

SPECIAL  
ARTICLES

## Our Contributors

BOOK  
REVIEWS

## BODILY SUFFERING.

All who believe in the providence and word of God recognize His hand in sickness or other physical ailments and discomforts. The Lord Jesus did not exaggerate in the least when he said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Nothing apparently is more casual than the tossing of pebbles into a cap or urn, and yet even these are under divine direction. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." A soldier in the tumult of battle "drew a bow at a venture," but it sped to the accomplishment of Jehovah's predicted purpose. Joseph's brethren threw him into a pit, from which he emerged to enter a dungeon, but God sent him before them to preserve life.

The omnipresence, the omniscience, the omnipotence, the very existence of God makes it certain that He touches everything, everywhere, whether with or without secondary cause; and any other view is as unphilosophical and unscientific as it is unscriptural. It is absurd, therefore, to suppose that sickness or any bodily suffering comes upon us by accident, or by the iron rule of a natural law that knows no master, and has no object. Sometimes it is sent as a chastening. "The Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick." It was well with the child, for it was safely sheltered in the bosom of Him who struck it, but the blow was designed to reach the father's heart. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."

Men are ready to accept a general providence, while denying a particular, as if there could be any general without particulars, or as if little things were not essential to the production of great results. They admit that God brings about the revolution of kingdoms, which rise and fall like corks struck with feathers in the game of shuttlecock, but they do not perceive that no event, connected with the end in view, can fly beyond the bounds of His providence. He, however is very explicit in asserting His control of all occurrences, either by His positive or permissive decrees. "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal." "The Lord killeth and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich: He bringeth low and lifteth up." "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?"

Nothing more, perhaps, need be said to those who bow before the authority of the sacred Scriptures to convince them that their bodily afflictions, no matter how sore they may be, are to be traced directly or indirectly to the will of God. Why He permits them is another question, and what Christians are to do, when smitten under His stroke is a question of very great importance, especially in these days. There are thousands of godly and sincere people who insist that the prayer of faith, if followed by anointing with oil, will rebuke and remove disease, and hence

that all medical or remedial agencies should be discarded, because their use implies a lack of confidence in the power and willingness of God to heal. Many of them claim, and no doubt truthfully, that they have been cured of divers maladies in answer to prayer, and they do not see why the benefits they have received should not be extended to others, and, indeed, to all sufferers.

But if we could calmly, and intelligently consider this subject, which is of vital moment to the sick, it must not be forgotten in the first place that similar claims, substantiated by abundant evidence, are put forth by those with whom the Christian can have no fellowship. Spiritualists, manifestly led by Satan, point with triumph to the numbers healed of deadly diseases by mediums. Christian Science, so called, that is not Christian, but wholly devilish in its blasphemous assertions and teachings, can tell of thousands who have been restored to health by their mutterings. Heaps of abandoned crutches, and other memorials of conquered disease at Lourdes, France, attest the reality of the benefit received by the pilgrims who crowd together for healing from the Virgin Mary. Scores of educated men and women bear witness to the healing power wielded by an utterly fanatical sect, known as "Overcomers," and marvellous cures are constantly reported as emanating from similar sources.

Of course it is not intimated that these indisputable facts disprove the genuineness of the cures wrought by the instrumentality of brethren who stand on much higher and holier ground. But they show that the believer should not be moved from Scripture by mere success. Long ago it was ordained that if a prophet give a sign or a wonder, and "the sign or the wonder come to pass," his prophesy was to be despised, and he himself put to death when he turned the people from the Lord. He tells us that the time is coming when false Christs and false prophets "shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect;" and in the last days, under the Anti-Christ, the false prophet "doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by those miracles which he hath power to do in the sight of the beast."

In the second place, most of the cures wrought by faith-healing, as it is called, are of nervous and hysterical character. Persons of morbid temperament can easily imagine that they have spinal disease, or cancer, or tumor, or consumption, or any other malady; and to them it is a horrible reality for a time. Anything that will take their minds away from themselves, and lead them to believe that restoration is possible, is usually an effective remedy. But a true child to God would rather be sick than to resort to methods that dishonour the Lord Jesus Christ, and are contrary to his word. Nor will he permit pious frauds, perpetrated in the interests of a theory, to go unrebuked. Thus when a person arose in a great faith-healing meeting, and declared that a diseased eye had been removed from his head, but as a result of his faith and anointing God had put a new eye in the empty socket, and healed the other eye, which was almost blind, every honest man, and particularly every Christian present, ought to have denounced the impostor.

In the third place, our faith-healing brethren as a general thing go too far or they do not go far enough. They lay great stress upon the power the Lord gave His apostles to heal the sick, but the commission extends much beyond this. "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons." "In My name shall they cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Those who claim supernatural power in the exercise of faith do not pretend to cleanse the lepers, to raise the dead, to cast out demons, to speak with new tongues, to take up noxious serpents, to drink poison; and yet surely they ought to be able to do these things as well as to heal, if they are acting under the apostolic commission.

In the fourth place, the cures wrought by the Lord Jesus and the apostles were instantaneous and complete. There was no slow and imperfect recovery, as with nearly all modern faith-healers, nor were there any failures, except in one instance of unbelief, when a father brought his son, grievously tormented by a foul spirit, to the disciples "that they should cast him out, and they could not." But the failures in the faith-healing of our day are vastly in excess of the number cured. The public knows only of those who have been restored to health, while perhaps every experienced pastor in the country is acquainted with some who have resorted in vain to this method of restoration. Probably not one in one hundred receives any permanent benefit from the professional faith-healers, and the disappointed sufferers are tempted to despair, lest the failure is to be found in their want of faith.

In the fifth place, the gift of healing is not bestowed upon all, as generally believed and taught. It is plainly written, "To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge, by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing, by the same Spirit. . . . Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? Admitting, then, that the gift of healing was not confined to the times of the apostles, but that it might be bestowed now if there was faith to receive the power, it does not follow that everyone has the gift, or that every sufferer can be relieved. Therefore, the assertions so often heard or read that anybody who has faith can heal or be healed, is utterly unscriptural, as is the common disregard of the injunction, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." A devout man or a pious woman, going about to call on the sick and to anoint them, often unsolicited, can by no possible stretch of the imagination be converted into the elders of the church. Oil was not only an emblem of the Holy Ghost, but it was a remedial agent constantly employed at that time; nor could the intelligent Christian fear that he is sinning against God in the employment of human remedies, when he remembers that an inspired prophet commanded a plaster of figs to be used for the recovery of a sick king; and that an inspired apostle directed a tired and exhausted preacher to drink no longer water, but to use a little wine for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities.