
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Is the Existence of Pain Reconcilable with a Divine Governor of the Universe?[1]

By the Rev. FRANCIS St. JOHN THACKERAY, M.A., F.S.A.,
Vicar of Mapledurham, Reading.

THE author of this interesting volume has gone through many varied experiences in different parts of the globe, as a soldier, an explorer, and diplomatist. His distinguished career in Tibet, with his successful mission to Lhasa, is fresh in our memory, and has won him well-deserved fame. He is thoroughly conversant with Hindus, Mohammedans, and Buddhists, and their religious beliefs. It was with feelings of acute distress that we heard of his being run down by a motor-car in Belgium, which broke his leg; and we cannot read without the deepest sympathy the vivid account he gives in the opening chapter of the excruciating agonies which he subsequently underwent—the joltings on the cobble-stones on the way to the hotel, the complications, the spasms and sleeplessness, the attack of pleuro-pneumonia, and all the misery of those dreary days and nights which ensued until the crisis was at last past, and a gleam of hope of recovery dawned on him with the arrival of Sir John Broadbent from England.

The second title of Sir Francis Younghusband's book is "Thoughts during Convalescence." It is the result of his meditations on the most profound subjects. Death he had often before faced, and had now only just escaped it. What is the predominant feeling left on him by the recollection of his sufferings? What is the final conclusion to which he is brought by the retrospect? It is painful to state it, but it must be said at once that his belief in the beneficent care of an all-powerful Providence is completely shaken. The outstanding feature of these Meditations is that the writer gives up entirely the view that mankind is under the care and guardianship of a kind

[1] "Within." By Sir Francis Younghusband, K.C.I.E., LL.D., D.Sc. Williams and Norgate.

and Almighty Being, ever watching over us to protect us from evil.

It will be best to let Sir Francis express himself in his own words, and we therefore make no apology for quoting the following passage *in extenso*:

"I suffered, but I was surrounded with every care and attention. But what of those who are *not* looked after? What of the wounded on battlefields? What of those injured far away from civilization? What of those who cannot be taken to hospitals, or who cannot afford the best doctors and nurses?

"I was injured in the leg, and my leg is nearly as strong as ever again. What of those who are injured internally, and in consequence suffer lifelong torture? And what, again, of those who suffer chronically, not for a few months, but from birth—who never enjoy full health? What of the tortures of cancer, which can only end in death? And what of the blind, of the deaf, of the dumb, who daily suffer from their infliction? And what, too, of the sufferings of women in childbirth, who suffer for no other reason than for doing their duty to the human race?

"All these, too, are merely *physical* sufferings. How much greater are the mental! Bodily suffering can be endured or can be alleviated with drugs. Moreover, bodily suffering readily strikes the eye and calls forth sympathy. But what of the *hidden* sufferings of the soul, which nobody sees and few know of; of lives with the light taken out of them; of lives for ever saddened by the loss of a dear one in death or, sadder yet, in life?

"What of those who have given and not received love? What of those who have exposed their whole quivering hearts and been touched to the quick by an unfeeling hand? Is any agony greater than that? Is the most dreadful bodily suffering comparable to the poignant anguish of the soul?

"The sum of suffering is stupendous. And for all we know, the suffering and evil in other parts of the universe may be even more appalling than it is on our planet. Human beings do all they can to lessen and assuage it. Can we really believe it is

deliberately caused by a just and merciful Providence for our welfare?"

It is true that "the sum of suffering is stupendous," but, as has been well remarked, the sum of suffering is the suffering of what the individual has to bear, whether for himself or for others. It is not cumulative. *Quisque suos patimur manes.*

The usually accepted theories, remedial or disciplinary, that pain is sent to improve and perfect character, that the present state is but a probation for a future life, are met by Sir Francis and answered to his own satisfaction by a negative. We may grant that it has been the tendency of Christianity to overstate the value of pain.

