

REDEMPTIVE POWER OF SUFFERING

Harold E. Luccock, in introducing his study of the International Sunday School lesson for April 28, current year, makes this significant expression: "The most important thing which ever happened in the world is the birth of an idea." This evidently is true if the idea is crystalized into proper form and action. Doubtless many an idea which, if put into concrete expression, would have been of untold value to the world, has vanished for lack of application.

As illustrations of the main thought: The lad Christopher Columbus, while sitting on the wharf at Genoa, Italy, and looking out over the sea, conceived the idea that the earth was round. That idea became so dominant that it gave direction to his life. Was the idea susceptible of demonstration? He believed it was and would prove it by sailing to the East Indies by going west. The result: the finding of the western hemisphere and a new world.

Watts saw the tea-kettle cover jump up and down while the water boiled in the kettle as it hung from the crane in the family fireplace. The idea born in Watts' mind was the power of steam when confined. The result: the steam engine and the vast machinery of the world run by steam power. Some one saw a spider's web suspended in the air by two silken threads to stationary objects, and this gave the idea which finally crystalized in the various forms of suspension bridges which span our rivers and mountain gorges and make our immense travel and transportation possible.

The germ of all human good is in the "birth of an idea." Its application by a demonstration is the proof of its utility and practicability.

What is true in physical life and the material world, as pointed out above, is no less true in the spiritual realm. All the laws in the material universe were in operation long before they were discovered by man. So, also, "The Law of the Cross." "Redemptive power through suffering" was in operation as a moral principle long before Isaiah conceived and announced it. For illustrations: Study the nomadic life of Abraham, Joseph in the Egyptian prison, Jacob's descendants in Goshen and the brickyards, Moses herding sheep in the desert, and David, though anointed for the throne of Israel, hunted as an outlaw by King Saul.

Isaiah, after denouncing by name the flagrant sins of Israel which provoked the judicial wrath of God, and their ultimate bondage in Babylon, "comforts" them with the assurance that they were to bless the world, not through national prosperity and power, but through adversity and suffering. Their opportunity to bless the world as a nation had been given them; but their prosperity and power had been made the occasion of forgetting God, turning to idols and rioting in all forms of individual, domestic and national sin.

"The law of compensation runs all through nature, and is exact in its operation. God makes no mistakes in His reckonings. Suffering may continue long after the sin has been forgiven." "The justice of our God will exact sufficient from us in the way of suffering. His clemency and mercy will never add a superfluous stroke from the scourge." Our times are in His hand. A period is fixed for suffering and trial. The suffering and bondage of Israel was fixed. Even the haughty spirit and oppressive hand of Babylon would be broken and the nation itself would be destroyed.

While suffering and adversity are the penal consequences of sin, God will, wherever possible,

make them conduce to correction and reformation. Israel's captivity effected a cure of idolatry. The national life of restored Israel was not like its former life. While far short of the life designed under the law, nevertheless the national life of Judea and the scattered colonies of Jews contributed much toward the redemption of the world.

Isaiah reaches the climactic expression of the idea of the "redemptive power of suffering" in the fifty-third chapter of his prophecy, where he "complains of man's incredulity, excuseth the scandal of the cross on which Christ suffered and died, by the benefits of His passion, and the good success thereof."

This great principle ran through all the sacrifices under the ceremonial law given by Moses. It is the essence of that expression of St Paul, "Without shedding of blood is no remission of sin." (Heb. 9:22 and Matt. 26:28).

The thoughtless worldling, the self-righteous moralist, and the worldly church member may scoff at a "bloody religion" if they please; still the principle of redemption through suffering is in the very constitution of the moral universe and has been through the ages.

Its greatest expression was in the crucifixion of Christ and the redemptive power of His suffering, manifest throughout Christendom in the transformation wrought in the individual, domestic and national life of those who believe in Jesus.

The supreme need of the world today is to do as St. Paul did as expressed by him: "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being made comfortable unto His death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." (Phil. 2:7-11).

Suffering is the inevitable consequence of sin. Redemption is through the power of Christ's suffering and death on the cross. He who neglects that "great salvation" will suffer that

" \* \* \* Death whose pang  
Outlasts the fleeting breath;  
Oh, what eternal horrors hang  
Around the second death!"

—C. E. Harroun.

SWEAR NOT AT ALL

Who says this? you ask. Jesus Christ says it. You know His name. You call Him it may be, your Lord. Now, Lord means master. He, therefore, your Lord and Master, hears men swear; for He knows and hears all things. He will also be your Judge. He says, "I say unto you, Swear not at all." Will you despise His voice?

And why should men swear? Does it give them any pleasure? The writer once met with a young man who through God's grace had repented of this sin, and forsaken it. The writer asked him what was the pleasure he used to find in swearing. "Pleasure, sir; none at all!" was his answer. And the only motive he could distinctly remember was an idea of its being manly to swear. But it is very unmanly. It is beneath a man to receive God's bounties, and

then abuse the Giver; to draw in breath only through God's goodness, and then to breathe it out in profaning His holy name. Is there then any pleasure in swearing? Has any one found any? What it is?

But further. Is there any profit in swearing? Is there anything gained by it in worldly matters? Do men respect a person more or trust him more for being a swearer? Far from it. If I were bargaining with a man about a horse, and he swore with an oath that the horse was sound, I should not believe him so readily as if he simply affirmed it without an oath. Because I should think thus with myself: I see this man does not mind breaking one of God's commandments, which forbids taking His name in vain; how then can I tell but, if it suits him, he will break another command, and lie, and cheat, and defraud me? When men tell the truth they do not need to swear to make men believe it. When Peter lied and said he did not know the Saviour, then he had to swear to make men believe him; it is just so now, men lie and then swear to it to make men believe it.

Is there then any profit in swearing? What have men gained by all their oaths? Not one farthing. How many good friends have they made by swearing? Not one. What good has their swearing done to their family? None at all. On the other hand, have they not lost in character, credit, and peace of mind, by this foolish practise? Who would for money swear over again all the oaths he had ever sworn? A minister was once talking in the streets of London, and heard a workingman swear a dreadful oath. He went up to him, and holding out half a crown, offered it to him if he would repeat that oath. The man stopped, considered, looked at the minister and his half crown, and said, "No, sir; do you think I will send my soul to hell for half a crown?" And yet he willingly did for nothing, that which money could not hire him to do!

Yet while there is no pleasure and no profit, there is great sin in swearing. Jesus Christ says, "Swear not at all;" God His heavenly Father, says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Every time men swear, they sin. And scarcely any sin can be committed so often as this. The drunkard, as bad as he is, can not commit his sin one-hundredth time so often as the swearer commits his. Try and reckon up the sins of swearing. How many times did a swearer swear yesterday? Ten times? "Ah, more than that." Twenty? Fifty? "I can not exactly tell," you say. "But suppose it were fifty times that a swearer swore yesterday. What of it?" What of it! Why, then at that rate he would swear in a year eighteen thousand two hundred and fifty times! And in ten years one hundred and eighty-two thousand five hundred times he will have idly, wantonly, profanely, taken God's name in vain. Hear again what Jesus Christ says: "I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."—The Christian.

WHILE WE LIVE LET US LIVE

"Live while you live," the epicure would say, "And seize the pleasure of the present day!" "Live while you live," the sacred preacher cries, "And give to God each moment as it flies!" Lord, in my view let both united be; I live in pleasure while I live in Thee.

—Philip Doddridge