



## THE PAIN OF THE WORLD: HOW TO FACE IT.

By MARY CLIFFORD.

SOME one, falling asleep, oppressed by the pervading pain of the world, had a dream. She thought she was sitting in her room alone, weighed down with a sense of the unreachable misery always going on in sight and out of sight, when the door opened and a dear friend came in and sat down silently by her side. Not a word was said, but gradually comfort began to overshadow her, and then there rose a gleam of light shining round and a sense of divine promise was shed abroad.

That dream is a picture of the manner in which relief has come to me in very dark moments. Perhaps all my readers feel we have had a terrible time of pain in the world during the last two years. Armenia, Turkey, Greece, and India, have gone through anguish which we have realised as no sufferings can have been realised before. Telegrams and newspaper reports have reached us, and continue to reach us, while the battles, famines, and massacres, have been actually going on. Blameless people in great masses have suffered these things; there has been no escape for them, or, in our realisation, for us. As a matter of common sense we could only believe that the facts were a good deal worse than any report has represented them to be. We have heard how here and there faith and hope have disappeared, and we have looked into the darkness and thought of those sad words of Martha and Mary, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

It is because of these doubts and misgivings that I have asked you to face this matter to-day for a little while. We want some strong, definite comfort that will not fail when these waterfloods overwhelm us.

Now, as we sit alone, absorbed in these awful sorrows and wrongs—to children and ignorant men and women, to innocent animals, tortured preventably and unpreventably for centuries—what do we see? I see a door open in heaven, and out of it comes Christ, and He enters and sits down with us.

That is just what happened and what has comforted me, when all other comforts for the time failed.

Into this world of sorrow and mystery Christ came. We are never told whether in His manhood He understood the reason of the existence or the entrance of sin and misery into the world. It may have been hidden from Him as it is from us. But He came. All the anguish, the unnecessary suffering, the hereditary suffering, the fatal mistakes, the cruelty, the success of evil, went on round Him, as it does round us, and if any one ever felt the blackness and the burden of it all, He did. He not only felt the miseries, but He felt the dread of them just as we do. As we are, so He was. But all through He was satisfied with God. The name Father was more full and great and real to Him than to any of us; and there never was one moment when His whole being did not say, "My father, my God."

This seems to me solid comfort. We have the simple fact to fall back on that our Lord Jesus Christ, who was in the midst and faced the worst, was never shaken. He knew the Father, and could wait.

Now our Lord must have known the staggering effect on our faith of this mass of suffering. Our own personal trials are not a difficulty, nor are the beautifully borne trials of good enlightened people. We ourselves feel the need of discipline, and we see its valuable fruits in others. It was those things that seem to tell against the justice and the good government of God, that our Lord knew would threaten our belief: the apparent defeat of His purposes when He was put to death; the failure in character of His disciples; the seeming absence of the restraining grace of God; the awful miseries coming on both innocent and guilty in that very city of Jerusalem.

He who realised the force of these things was always trying to prevent His followers from being dismayed and disappointed because of them. Three times, you remember, He warned them, each time with added detail, that He was not at this time going to reign but to die, and in the eyes of men to fail. Much of His later teaching dealt with the period of national chaos that would come instead of the ordered kingdom they had expected. And one of His disciples He earnestly put on his guard against the despair that was likely to follow a great lapse into particularly mean sin. Even to this day non-Christians speak of the failure of Christianity, and it was clearly in our Lord's mind to fortify us against the discouragements which tend to such a view.

It all points to this conclusion. We, placed as we are as to education and light and knowledge, are in a position of sore temptation as to doubt and depression. We had better face the matter. Whatever we are, we must be true. We want to see clearly what comfort we have a right to take. Some day, when all is clear, I believe we shall thank God for letting us live here and now.

This paper was thought out chiefly in Cumberland. After a spell of fine weather, rain and storms set in, and instead of lake and ghyll and fell shining in ever-changing lights, the clouds poured down hopeless drenching rain and we wandered wet-footed among bogs and swollen streams and dripping trees. One evening, when the low-hanging clouds oppressed us with a sense of menace and pitilessness, quite suddenly there appeared high up a space of fair sky, gold and crimson and clear pale blue. Instantly we travelled in thought to the mountain top, where the uncertain footing and baffling mists would have vanished, and where with an unveiled sun we should look over the wide view and see the broad beneficent relations and harmony of a great landscape. Now, if we mount and rise above the misery and perplexity pressing

round us, and try to view the world from a little way up and off, what do we see? A world spiritually and morally still in the process of making. Amid much darkness we can see the movement of a tide making for righteousness, and we are conscious of the Spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters. Against that slowly rising tide is always swelling a strong current of evil, sin, lawlessness, which sometimes seems for a time to have its way unchecked. It is only by long watching that we are sure the tide is slowly winning its way.

"For while the tired waves vainly breaking  
Seem here no painful inch to gain,  
Far back through creeks and inlets making  
Comes silent, flooding in, the main." \*

Now the problem is an intensely interesting one how, in such a world, could a holy Creator fit His living creatures to co-operate with His purpose of attaining goodness and perfection?

What we observe is this.

First, a condition of wonderful interdependence. Every living being belongs to all the rest. Past generations helped to make us; we are helping to make those who will come in the future. None live or die alone. If we rise, we lift others up; if we fall, we drag others down.

This is all perfectly familiar to us. We see the unoffending child of the drunkard born with an hereditary temptation to drink, and we see the child of the good father, from no merit of its own, born with healthy instincts and desires. It is this interdependence which brings the hard things. Where would the Arab slave trade of Africa be to-day, if the Christians of the sixth century had not so debased their religion that Mahomet, a reformer on wrong lines, arose?

So here, in mercy, comes in the warning note of pain. Wrong, cruelty, injustice are not evil alone; they are miserable, they hurt. Therefore at this very point we begin to see the law of sacrifice, the law by which the sting of evil may be taken from pain, making it a sacred and even a beautiful thing. According to this law all life is won through suffering. The seed dies before the new germ sees the light. Every birth means anguish, every effort means exhaustion, every victory means a struggle; through the grave and gate of death comes resurrection.

By this law the strong serves the weak, the greater yields its life for the less. It is clear that in the government of the world pain is on the side of deliverance. I know some will doubt whether this is true, remembering the seemingly bad effect of suffering on some natures, the deterioration, selfishness and loss

\* Arthur Clough.