

# THE BIBLE



# CHRISTIAN

TRUTH, HOLINESS,

LIBERTY, LOVE.

VOL. IV.

MONTREAL, SEPTEMBER, 1847.

No. 9.

## SIN COMPARED TO DISEASE.

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Sin is often compared in the Scriptures to a disease, and the recovering from sin is represented under the image of healing. My intention is, to carry out this comparison to some points of useful, religious meditation.

Before going into the proposed detail we may observe, in general, that sin and disease resemble each other, in some respects, in the relation which they bear to our nature. Our nature is liable to both, but it was made, as its end, for neither. Nor was the soul made sinful, any more than the body was made sick. As their natural and perfect condition, our bodies were made for health, and our souls were made for virtue. Sin brings disorder into the moral constitution, as truly as disease brings disorder into the physical constitution, of our being.

Again; there is in our bodies a fine and beautiful organization, an exquisite adjustment of one part to another, which disease deranges. So does sin derange the moral system. It disturbs the healthful order of the affections. It pushes some of them to excess and goads them to fever, while others are struck with the chill of death. They flow in their wonted channels perhaps, but with irregular and intermitted action—not with the calm and even pulsations of vigorous life. Like obstructions in the bodily organs, like the inroads of disease upon the nerves and senses, like the jars of nervous irritability, like the film that dims the eye, or the heaviness that settles upon the ear, or the clog that weighs upon the limbs and fetters every muscular power, such is sin to the soul; it brings obstruction and pain, darkness and disorder and ruin, upon the whole moral constitution of our nature.

The various forms of the moral disease, also, answer to the varieties of physical disease. There is the moral fever—the passion inflamed with pursuit, when all healthful moral aliment and all the powers of the soul are converted into one raging and consuming desire. Again, there is a stupor in the soul—the moral paralysis. The mind is insensible to the calls of conscience and religion, it scarcely feels the pain—or even the consciousness—of rejecting them, so deep is its lethargy; it hears, but does not understand; it sees, but does not perceive; it has but a dull, benumbed and half-conscious sense of any thing that spiritually concerns it: that, I repeat, is the fearful moral paralysis—from which the soul must be aroused, or it will soon sink to utter perdition. There is the moral delirium. There is a mind which fancies it is well, when it is sick almost unto death; which although surrounded with signs of moral ruin, and an object of pity to every beholder, yet shocks the ear of every thoughtful spectator with its insane and boisterous merriment; which though essentially poor, and miserable, and destitute, yet thinks itself, and would have others think it, rich and fortunate, increased in goods, and full of goodly prospects. Many such are around us, morally insane, or palsied in every moral faculty, or burning with the fever of the passions. And many more are there, who are suffering in all the intermediate stages of moral disease. The variety of cases, indeed, is such that no limit can be set to it, and no description within the range of our present reflections can do it any justice.

Let us, however, attempt to bring before our minds this unhappy condition, in which the world is suffering, under some other and more detailed points of comparison.

Sin, let us observe, then, is like disease in its origin, i. e. in its causes, in its commencement,—in its progress;—in its effects;—in its remedies;—and in the process of cure.

It is like disease in its origin—in its causes and its commencement. There is a liability to both these evils, we have already said, in our nature; there is a liability, and that perhaps is all that we can say of what our nature does to create in us either disease or sin. But when we pass beyond this general and

primary account of the matter, we come to distinct causes—to causes, for which men are responsible. Of disease the world, and the civilized world especially, is full of causes, which are artificial, which are originated by man, by modes of dress and of living, by processes of cookery and distillation, and by those habits of mind, those cares, anxieties and sorrows, which are superinduced by an artificial state of society. How much there is that is wrong in the whole fabric and plan of civilized life among us, in its very nurture and economy from the first step of our existence to the last—how much is wrong in all this, is a question which no reformer, as I apprehend, has yet sounded to its depths. We are a race far more weak and sickly than the savages, far more so than our British ancestors, far more so than the elder tribes of every nation; we are such now by our very constitution, and our children are doomed to be such after us, and when or how the evil is to be remedied it is not easy to see. But be this as it may, such, or similar at least, are the causes of sin. They lie, many of them certainly, in circumstances, in the very foundations of society, in a wrong education, in prevailing false maxims, in artificial temptations, in the whole economy and in the very atmosphere of civilized life. Much occasion as there is to be disheartened at the wrong which men intentionally and wilfully do, there is still more cause to despair of remedying the evil which they do unconsciously—the evil which they do, in business, in conversation, in the scenes of recreation, and never call it evil because all along for years and through generations the world has been going on in the same way.

