of the right measure of justice in the punishment of wilful final wickedness till the great day of manifestation, when we shall see man's dealings with God and God's dealing with men in the full light of truth. Then those who are saved for eternal joy will fully recognise the generous kindness of God in their own regard and His justice in dealing with the reprobate. Will the latter be convinced of the justice of their eternal punishment? It is commonly assumed that they will see it themselves. Whether

this be the case or not, they will not be able to change the eternal decree, nor to deny or to palliate their guilt. They will not be able to deny that, through the voice of the conscience, through the sacred writings, and through the teaching of His church, God has given clear and positive warning that the final punishment of the wicked will be eternal. They will not be able to deny that they received sufficient, nay, abundant graces to live so as to be saved. Moreover, God has the wisdom and the power to adjust the eternal condition and sufferings of each reprobate soul to the exact measure of penal justice. If this is the case, as it undoubtedly is, surely there is no room for just complaint if those are consigned to eternal punishment who, slighting all the helps of proffered grace, the voice of conscience, and the threats of eternal hell-fire, obstinately persevere in wilful wickedness to the end.

3. Though God, infinite as He is in His resources of wisdom and grace, can so protect and assist everybody, under all possible circumstances, that willing souls may derive advantage from all injustice and scandal to which they are exposed, still He had to establish a moral order calculated to ensure the well-being of human society and of its every individual member. He accordingly laid down a wise and just code of natural and positive laws, and arranged both to encourage their observance by rewards and to enforce it by penal sanctions. It was necessary for the protection of the good and the weak that these

penal sanctions should be made effective. It is perfectly clear that final annihilation of the wicked would certainly not be an efficient protection of the good and the weak against the injustice of the wicked. Even the prospect of eternal punishment fails to restrain all men from injustice and sin and wilful obstinacy in sin ; still it is the most effective protection which God could give to men against the injustice and wickedness of their fellow-men, without positive interference with their free will. Could it justly and reasonably be expected that God should have withheld this most efficient, nay, this only effectual protection, from those who are sorely in need and most deserving of it ?

Were God, therefore, eventually to annihilate the souls of the wicked, He would—

1. Deny efficient protection to those who need and deserve it.
2. He would fail to enforce the right moral order and individual compliance with it, with the greatest efficiency consistent with justice.
3. For all we can know with certainty, He would not be dealing with the wicked in keeping with infinite justice.
4. He would act inconsistently by destroying a soul which He made naturally indestructible.
5. Many would rather feel encouraged to vice than restrained from it by the thought of final annihilation.

19.—MAN BORN ACCORDING TO AN ESTABLISHED ECONOMY OF CREATION

Could God not have left those souls uncreated whose eternal reprobation He foresaw?

1. At first sight this would seem very easy and simple, but in truth this is far from being the case. God deals with men not merely as individuals. He has made men a human society, and to the human society He has assigned a wise and practical system of natural propagation and development, and has arranged to create human souls in harmony with and dependence on this system. Is it reasonable to expect that God should make a regular set of exceptions to this system, so intimately and essentially bound up with the human nature and human society, solely for the benefit—if withholding benefits can be called a benefit—of most wicked and incorrigible individuals, wholly undeserving of such consideration?

2. God has, moreover, established an admirable system of eternal rewards and of encouragements to virtue, conducive to the greatest possible happiness of all classes of men of goodwill, and this system of the moral elevation of man is closely bound up and intertwined with that of the physical and social life and development of the human society. The suggested departure from this system would touch the very roots and life-springs of human society and the foundations of its social fabric; it would imply a

radical and almost complete abandonment or overthrow of the whole plan of the physical and moral development of the human race, originally devised for its welfare.

3. It is perfectly certain that infinite justice can be fully satisfied if souls are created on the plan which God has arranged; is it quite certain that the suggested departure, resulting to the disadvantage of millions of most deserving souls, would be fully in keeping with infinite justice? We certainly cannot be sure that it would be in keeping with God's infinite wisdom and kindness.

