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THE REVIEW AND EXPOSITOR

Vol. IV.

January, 1907.

No. 1.

THE PROBLEM OF PAIN.

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Not, indeed, the deepest, but the most patent and therefore to the general mind the first, difficulty which disputes with faith among the facts of life arises out of the spectacle of the pain and sorrow and wrong that are so manifest in the world. These things are real and indisputable and are sometimes almost unbearable. They are not only severe but apparently so wanton and—what presses most of all on faith—they are often utterly unjust. Conscience, which is our great internal teacher of religion, bids us believe in a God who is just and moral: Christ who is our great historical religious Master, tells us God loves the world. But is it easy to look the world in the face and say that it is what we should expect from the hand of a righteous, not to say a fatherly and loving Being? The suffering of life and the injustice of things at once impugn the whole witness of conscience and of Christ about God:

“The world is dark with griefs and graves,
So dark, that men cry out against the heavens.”

The challenge is as old as Celsus and as recent as the *Clarion*, but it seems to come with special emphasis to-day. The modern mind is acquainted with the details of the struggle for existence so ruthlessly carried on in all the animal world, while modern emotion, tolerant of the more strictly ethical aspects of evil, is very sensitive

to its pathological side. This is both a scientific and a philanthropic age and the knowledge given by the former interest and the sympathy generated by the latter unite in raising the problem of pain with peculiar urgency. But while science and philanthropy make us feel the problem, they may justly say they are not called on to answer it. To them, pain in the world is a fact to be observed or meliorated, not a mystery to solve. It is on Christian faith that the *onus* of some sort of a solution lies. It is the faith that speaks of a beneficent Creator who cares for the sparrows which may justly be asked what it makes of the butchery in animal life; it is the faith that calls God both the Eternal Righteousness and the Eternal Love that may be brought to book by the thought of the wrong and the suffering of human life. It is the believer who, in the face of these things, is asked if there is pity, fairness, love with the Most High. Religion is asked today as flatly as in the days of Epicurus or of Hume whether it is that God is unwilling to prevent evil or that he is unable to prevent it or both. And often the only thing that many a perplexed mind can say is, "When I thought upon this it was too painful for me." But a faith frank with itself must think upon it.

It may sound a paradox, but, to my mind, the most hopeful thing about the problem is just that pain is so real and deep an element in life. What I mean is this. If it were something clearly separate from the processes of nature, only hindering them and hurting them, then it would be a despairingly irrational fact. But pain is too deep in life for that. It is a factor—it might be called the *great factor*—alike in physical evolution as the animal struggles for existence and in spiritual as man is perfected through suffering. To object to pain then, is to object not to some foreign element in life, like a needle in the body, but to the process of life itself as we know it, like gowing muscular action. Pain, therefore—whether or not its presence is reconciled with Divine morality or

love—is quite clearly not an irrational thing; and this suggests that the true way of thinking about it is not to attempt to minimize it, and, if possible (and Christian science seems to find it possible) to eliminate it, but rather to understand its function and even magnify that. Another fact about pain is in line with this and is, I think, a fact worth noticing particularly. Pain increases as nature evolves. Nature evolves physically and more highly organized animals feel more than the lower; it evolves to conscious reason, and man has deeper sorrows than the brute; it evolves socially, and civilized man has more complex pains than the savage; it evolves spiritually and the saint has agonies that the sensual or selfish man never knows; and—one may add it with reverence—the crown on the head of the Perfect Man was truly the Crown of Thorns. I do not forget that it is true that, as man becomes higher, he increases also his joy. Still it is through pain that these higher joys are reached, and to the end (in this world) they are subtly touched with tears; the purest joy of purest souls is love and *Caritas est passio*. All this suggests that there is not only meaning in pain—which even natural selection shows—but growing moral meaning. It is thought to impugn God's moral character. What if it turn out to witness to it in the end?

Now, if one's aim were that of minimizing and, if possible, eliminating pain, one would naturally begin with its minor manifestation and palliate these as far at least as it is feasible to go; but if one is seeking a meaning and a moral meaning in pain, it is obvious that will be best sought where that meaning is most fully expressed—that is, in man's spiritual life. I have just indicated that the latter seems the true method; nevertheless it may be convenient in the first place to say a few things about pain in the animal world so as to clear the ground.