The operation of these causes is often imperceptible; and so it is, that sin in the heart, like disease in the body, takes its origin, it is scarcely possible to tell when, or where, or in what manner. It steals into the mind like the breath of a tainted atmosphere. As a man walketh forth amidst the evening damps, and unconsciously draweth from some noxious exhalation the seeds of a disease that is yet to destroy him; so doth he walk forth in the presence of evil moral influences, perchance at the same hour of eventide, and from the surrounding atmosphere of bad example, from the poisonous breath of evil communings, are engendered those vague impressions, those lax and licentious ideas, those guilty thoughts, whose fruit is death. If we look to have disease or sin present itself before us in some definite and alarming aspect at its first assault, we shall be greatly mistaken. When a disorder has become fever or consumption, it has indeed taken a distinct form, but it has then advanced far from its first secret lodgement in the system. And when the moral disorder has become intemperance or avarice, it has taken many fatal steps from its first imperceptible beginnings. Therefore the truest wisdom is prevention. It is, to guard with the strictest prudence, with habitual watch and care, all the avenues through which evil enters.

The progress of sin too is like that of disease. Sometimes it is imperceptible. The man has become worse and worse, more selfish, self-indulgent, passionate, proud, sensual and corrupt; low purposes and mean thoughts have usurped the place of high and pure sentiments; but all this has taken place so gradually, that he is but half-conscious of the change that has passed upon him, and like many a man in declining health, he will not admit that he is sick, and that his soul needeth to be healed. But the progress of sin is sometimes more visibly marked; its character is more distinct, and its symptoms more definite. It is like a fever or plague; it seizes its victim as with the fury of a demon, and hurries him to swift destruction. Again—and this is perhaps the most common case,—it is fluctuating. How often, in sickness, is the patient reported to be one day better, and another day worse; now the symptoms are more encouraging, and then they are more alarming. So it is often with the course of the transgressor. At one time his case appears very dark and discouraging. His evil habits gain strength and for a time hold irresistible sway over him. But now

in the midst of this terrible career, it is very likely that there will be a temporary reform, and his friends will say, there is hope of his recovery. Oh! those hopes of moral recovery—how do they encourage and disappoint, allure and blight the affections of anxious and watchful friendship! And thus will the man hold on his irregular and troubled course; ever growing worse, though sometimes seeming better—ever growing worse and worse;—weaker to resist evil, and more impatient after every temporary self-denial to plunge into new indulgences, till at last, if he repent not, he will arrive at that dreadful condition where hope is extinguished, where the body and the soul together are sinking into ruin.

Again, the effects of disease may illustrate the effects of sin. Disease prostrates the system, lets down the tone of useful and vigorous action at every step, enfeebles every limb and sense and physical faculty, and ultimately makes of the man a child, causes him to be timid, irresolute, faltering, disheartened, and finally brings him to that state when his life is a grievance to himself and a grief to others. What one of these effects is not emblematic of some portion of the experience of every moral offender? Does not sin, in every form, whether of excess or defect, of violence or indolence, does it not tend to prostrate the energies of its victim? Is it not ever hasting to bring about that result in which a man is a curse to himself and others? Does it not almost invariably bring feebleness, faintness, and irresolution, into the soul?

Perhaps it will be said that it does not immediately. Neither does that process by which disease is consummated give any such tokens, in its earlier stages, of its destructive tendency. The effects, the visible and sensible effects at least, often lie at a considerable distance from the causes. The dyspeptic patient often feels better for free living, to-day; but he will feel worse next week. And so it is true that that course of sensual and selfish indulgence, which is an offence alike against medicine and morality, and with which some set out in the career of life, has sometimes, for a season, no visibly bad effect. The youthful offender flourishes as the green bay-tree. There are health and high spirits; there is something that seems very like happiness; and the poor victim rejoices in his heart, and is persuaded that his is a very good way to live in. "Your strict, solemn, over-virtuous people he is very sorry for. No spirit! no life! no courage!—they dare not be happy." Ah! how differently will tell a few years' experience of a dissolute course. Whose then will be the spirit, the life, the courage? Will they be his, who wakes up stupid, sullen, peevish, pale, and paralyzed, from the last night's debauch? Will they be his, whose soul and body have together become diseased and broken down? Will they be his, who stands a wreck of life, upon the borders of the grave?

