

SUNDAY READING



SERMON.

Nature as Health.

By Rev. W. GARRETT HOLDER.

Preached on behalf of the Hospital Sunday school...

It is natural on this Hospital Sunday to think of disease, since its presence renders such institutions necessary. For this, and for the various accidents which fall upon man, they have been established by sympathy.

This seems to me clear from the fact that many diseases can be traced back to their origin, so that we can see exactly how they arose. We know their genesis. Fully half the maladies to which men are liable are due to impurity—either a moral impurity or a physical impurity.

The Origin of Disease.

Now, if we can clearly trace the origin of certain diseases to the carelessness or sin of men, are we not justified in believing that larger knowledge would show that all disease has a like origin—that it is abnormal—that of it we may say an enemy of some kind hath done this, and not the Creator and Friend of man? Moreover, we know that new conditions of life have given rise to new forms of disease.

Let us put away, therefore, the too common, but, as I believe, the utterly false idea, that God is the author of disease. He is the God of health, not of disease—of order, not of confusion.

But then, it may be asked, even if God did not cause disease, might He not have rendered it impossible, might He not have made man's nature able to resist its entrance, or quite impervious to its assault? To that two answers may be given.

The first is, that such a condition would have had corresponding disadvantages. Humanity would have had to be of a harder and, therefore, less sensitive type. If men had been as stones they could have resisted disease, but then they would have been far less than man as we know him. The loss would have been greater than the gain. It is better to be men such as we are, and, therefore, liable to disease, than to be as stones, with no such liability. The law of the world seems to be, that the higher the life the greater the sensitiveness. Where there is no life there is no peril. Where life is of a low type the peril is small, but as the life grows richer the peril increases. Disease cannot attack a stone. It can attack an amoeba (the lowest type of life), though only in certain forms. But as we go upward in the scale of life the perils increase. The fuller the life the greater the liability to disease. Man, standing at the head of the living creation, and having a more complex organism, presents more points of danger. Now we must be content with this. We cannot have all the advantages of our high position without its drawbacks. We cannot have our great

range of sensations, our highly-strung nervous system, our lofty desires, without their accompanying perils. The more refined the music the greater the risk of discord.

The second answer is, that disease plays a moral part in our life. It is in many cases directly, and in others indirectly, the penalty of carelessness or sin. We sin and suffer for it. The man guilty of excess in the use of stimulants pays the penalty in a bloated body and excited nervous system. The debauchee loses not only purity of mind, but of body; whilst even those who are careless in their mode of living, who go at too great a pace, who turn day into night, lose the glow and freshness of health which might be theirs. And the resulting disease is one of God's ways of keeping us in the true path for our life. But of this, anarchy would prevail, and men might go hopelessly astray from the way in which they should walk, I admit it seems hard that disease should arise from the folly or sin of others, that because the fathers have eaten sour grapes the children's teeth should be set on edge—that seems hard. But so long as we are knit so closely together, it must be so. The only remedy for this would be complete isolation—each life distinct from every other. That would be a greater evil than a measure of suffering for the sins and errors of others. Let us look all round the matter, and we shall see that disease is to be laid not at the door of God, but of men; but that God overrules it, and makes it a means of physical and moral discipline.

But now to turn to the other side of the matter. The Psalmist describes how God healeth all our diseases. It may be that he thought of God by direct aid, as we should say, miraculous methods, healing the diseases of men. But this is a very limited and partial way of regarding His working. There are those who regard as Divine only such direct and immediate working. To such, only the strange is Divine. But that would restrict the healing to a very limited area. I would have you see that the whole system of God is arranged with a view to such healing. The tendency is in that direction. Let me show how this is.

God's Provision for Healing.

1. Wherever there is life there is a power of recuperation. Hack a stone, and it remains hacked. Hack a tree, and the life within will set on foot a process of healing which will remedy the mischief and smooth the disfigurement. Let an injury be done to the human body, and the system will work for its recovery. But for this, all the remedies of the healing art would be in vain. Indeed, it is on this healing tendency that the surgeon relies, and his great object is to give it opportunity to work. There is a tendency to health, to wholeness in the body, which helps to throw off disease and restore strength. The body is always throwing off waste and diseased tissue, ever building up new and healthy tissue. It is only when disease is too deeply rooted or widely spread that this tendency to health is defeated. Thus continually God healeth all our diseases.