I am not one of those who think there is no problem in the facts of suffering in the animal world, but certainly it is often grossly overstated. For this, Mill's famous in-

dictment of Nature and Tennyson's constantly quoted line about her being "red in tooth and claw with ravine" are largely responsible. Both the philosopher and the poet have let their imagination loose on the subject. A just mind recognizes that, while there is pain in the animal world, there is infinitely more pleasure. Dr. Russell Wallace—almost the most trustworthy authority that could be quoted on the subject—says that animals in nature "have an almost perpetual enjoyment in their lives." In point of the amount of it, then, we must not exaggerate the pain of animal life; it is a very small percentage of its joy. Even more easily is it exaggerated as regards its intensity. Animals feel pain, for there seems to be nothing attractive either to science or faith in the idea, originating from Descartes and re-stated in somewhat altered form by a recent writer,* that animals are automata, and, not having consciousness, do not know what pain is—nothing attractive to science because it is unverifiable, and nothing to faith because in freeing the realm of sentient animal life of pain, it at the same time robs it of all joy and so immensely impoverishes creation. But though animals suffer, their sufferings have nothing of the intensity that human suffering has. To a very great degree, the intensity of human suffering lies in such things as our massing our griefs together, our anticipating them, our reflections upon them; these torture far more exquisitely than the moment of physical pain, which indeed seems in a strange way often to bring its own anæsthetic. Animals have nothing of these intenser pains. It is sheer nonsense to speak of their sufferings as approaching what ours would be in their circumstances. A man exposed to daily risk of death, in constant struggle for good, encircled by ruthless enemies, and before whose eyes his fellows were constantly being murdered would go mad; the bird or beast in such conditions sings and gambols all the day. And the conclusion of the whole

* W. E. Kay Robinson in "The Religion of Nature."

matter—for I do not wish to spend more time on a theme that has often been discussed (and I claim no originality for the above remarks on it)—is thus summed up by the great English naturalist whom I have already quoted. “Given,” he says, “the necessity of death and reproduction—and without these there could have been no progressive development of the animal world—it is difficult even to imagine a system by which a greater balance of happiness could have been secured”; while of the particular feature of development with which pain is associated, namely, the struggle for existence, he declares that “it brings the maximum of life and enjoyment with the minimum of suffering.” Mr. Morley in his life of Gladstone, remarks a little contemptuously that “of course optimism like this is indispensable as the basis of natural theology.” If so, it is satisfactory to have an eminent authority expressing it from the standpoint of natural science.

When we come to the problem of pain in relation to man, we come to a quite different problem. Everything is to be viewed in relation to the end and purpose of that to which it belongs—holes which would spoil a drum are necessary to a net—and, in passing from animal life to human we pass from an existence whose end and purpose are merely sentient to one whose end and purpose are ethical and spiritual. Before a word is said about the problem of pain in man, we must recognize this. It will lead only to cross purposes if pain is complained of on hedonistic grounds because it hinders man’s pleasure and justified on moral grounds because it helps his character. We must first clearly see and say which is man’s true end. Now, hedonism always has its appeal to us to recognize in it our end, because as Coleridge has said somewhere, we can disclaim our nature as moral beings but we cannot disclaim our nature as sentient beings. Yet I do not think I need be asked to contend at length here that when we do so disclaim our moral nature we are false to our true

selves. Man's true life is character. "Not enjoyment and not sorrow is our destined end and way." If we agree to this, the whole problem changes and—while it certainly does not dissipate—clears. All the pessimism which is but the chagrin of defeated hedonism is out of place. But, in candor one must add that all the optimism which is based upon the minimizing of pain is also out of place. I have argued—because I think the facts demand it—that it relieves to some extent the problem of pain in relation to the animal world to remember that animals do not suffer with the intensity we do. But if one tries to take that argument higher than the animal world, it turns against one's self. An American writer on the problem, Dr. Minot Savage, seems strangely to fail to see this. After most justly minimizing the exaggerations of animal suffering, he goes on "to take a step higher than the animal world" and, on precisely similar lines, argues it is a mistake for us who are civilized and cultured and comfortable to rate too highly the distresses of people in savage countries abroad or in slums at home for the former are quite content "to lead their own life" and the latter often "satisfied with the kind of tenement they live in." I doubt the accuracy of this especially as regards the slum-dweller, but does not Dr. Savage see that if it be true that is just "the pity of it"? If the real thought of a human life be not pleasure even in its low, dull form of stupid content, but be something ethical and spiritual, then the saddest thing about any man's low life is just that he is content with it. When we "take a step higher than the animal world" we take a step into a different world. Man is not "*la bête humaine*." The problem of his suffering cannot be answered, because it should not be asked, in the terms that apply to animal life. It must be asked and answered in terms of man's ethical end.