Let us pass now to consider the remedies of disease, whether it be physical or moral. And the comparison will be sufficiently understood, when we say, that for the cure of moral diseases no nostrums, no panaceas, are to be relied on. Nothing is safe but a course of wholesome, judicious, careful treatment. The moral, as well as the medical patient is to feel, that if he tampers with his disease, he is very likely never to get well. He is not to let the disorder of his soul run on, under a notion that he may by and by apply some grand prescription of spiritual quackery, and all will be sound and strong again.

The wish has perhaps occurred to every one in sickness and pain,—the idea at least has occurred, that there might have been some grand restorative, some elixir, some fountain opened, which would at a single draught have healed every wound, assuaged every pain, and cured every raging disease. But an instant's reflection must have showed us, that such a provision, so apparently gracious at first view, would be the most fatal of all evils. It would be, for it would enable men to dispense with all that wholesome care and moderation, which are so necessary to the order and virtue of Society.—So must we regard all moral specifics of quick and sovereign efficacy for saving the

people from the power, and pain, and threatened destruction of sin. No doubt, great cures will be talked of under this extravagant system of practice, and sometimes, by the force of imagination and of circumstances, great cures will be effected. Much more will be made of them, than of ordinary cases of healing; statements and names will be published, to prove the efficacy of the extraordinary medicines invented for the cure of the soul, and to induce others to take them; there will be much excitement about the new measures for spiritual healing; but all this while, the moral health of the people will suffer. Just so far as they rely upon spiritual nostrums and specifics, will they neglect the habitual care of themselves.—Just so often as they resort to these methods of sudden and extraordinary practice, will they be superficially dealt with, imperfectly cured, and ultimately injured.

No, the process of recovery from sin is slow. Such is all healing of chronic diseases—i. e. of diseases of long standing, which are fixed in the constitution; and sin is a chronic disease. There are indeed sudden disorders in the moral constitution, which may be speedily healed. Some passion may be urged to fever, and hurried to indulgence; and discovery may bring about a crisis, or the strength of the moral nature may interpose an effectual check, and in a few days there may be a complete recovery. But not so with that diseased state of the soul, that moral debility, which has been brought on by a long course of sinful indulgence or sinful neglect. From that state a man must rise by little and little, by a regular, patient, daily care and prudence, by a constant and persevering repetition of little attentions, or by fixed and almost insensible habits, and not by any notable and grand practice. It is not so much the power of medicine, then, however judiciously applied, that is to recover the constitution, as it is a strict regimen and healthful exercise.

I say, regimen. Nothing, perhaps, better illustrates the spiritual care of ourselves which is necessary, than what in medical practice is commonly called dieting. There is nothing in the physical care, which is more difficult than this, or in which so many patients utterly fail. They can do some great thing, they can go abroad on journeys for health, they can be much excited about the matter and sigh to be well; they can apply to a physician, they can take medicine, they can use all the resources of the most extravagant practice, be it steaming or cauterizing, drenching with flood, or burning with fire; but they cannot use a little moderation! for that will take a long time, and require a great deal of care: and a hundred patients will fail here, where one will fail in any other point. Moderation, restraint, dieting!—many abhor the very idea of it; and had rather die than diet; and they will die, for the want of nothing but prudence. So it is in the moral course. Protracted, perpetual self-restraint is the only cure for multitudes; and yet they will do any thing—attend meetings, rush into excitements, make much ado, use prescriptions, seek counsel only to resist it, and after all suffer tortures and vent groans of remorse—any thing will they submit to, but sober, strict, daily, hourly, self-denial. And yet this is the only way in which they can be saved: and they who rely on any other means are not saved.—They are only to use the physician's phrase, patched up for a time; the moral disease is only held in occasional check; and though they may be called Christians and may have a standing in the church, they go on weak, inefficient, halting, now better and now worse, now recovering and then falling, to their dying day.

I say, again, that for moral healing, there must be a regular and constant exercise of the moral faculties. It is not enough to submit to a certain course of moral treatment. Many are willing to do that. They are willing to go to church and passively to listen; they are willing to read a book about the spiritual discipline, and they hope that it will do them good, but it will not do them good; and nothing will do them good, unless they put their moral powers to vigorous exer-