4. Would it not be inconsistent on the part of God were He to fail to give life to souls when the condition on which He made His action dependent is fulfilled? Would there be no inconsistency in giving to men, and to the human society, a certain natural constitution, and then to disregard it, and a well-devised and well-planned moral order and organisation, and then to interfere with its natural development? Would such inconsistency be in keeping with infinite wisdom, even if it did not prove prejudicial to the interests of anybody?

5. Then, who could expect God to act with such inconsistency, when, as is the case, the very wickedness of the wicked opens out incalculable opportunities to men of goodwill for the exercise of most beautiful and meritorious virtues?

6. And could it justly and reasonably be expected that God should act with such glaring inconsistency

to the eternal disadvantage of all good and deserving men?

We should not overlook the fact that the misconduct of evil-minded men affects the interests of a large number of their fellow-men. Most evil-doers, especially the most reprobate, are the cause or occasion of temptations and sufferings to many other persons. These temptations and sufferings are occasions of an immense amount of merit to countless souls, who would be deprived of these merits and the corresponding measure of eternal happiness, but for the wicked. The souls so benefited by the sins of others would have no reason to complain were those occasions of merit not given them, but can we wonder, if God does not choose to deprive millions of His devoted servants for all eternity of inconceivable happiness? Should He not have given existence, life, personal freedom, and every chance of eternal happiness to all, whilst He knew that, though some would abuse these benefits to their own detriment, others, through that very abuse, would be enabled to practise most admirable virtues, to gain most precious merits, and to obtain most extraordinary rewards of eternal joys?

Surely every one of the reasons just hinted is weighty enough to make an extraordinary departure from the established system of the propagation and development of the human race appear unwise and undesirable. When we take everything into consideration, our own common-sense bids us admit that

things are best as God has arranged them. True, hazy as our vision and narrow as its horizon is in this life, we cannot expect to see and to understand all the details of the way in which God deals with men ; still, the more we consider its general outlines, the more we are forced to the conclusion that He has devised all things well, and that His plans and dealings with men are worthy of a God of infinite wisdom, justice, and kindness.

20.—CONCLUSION

No doubt, God has not vouchsafed to explain and to justify to us the reasons for all He has done and is doing ; as links in the chain of the great divine plan, we have assumed as possible several divine reasons and designs for which we can assign no proof except the probability they derive from their harmony with the whole cast of the chain ; moreover, as long as we live on this earth we shall not be able fully to comprehend the wisdom of all the details of God's dealings with men ; still, we can see the general ground lines of His plan and understand that there is reason and consistency, wisdom and justice, mercy and kindness in it. The more we consider it, the more we are impressed with the grand idea of our destiny, filled with elevating encouragement, and borne aloft with soul-stirring hopes.

It behoves us to cherish sentiments of sincere

gratitude for the knowledge of the Christian truth and for the consolations of Christian hope which God has vouchsafed to us. An earnest and thoughtful mind can find no satisfaction in atheistic or agnostic philosophy.

To the atheist, "humanity is but a transitory phase of the evolution of an eternal substance, a particular phenomenal form of matter and energy, the true proportion of which we soon perceive when we set it on the background of infinite space and eternal time."¹ "Our own human nature, which exalted itself into an image of God in its anthropistic illusion, sinks to the level of a placental mammal, which has no more value for the universe at large than the ant, the fly of a summer's day, the microscopic infusorium, or the smallest bacillus."² "The best we can desire after a courageous life spent in doing good according to our light, is the eternal peace of the grave. 'Lord, give them eternal rest.'"³

This is the final hope of those who disbelieve the existence of God or the immortality of the soul. They cannot deny our innate craving after happiness, but they can hold out no prospect except its final disappointment in death. It is a philosophy without hope. What a horizon, narrow, dark, and gloomy, hems in their view and their hopes! The tombstone

¹ *Riddle of the Universe*. Ernst Haeckel, ch. xiii., p. 87.

² *Ibid.*, ch. xiii., p. 87.

³ *Ibid.*, ch. xi., p. 74.

is the furthest landmark of their happiness and their aspirations.