When it is thus stated, unquestionably there is some light. Man's end is ethical and spiritual; well, certainly

nothing makes for this as pain does. The modern world has cast away the mediæval—or rather, heathenish—idea that pain is in itself a good; but it is no mere ascetic idea but the testimony of every part of the moral and spiritual experience of the world that nothing else is so much the means, as pain is, of deepening the mind, disciplining the character and developing the noblest self of man. It is true of knowledge: “where we say that men learn wisdom by experience we mostly mean by experience of something painful.” It is true alike of power and of gentleness; it is by trials that a man is made both strong and tender. It is true of affections; even love is hardly quite pure till it can suffer. It is true of all greatest art; “the poets learn by suffering what they teach in song” and “the half of music is to have grieved.” These are not merely rhetorical phrases. They are outstanding facts about the life of man. Joy too has its good; at its truest, joy can even purify. Yet a human life that knew only joy would be an ignoble life. It is not asceticism, it is not even only religion, but it is the whole range of man’s moral and spiritual experience which testifies that, without the discipline of suffering, life cannot become noble and will not become even good. This is not to say that suffering always succeeds in making life noble and good. There are facts that deny that. One must never forget in generalizing about life, that there is still such a thing as individuality. In certain cases, suffering deadens rather than illumines, and embitters rather than purifies. But this—which is really of the effects of sin rather than the effects of pain—does not alter the broad truth, to which every fact in the spiritual life consents, that man cannot be noble or good without suffering. Perhaps, however, this is more convincingly said not as a broad truth but as a personal experience. A large number of men, as they go through life, meet somewhere, and have to pass through an illness—a grave illness. At the time it often seems a hard lot and a sheer loss. But, after-

wards how many a man has found that that time of trial and loss was really the best thing that ever happened to him, and that, if there is in his mind any depth or in his heart any tenderness or in his soul any true sense of God, it largely dates from it. He knows what the Psalmist meant who said "It is good that I have been afflicted."

And all this has a deeper aspect. How is it that our moral nature thus needs pain to develop it? The reason—or at least a reason—is not far to seek. If our moral nature were so perfectly in love with good that the ideal had only to be set before us in order that instinctively and gladly we sought after it, then it would be difficult to see how we needed pain—though even then it would remain true that some of the finer moral qualities, such as sympathy or bearing for another, might still need this element for their development. But, (however it may be as regards this last point), we all know that ours is not a nature perfectly in love with good. There is—and again this is no mere dogma of religion but the broadest fact of all experience—another element. And if we are even to be morally saved, this element—which is what the theologians call sin and the ethicists the bad self—needs to be disciplined, to be warned and threatened, to be punished. Pain does all this. Pain then, which *may* be necessary even for a nature which is in love with good to add its finer perfections, is *certainly* necessary for a nature which is in love often with evil to show it sharply its errors and penalize them. I do not enter in this paper into the question as to the source of this dark element in our life; that is a subject by itself which has its own perplexities. But that element is there. Its existence is too plain to be denied. And because it is there, pain—with its warnings and its penalties—not only is there too but *ought* to be there too. A world in which there is moral evil and no attendant physical evil would indeed be an immoral world; and when one thinks—or rather begins to think, for the conception stretches far beyond us—