A formidable catalogue of catastrophes, inexplicable by the current view, is given, such as the drowning of Major Bretherton on the way to Lhasa, while other far less valuable lives were saved; the story of Gordon at Khartoum; the appalling famine in India; and the more recent foundering of the *Titanic*. The following passage is a typical specimen of the style of argument employed through the earlier part of the book:

"Perhaps it may be argued that for the monsoon current to have been diverted to India in the year the rains failed, the whole mechanism of the universe would have been deranged, and worse evil might have ensued. This, possibly, is the case. But if it is, it only proves how greatly the individual man is at the mercy of mechanical forces, and how little dependence he can place upon an external Being to help him. Such an argument would only show how helpless such a Being Himself was before the machine He had with His own hand created."

Of little or no weight to such a reasoner would be any words like those of Bishop Butler:[1] "*Why are we not made perfect creatures, or placed in better circumstances?* God Almighty undoubtedly foresaw the disorders, both natural and moral, which would happen in this state of things. If upon this we set ourselves to search and examine why He did not prevent

[1] Sermon VIII.

them, we shall, I am afraid, be in danger of running into somewhat worse than impertinent curiosity."

Nor is it more probable that the following lines in Tennyson's "Ancient Sage" would appeal to our author:

> "My son, the world is dark with griefs and graves,
> So dark that men cry out against the Heavens.
> Who knows but that the darkness is in man?
> The doors of Night may be the gates of Light."

Nor would he accept the view that life beyond death may be regarded as a compensation, if we are to retain our faith in the justice of a World-Ruler. For on this subject he speaks doubtfully and hesitatingly.[1]

Perhaps he would be more inclined to listen to one of the latest exponents of science, Sir Oliver Lodge, when he says:

"Pain is an awful reality when highly developed organisms are subjected to wounds, and poison, and disease. Some kinds of pain have been wickedly inflicted by human beings on each other in the past, and other kinds may be removed or mitigated by the progress of discovery in the future.

"The higher possibility called 'life' entails the correlative evils called 'death' and 'disease.' The possibility of keen sensation, which permits pleasure, also involves capacity for the corresponding penalty called 'pain,' but the pain is in ourselves, and is the result of our sensitiveness combined with imperfection.

"Conflict and difficulty are essential for our training and development, even for our existence at this grade. With their aid we have become what we are; without them we should vegetate and degenerate, whereas the will of the universe is that we arise and walk."

Existence and freedom of will involve limitation. Human nature possesses a marvellous expansive and recuperative power, but it must not expect to enjoy inconsistent advantages. It is true that besides the negative theory of pain, the need of

[1] "In another state He—*i.e.*, Christ—may possibly exist now" (p. 139). And if there is no certainty in His case, how much less is there for others?

which for perfection Sir Francis holds to be absolutely devoid of any evidence, there is a positive view of life to which we will immediately come. And we must not refuse him credit for his admission that "the more acutely we suffer, the more closely do we find ourselves in touch with those who are most sensitive and feeling among our fellow men and women," while he has no words sufficient to express his admiration for the Luxembourg nuns who attended him in his illness, qualified, however, by the reflection that "if their love of God had been more distinctly recognized as love of the Divine in man, their lives might have been more fruitful still."

It is the Divine element in man which forms the chief subject of the later chapters of "Within," and constitutes the constructive element, as far as there is anything constructive in these Meditations during Convalescence. It is difficult to classify or characterize the religious opinions of Sir Francis. His theory of the cosmic order appears to be that of an *anima mundi.* The First Person of the Trinity he seems to give up entirely, and the Second Person, on Whom more shall be said later on, is divested of divinity. There remains the Third Person, or, as he is called, "the great World-Spirit."

"We are abandoning," he says, "the idea of God the Father, and we are realizing the idea of God the Holy Spirit; we are giving up the idea that the kingdom of God is in heaven, and we are finding that the kingdom of God is *within* us."

At great length, and with a profusion of illustration, the growth and development of this inherent impelling spirit is dwelt on, and the point is insisted on that the motive principle of the whole world-process is in its essence wholly good.

"The existence of an outside Providence who created us, who watches over us, and who guides our lives like a merciful Father, we have found impossible longer to believe in. But of the existence of a Holy Spirit radiating upward through all animate beings, and finding its fullest expression, in man in love, and in the flowers in beauty, we can be as certain as of anything in the world."