To those who pride themselves on the superior wisdom of agnostic unbelief, all is uncertainty. At times their attitude of doubtful reserve may admit a faint glimmer of eternal hope, but only to be overshadowed by their uncertainty of awe—inspiring eternal issues, over which their agnostic attitude admits no hope of control. Their misfortunes and their sorrows are deepened, and all their happiness is darkened by a shadow from the unfathomed abyss of gloom and uncertainty beyond the narrow confines of the present life. Theirs is a philosophy without certainty; theirs, too, a philosophy without hope.

Without the Christian recognition of man's free will, unseen helps of divine grace and eternal rewards of merit, it is, indeed, impossible to find a reasonable and satisfactory explanation of wickedness often successful and triumphant, virtue often unrecognised and unrequited, poverty and pain, grief and sorrow, hardship and distress, cruelty and injustice, misery and suffering of every kind often endured without any fault on the part of the sufferers. Well may a man who is blind to the consolations of a loving Providence, and of eternal hopes beyond the tomb, writhe in bitterness of heart and say: "How could a just and kind God have permitted man to do evil?" To all appearance, men are left to do as they like. Apart from a few only very partially

efficient barriers to vice and injustice, set up by some slow and halting human administration, the wicked seem to enjoy unrestrained liberty to abuse their influence and power as they list. Hundreds and thousands of their fellow-men seem to be entirely at their mercy, without any power to protect themselves against injustice and oppression! Well may man say: "How could a God have allowed it?" The mind of man is too small to see a remedy. We seem to see injustice triumphant, wickedness armed with irresistible power, and man powerless against overwhelming wrong! It is only a God of infinite resources and infinite wisdom, Who can afford to bestow free will on a creature, to allow its free exercise even to the wicked, and to let the unjust enjoy their short-lived triumph. He can afford to give full liberty and power to His very enemies, and to let them use or abuse it as they choose, for He knows how to assist and to sustain, by unseen helps of grace, those whom they wrong; He knows how to turn the sins which the wicked commit, and the wrong and injustice which they do to others, into occasions of greater good, of greater virtue, of greater merit, of greater mercy, of greater eternal happiness and joy to many, especially to those who suffer unjustly. It is only in the fulness and certainty of Christian truth that the mind finds perfect rest and the heart true contentment and peace: we find in it definite and clear, full and certain information about our origin and destiny, about our past and

future, about time and eternity, about all the great issues and problems of life. In the light of Christian faith and hope there is literally no cloud but has its silver lining; there is no pang of grief, disappointment, or pain, but awakens a soul-thrilling hope of unutterable, inconceivable joy!

From the cradle to the grave we are overshadowed by the almighty providence of the infinite Love, and surrounded by a mystic light of hope shed on our pilgrim path on earth from distant vistas of a better life; no misfortune or disappointment can fall upon us, which is not lightened by some kindly ray of Christian hope; the pillow of the sick or dying is cheered by its consoling radiance, and in its sweet light even the gloomy portals of the grave become irradiate with hope and joy and consolation, as if set with brilliants and transformed into the gates of Paradise!

The day, nay, the eternity will come, when those who have suffered most will bless the days in which they have been afflicted, and rejoice for the years in which they have seen evil,¹ for what they will look back upon as a light affliction which lasted but a moment, will have obtained for them a surpassing and eternal weight of glory.² The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.³ What will be the beauty and sweetness of the eternal rewards of patience, it is not given to men to comprehend, for

¹ Psalm xc. 15 (lxxxix. 15). ² 2 Cor. iv. 17. ³ Rom. viii. 18.

eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love Him.¹ All we know is this, that God will give to all His elect, especially to those who have suffered pain and bitterness and sorrow, rewards such as only a God of infinite resources can bestow, rewards worthy not, indeed, of the paltry service rendered, or the puny pangs endured, but worthy of the great God of recompense, worthy of His infinite power, worthy of His boundless generosity, worthy of His ineffable and inscrutable goodness and love!

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

PRINTED BY
OLIVER AND BOYD
EDINBURGH

DATE DUE

MY-2 '92

JA 15 '95

NOV 27 1996

~~AP 531~~
9099

BT160
E35x

STACKS BT160.E35x c. 1
Egger, Joseph,
God and human suffering



3 5282 00168 4540