how immense the fact of moral evil is in the world, then we should ask not why there is so much pain in the world but why there is not more. But perhaps this too, like the former point, is best said not in general terms about the world, but in the particular terms of personal experience. Speaking of the good which affliction brought to character, I quoted from one Psalm words which evoke a deep response from many an afflicted life. There may be quoted from another Psalm an even more striking testimony which, I will venture to say, no humble and honest conscience dares dispute. It is this: "He hath not dealt with us according to our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." It is difficult to say this of others' afflictions often (and this reminds us we have still to face the greatest of all questions about pain in the world which is the injustice of it) but, in our conscience, we say it of our own. The severity of Divine discipline is our problem when we look without; the righteousness and even mercy of it when we look within. His biographer, not unnaturally, called a great Christian's sufferings "cruel;" but Mr. Gladstone himself died singing praise of Him Who is "most just in all His ways."

Although, as I have just said, the acutest part of our whole question still lies before us, it may be well first to draw the conclusion that arises out of what has been said about pain and the life of man. The conclusion—the only possible conclusion—is that pain, instead of impugning, really evidences the moral interest of God. He afflicts man because, above every other end, He would make moral character, and nothing works for this as pain does. Pain is then a great witness to the fact that, higher even than happiness, God values moral life and moral law. Ah! is it not turning out that the presence of pain means, not that God is not careful enough about morality, but that He is *too* careful about it. It is we who do not enough care about it—do not care enough about it to make us welcome this great educator of the moral life and

great avenger of the moral law. Our argument with God about His means, which is pain, is really an argument with Him about His end, which is moral salvation. But this is God's end—His real and serious and determined end; and the world is made accordingly. Therefore it is a "scheme of the weal and the woe" for without this latter—so far as we can see—it would not achieve that end which is the spiritual character of man.

But we must now come to what is the last and severest difficulty—the appalling *injustice* of the world's pain. This is a very acute enigma. Think of but one right aspect of it; think of the wrongs and sufferings endured by thousands of helpless, innocent little children, born into cruelty and neglect, where lives are a daily appeal for a justice that seems to have no ear. The considerations we have found to go far to explain suffering among men have little or no application here. How is a little child purified by childish suffering? The child's path to virtue is through happiness. How does any idea of the punitive or preventive idea of pain apply? Surely a little, innocent life does not deserve that. The thing is unjust. We have the moral right to call it unjust in God's world or anywhere else. It is no blatant, irreverent unbelief that does this. It is a charge prompted by the very truest ethical instinct of our nature. Justice is one of the most sacred of secular words. It is a very name of God. If God fails here, He is not God. Yet, how palpable are the facts of injustice in life. How indifferently, how indiscriminately evil and pain fall on the just as on the unjust. The guilty sin and the innocent suffer. A father is vicious and his children die in an asylum. A man does wrong and hundreds are dragged into distress by his deed. It is no answer to point to his sin. That he sinned accounts justly for *his* suffering; but it does not make the suffering of others just. The wrong of these impeaches Heaven. Here the Christian thought of God seems to meet a sheer shriek of contradiction.

There is a question here, which sometimes, when we are brought face to face with a poignant example of it, makes faith simply stand still.

I cannot see that this question is really met along the line usually offered for its relief, namely, the supreme spiritual value of vicarious suffering. Certainly, no words can exaggerate either the moral depths or the moral beauty and power that are in such sorrow as that. It has inspired the greatest thoughts of literature—the Greek tragedian's "Antigone" or the Hebrew prophet's "Suffering Servant." It has put their very crown upon the brow of the saints—"the martyr first." It makes suffering not merely a gain in good, but, "become emphatically *the good.*" And it—it alone—has redeemed the world; "the sufferings of the just" says a modern teacher,* "are the saving thing in human history." And yet if all this good is attained through sheer injustice! However exquisitely be chiseled the capital of the pillar of virtue, what avail it if the base be rottenness? It may be said that the objection to the justice of vicarious suffering is taken away when the sufferer is voluntary as well as vicarious. I have never been altogether clear even about that, but it is unnecessary to discuss it, for what of the countless cases where it is not voluntary? Think again of the little children. Ah! is it not a strange thing that one of the keenest darts that pierces faith comes not from the loud denials of unbelief or the critical century of philosophy or the chilling sneer of culture, but from the wan face, the pleading eyes, the pain-marred frame of some little child? Those, faith is not one moment afraid to look in the face and even proudly answer; this, it can hardly bear to see and is dumb before it. I recall a happy little child whom Jesus once placed in the midst of his disciples to teach them faith. There are other little children in the world and when we place them in our midst our faith seems—I repeat it—to stand still.