2. Then nature abounds with remedies which assist this healing tendency. Men have found in the vegetable and mineral world antidotes, or, at least, palliatives, for nearly every disease to which flesh is liable. The world is full of restoratives, some discovered, and probably, more as yet undiscovered. Here, again, God healeth all our diseases.

3. Then pain is an aid in this healing. Since it calls attention to disease. It clamors for aid. At first sight pain looks like an unmixed evil. It is really an evil with a great admixture of good. Pain has been likened to a splint, which affords the affected part and freedom from movement, and so facilitates recovery. A rabbit brakes its leg; the pain causes it to keep the limb at rest, and so the sundered ends draw together and join again. But for pain disease would work on unknown and unrealised, and the life be secretly undermined. But pain makes us rest, makes us send for the doctor, makes us co-operate in his work.

4. Then, too, God healeth by the skill of human healers. As we have seen, He is the great healer by means of the recuperative powers which He has set in the body, but He enables the physician to co-operate in the great work. This seems a purely human matter; but it is not. It is both human and Divine. It is human in that the skill comes by study and experience; it is Divine in that the faculties employed are of God. Whence come the observing eye, the listening ear, the reasoning brain of the physician? Whence come the sympathetic feeling which moves all these to action. These are of God. The doctor, quite as truly as the minister, may say, "We then as laborers together with God." God gives the skill, great is the company of them that use it. What have any of us—ministers, doctors, thinkers, artists—that we have not received? In this sense it is true God healeth all our diseases. The more I think of it, the more I am persuaded that God is ever a healing God. The whole system of the world is arranged with a view to "heal the hurt of the daughter of my people." God not only renews the face of the earth, He also renews the bodies of men. But for this, disease would gain the mastery and bring the race to an end. It is not thus; life is ever wrestling with disease, and God is on the side of life. The work of Jesus Christ on earth is the visible token and proof of all this. He was ever healing, and so is the Father from whom He came. A healing God gave us a healing Christ. Yes! God healeth all our diseases.

The Cure of Spiritual Evil.

And what is true of physical is also true of spiritual evil. God is ever working in man's spirit, as He is in man's body. There are mighty forces at work in the spirit to save it from its sin. A Divine Spirit is ever wrestling with our human spirits, to win them from the sin which leads to death, and to draw them into the way of life. No analysis of man is complete or

adequate which does not recognize a Divine element within. A man is not a man unless he is more than a man, unless there be in him the breath of God. "God breathed into man's nostrils and man became a living soul." What chance would there be of the removal of disease if there were not a recuperative tendency in the human body? But for that, all the drugs, all the doctors in the world would be in vain. And what hope would there be of man casting off his sin, if there were not a Divine spirit within him ever exerting an exorcising power over evil, ever drawing the soul from evil and alluring it to good. What the healing tendency is to the body, that the Spirit of God is to the soul. The one leads to health, the other to salvation.

And so the Psalmist tells in one breath of Him "who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases." What healing is to the body, forgiveness is to the soul. And they are both one source in Him who giveth unto all men liberally. But both these gifts reach us very largely through human agency. Healing of disease is at least assisted by medical skill, and healing of the soul is assisted by human testimony. By means of the physician Christ's healing work is continued. By means of the ministry of holy men. His healing work on the spirit is carried forward. The hospital co-operates with Christ in bodily healing as does the church in spiritual healing. It needs the two callings of the minister and doctor to be a complete vehicle for the Divine influence of healing.

Today you are asked to assist the healing work on those who are too poor to procure medical aid for themselves. In this all churches can join. Here no difference of any moment can arise. There may be grave differences as to the healing of man's spirit, there are practically none as to the healing of his body. Here Jew and Christian, Trinitarian and Unitarian, Episcopalian and Presbyterian, Methodist and Independent, Calvinist and Arminian can join. When we can thus join, let us do so heartily. If we are in health let us give as a thank-offering for our health. If we are suffering let us give out of sympathy for those less able to procure medical aid. If we are rich let us give out and according to our abundance. If we are poor, let us give out of our poverty, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus when He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Sheriff Smith of Dundee, on the Clergy.

