

callous to suffering, blind to pain, deaf to supplication, bound hand and foot with chains of law so that he cannot rise and help.

There are three main theories of life which have been urged as explanations of the facts of human experience. The theory of the optimist is that all is well, everything is for the best. It looks out upon the world with rose-coloured glasses, in a spirit of hopefulness. The great sea of life is as placid to its gaze as is a lake nestling in the mountains, sun kissed and guarded from storms. Or life's bright and shining river knows only now and then a passing shadow. Life is like a day in June, unflecked by clouds. The theory of a pessimist is that all is wrong. The world is a hell of wretched misery and human existence is blighted with a curse. Schopenhauer, the apostle of despair, who voices the awful sentiment of this school, declared that this is the devil's world, and that life is so miserable that utter annihilation would be preferable. And the great Buddha, the founder of a religion which numbers millions, made the end of it extinction. When the soul enters Nirvana it is extinguished.

LIKE A LAMP BLOWN OUT.

Many modern poets are victims of this hopelessness as it was voiced in Shelley :

"I could lie down like a tired child
And weep away this life of care."

The Christian theory is that God rules above, that the world is a school of discipline, that God is able to over-rule seeming evil and to bring good out of it, and that all things work together for good to them that love God.

The problem of suffering faces us continually, and men and women who have felt its terrible effects ask what its meaning is and desire to know what purpose it serves. The question arises, if God is the author of the world, whose constant care over it never ceases, whence comes evil with its awful train of sorrow and suffering? The answer of the Bible is that all the evil and suffering that have fallen to man's lot can be traced directly to sin. St. Paul says that by one man sin entered

into the world and death by sin. We see that sin and death had their beginning together even as Milton hints :

"Of Man's first disobedience and the fruit,
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe."

When God looked out upon His creation, He declared that it was very good. But the entrance of sin marred it, corrupted man's heart, defiled his imagination, so that the first-born of men stained his hand in his brother's blood, and the wickedness of man God saw was great upon the earth.

Suffering, then, is a great fact of human experience. How is it to be faced and met? This question has been beyond human thought. Philosophy provides no sufficient answer. It attempts to rock the troubled soul to sleep, but it knows of no remedy for the heart's sorrow. There is still the old Epicurean answer—forget your troubles, put them out of your mind by thinking of something else, seek forgetfulness in pleasure. And the answer of the Stoics still survives, that a man should be free from passion, unmoved by joy or grief, and that it was a duty to bear pain and not to give way to repining. But hard facts often break down proud philosophy, and insensibility furnishes no cure. For when the heart is torn and bleeding, but no tears pass the eyes, it is like a deadly wound, which leaving no escape is

THE HARDEST TO CURE

and the most dangerous in character. The philosophy of tears is that they are a safety valve to an overburdened mind. Tennyson recognized this when he wrote of one who, grief-stricken, as home they brought her warrior dead, would have given way beneath the mental stress, if the sight of her child had not unsealed the fountain of tears.

We are not left to grope in darkness in the face of this problem. Scripture throws light upon it, which Christian experience has found to be true. As Balfour, the leader of the English House of Commons, points out in his "Foundations of Belief," the Christian's faith in

God's relation to man answers the problem. "For they worship one who is no remote contriver of a universe to whose ills He is indifferent. If they suffer, did He not, on their account, suffer also? If suffering falls not always on the most guilty, was He not innocent? Shall they cry aloud that the world is ill-designed for their convenience, when He for their sake subjected Himself to its conditions."

This is true testimony, for Jesus Christ is God's answer to the question. He experienced suffering in all its forms; of body, mind, and soul. He was the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; He drank the cup of affliction to the dregs; He endured calumny, insult, reproach and mockery; He knew what the loss of friendship meant and tasted poverty's hard lot. Above all He bore upon the cross, as representative of our humanity and as substitute for man, the sins of the whole world. And all this was for us. He tasted death for every man, was forsaken that we might never know despair; died that we might live, suffered to the depth of humiliation that we might be

PARTAKERS OF HIS GLORY.

He stooped to our grief that we might be companions of his friendship. He traced the mystery of pain and sorrow to its centre and showed how it may become a Divine discipline; showed light upon its whole path and made clear its end.

Suffering in this view is a school of character in which God Himself is the great teacher. His one great aim is to develop in us a Christ like character. His love is too deep and true to be indulgent and chastisement is not a sign of anger but a mark of love.

Suffering is a school of discipline in which the spiritual athlete is trained. God tests us by labours, griefs and losses and teaches us the way to gain the strength from them all. Suffering is the crucible of the spiritual life and even as the fire removes the dross from the silver, so pain and sorrow destroy the dross of self, as they send us to Christ, in Whom alone our hearts can find their rest.