The chapter on "The Ideal" contains much that is interesting and stimulating. Fame and Honour and Power, Truth and Knowledge, Freedom and Beauty, are all passed in review as motive principles in life, and each in its turn is found to be inadequate. Love is alone found to be "creation's final law," the supremely valuable thing to lay hold of—love in the family, love in the nation, love spreading to all mankind.

In spite, however, of the admission noticed above, and the glowing anticipations of a far happier future in store for humanity under the reign of a vast Love free and untrammelled, we cannot lay down this volume without feeling that its general trend and object is utterly destructive—destructive not only of the aspects of the Deity presented to us in the Old Testament, but also of much of the basis of Christian hope and trust; destructive of prayer, for to whom shall it be raised? destructive of the truths held firmly to by St. Paul, that "all things work together for good to them that love God," and "that we know only in part;" and also of the words of St. Paul's Master, who said He would "draw all men to Himself" by enduring torture and death on the cross, thereby sanctifying pain and suffering, and showing that God has Himself in Christ shared them with poor, pain-stricken mankind; destructive of an integral part of our religion—"Our Father," "Almighty," "All-merciful," "Providence." Are we to abandon all these titles, expressive of the belief of thousands of years, because the old objection is resuscitated that God cannot be merciful if He allow pain, He cannot be omnipotent if He does not instantly put a stop to it?

Much stress is laid on the need of greater faith in ourselves—not that each must rely upon himself alone, but also on those about him; and it is true that we do not make the most of what is within us, or adequately fulfil the purpose of our being. But is not the inherent impelling holy spirit in man over-glorified by Sir Francis? And is not its source unduly ignored? To what do we ascribe the saving of mankind from utter degradation or even extinction at great crises? When the Black Death

in 1349 swept away at least a third, if not half, of the population of England, where was any deliverance to be looked for "except the Lord had shortened those days"? Where is this holy spirit in human nature discernible amid the frightful horrors of the Inquisition, or, still later, in the awful sufferings inflicted on the victims of a belief in witch-craft?

And, further, in tracing the history of the world-process, the treatment is surely one-sided. Much is said on our rise and ascent, nothing on the Originator of our being. Who gave the potentiality and promise of development to the brain of a Newton or a Darwin, to the primordial germ, the speck of protoplasm, or "the mollusc which gasped in the first warm flood"?

Such questions are surely cognate to any theory or system of the cosmic order.

Lowell congratulated himself that he was born before "responsibility for the universe" had been required. The thought has, no doubt, been to many persons in their perplexity a source of sincere consolation and a haven of refuge. And a greater philosopher than Lowell, Goethe, has said: "Man is not born to solve the problem of his existence, but he is born to attempt to solve it, that he may keep within the limits of the knowable."

We have reserved to the last the consideration of the place held by our Saviour in Sir Francis Younghusband's theory of the universe. The courage, the beautiful and intensely lovable nature of Christ, are, indeed, fully recognized in more than one passage (pp. 116, 139). But this appreciation is qualified by such words as these: "We might justly worship Him as the incarnation of an ideal; but we cannot really love Him as we can and should love living men and women." "We put Jesus on a higher pinnacle than we place Napoleon, and we do not place Him there simply because He died to save us. For if He were the Son of an Omnipotent God, He could not really have died, and His apparent death must have been a mere play." And we are amazed at such language as that which meets us on the last page of the book, "when the whole life and art of men are

saturated with the faith of man in himself and with his confidence in the future of his race, then, maybe, a pure God-child will arise, more perfect even than Jesus." And still more are we staggered by the startling assertion (p. 76) that "Men and women, in supreme moments, have reached heights higher even than Jesus reached." Obviously there is here no need of a Saviour, for the holy spirit in man that has risen superior to that ideal figure is *αὐτάρκης*, self-sufficient, self-sustaining, self-purifying.

We may indeed trust that much unnecessary pain will be abolished, and that a more glorious future is in store for our race than we can imagine, for man is still in his infancy; but it will scarcely be brought about by our own unaided efforts, however much we may contribute towards it. And is not a truer and a deeper note struck in the concluding stanzas of "In Memoriam"?—

"That we may lift from out of dust
A voice as unto him that hears,
A cry above the conquer'd years
To one that with us works, and trust,

"With faith that comes of self-control,
The truths that never can be proved
Until we close with all we loved,
And all we flow from, soul in soul."