On the occasion of opening a sale of work, in connection with Martyrs' Free church, Dundee, on Friday last, Sheriff Campbell Smith, in the course of a speech said that Mammon, to the poetic vision of Milton, was rather a contemptible kind of spirit; but now he was a fashionable divinity, with his temples in grandly furnished drawing-rooms and his sacrifices on bank counters and overloaded dining tables 20 feet long. There was no church so intensely orthodox, so terribly exclusive, as the Church of Mammon. An empty purse and shabby raiment could not enter there. The doors were more completely sealed against poverty than even the doors of a modern fashionable bazaar. Proceeding, the Sheriff asked—What was the position of the clergy in this age of money-hunting and of mammon-worship? Was it what it ought to be? Were they not worse paid than doctors, lawyers, engineers, bankers, tax-gatherers, newspaper editors—aye even teachers, and brewers' clerks? He thought they were, and, further, that the remuneration of this purse-proud last quarter of the nineteenth century allowed the clergy, was an unconscious gauge of the value that was set upon religion. Why, a horse jockey of seven stone and a half, that had or was thought likely to win the Derby—a creature not much bigger than a bantam cock—and very often not much wiser—enjoyed a stipend as large as an English Bishop, and as large as the accumulated stipends of many a Scotch Presbytery.

Posture in Prayer.

The Bishop of Huron, in a recent sermon, had something to say to an Anglican audience respecting posture in prayer, which might with much propriety, be said of many churches of all denominations in St. John's.

"It was a painful thing to look over a congregation while prayers were being offered and to see the light part taken in the homage by many of those present. Many never condescended to bend the knee, but lounged back in sumptuous indifference, while at the close these came but a feeble and meaningless 'Amen.' It was not wealth nor any other temporal power which the church needed so much as the deep, spiritual power of prayer. There were three positions in prayer: Standing, which was scriptural and implied service; kneeling, which betokened consciousness of sin; and another which was so popular among the elegant people of modern society. It was that of sitting and it implied equality. If in the presence of the queen, they would know that they had no right to sit, and would never attempt it, and yet they do so in the presence of God. They apparently felt themselves the equal of Him. Although God's awful majesty was there, they assumed the right to sit. Strong, able-bodied men lolled back in their seats, and the occupants of pews cried out that they were miserable sinners, while the carpets in their richly furnished pews had never been touched by the bent knee."

Second Hand Tombstones.

Perhaps everybody does not know that there is quite a brisk trade in second-hand tombstones. Nearly facing Mr. Spurgeon's vault in Norwood cemetery is a tombstone setting forth the good qualities of one not buried beneath. It was a second-hand stone, and the action of the weather has been such that the inscription originally cut can now be read. Still stranger is the custom of selling family vaults partly filled. Not long ago a London clergyman was promoted to a country charge. As a vault was at his disposal near his new dwelling, the reverend gentleman sold his vault in a well known London cemetery, although two of his children were already buried there.

A Missionary Family.

The death of Mr. Percy Comber, a missionary on the Lower Congo, recalls the tragic fate of a remarkable family. Fired with the spirit of Moffat and Livingstone, Mr. Thomas Comber in 1876 essayed to

open up the Congo for the baptists, and for ten years he did pioneer's work with no visible results. He then died, and was soon followed by his wife. In 1885 his brother Sidney also fell a victim to the Congo fever while engaged in mission work. A little later a sister, working in Victoria, Western Africa, and but recently married to a missionary, was also stricken down by fever and died. In Mr. Percy Comber the last of the self-sacrificing enthusiasts has now been taken, and the aged father, who lives in South London, is the sole survivor of the missionary family. Mr. Stanley was an admirer of the Comber family, and spoke highly of their civilizing influence on the Congo.

FRAGMENTS OF THOUGHT.

Sins are easier kept out than driven out. Truth is violated by falsehood, and it may be equally outraged by silence.

Conscience is the eyes of the soul, and how troublesome is the least mite of dust falling in the eye, and how quickly does it water and weep upon the least grievance that affects it!—South.

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