* Harnack.

There is a mental habit which is always salutary and which is never more useful than when we are shut up to a difficulty, namely, to think out what is involved in the alternative. Let us use that method here. The problem is that when a man does evil not only he but others who are innocent are involved in suffering. But think what it would mean if this were not so. It could be prevented only if the man's life were something isolated from other lives and terminated in itself—if, in short, we were not "members one of another" but each man did "live for himself." Does any thinking person desire that this should be the law of human life? It would not only impoverish life, but it would ruin it. It would make impossible the whole progress of humanity from age to age and race to race and man to man. What is it which makes the riches, even the very meaning, of my life? It is not what I myself have learned, discovered, done, earned. It is what I have inherited from the past and from others' lives around. Without this solidarity human life would be unthinkable. In his essay on Nature, to which I have already had occasion to refer, J. S. Mill says the just law, if God were omnipotent, would be that "each person's share of suffering and happiness would be exactly proportioned to good or evil deeds and no human being would have a worse lot than another without worse deserts." This is a strange and difficult world of ours, but after all, I am thankful I live in it rather than in the world Mill would make in the name of justice. My share of happiness reduced to what is exactly proportioned to my good deeds would leave me not only morally but also intellectually on the verge of starvation; it is others' great and good deeds—others' moral triumphs and others' intellectual riches—that are the food of my soul. And if no human being is to have a worse lot than another without worse deserts, then no human being should have a better without better deserts; what desert, then, had Mill to the comforts of civilization or the culture of the

ages which a pre-historic savage never enjoyed, though his individual life—poor fellow—may have been quite as deserving? It seems, thus, we must revise our idea of justice. Mill is quite right if the sheer individualist idea of man as an isolated unit is right. But that idea of man is out and out wrong. We are “members one of another” and *no* man “liveth unto himself.” We live together and suffer together; we struggle together and progress together. It is the greatest law in humanity—without it the word “humanity” could have no meaning—and to repeal it would be universal ruin. But, it may be said, God—Mill’s “Omnipotent Creator”—should repeal it as regards evil. Surely that will not bear thinking out. A world with one set of laws for virtue and another for vice would be perhaps the most disadvantageous world for morality that could be. One of the great moral bases of the world is just the impartiality (so to speak) with which the laws of life are meted out alike to the good and the bad. Of no law is this more true than this law of solidarity of which I am speaking. When evil comes from this—the poignant evil of the injustice of innocent suffering lives—it is not because the law which is the channel of that injustice is evil, but it is because the source is evil—the deeds which put the law into operation. If men’s deeds were good the law of solidarity would be nothing but blessing. The injustice we see arises not from the laws of God but the lives of men. It drives us back then to the problem of sin into which this paper does not enter.

And yet—shall I end a discussion of God’s relation to the pains of the world by a word of repudiating responsibility? That were not even human; it certainly is not Christian. We do God poor honor in an argument if we are satisfied with that. God is not self-justification; God is love. After you have finished all your reasonings about pain and proved its laws are just and necessary and wise and beneficial, still the *sufferers remain*. And after logic has done its part in discussing them, there still re-

mains the part of love which is to visit them, to share their sufferings, to be beside them in the very endurance of their pain. And is not this how Jesus Christ has visited this world of suffering men and women and children? "If they suffer, did not He on their account suffer also? If suffering falls not always on the most guilty, was not He innocent? Shall they cry aloud that the world is ill-designed, when He for their sakes subjected himself to their condition?" Surely here is something that comes far closer to the heart than even a Divine explanation of suffering. Here is a Divine participation in it. Here is a Divine Sufferer Who with all our afflictions was Himself afflicted. After all, it is not philosophy that this suffering world needs, but sympathy. This sympathy is in Christ. He *shares* human suffering. And thereby He is knit to humanity by one of the strongest and tenderest and most sacred of ties—the knowledge of a common pain, the bearing *together* of a cross.