

on the horizon. Our earthly life is, however, for the most of us perfectly enjoyable. We thank God for this fact. Our world is not a place of unmitigated torment. We thank our Father in Heaven for the peals of joyous laughter, that often, for a time, drown the wail of suffering. We thank Him for the smiles of happiness that often hide the tears of misery. We thank Him for the rays of hope, by which, ever and anon, he dispels the darkness of despair. But we think that it will be readily granted by every one that beneath the rippling waves, which sparkle in the sunbeams of joy, on the great stream of human life, there is a deep undercurrent of suffering. God is making the book of Providence from the record of men's bitter experiences.

Suffering is a restraint on wickedness. In the present life God uses it to curb licentiousness. He restrains, if He does not chain, sin by pain. Every transgressor of law makes his own scourge or forges his own fetters. The dark sea of human depravity would soon engulf our world altogether were no limits set to its swelling tide by the banks of suffering and death. Were the inhabitants of the earth ripe for extermination we would not require the waters of a second deluge to sweep them away. Only let us have the fountains of iniquity opened up—all the wild passions of men let loose—and all the barriers by which suffering opposes the overflowing of evil removed, and the whole human race would soon be buried in the grave of its own corruption. Suppose a state of human society in which disease in all its hideous forms yields pleasure instead of pain—that sensuality produces delight with surfeit—that all desires may be freely indulged without causing misery—that the grossest appetites may be fed without producing satiety—that vice wins honour instead of disgrace, and crime is rewarded instead of being punished—then it is not more certain that the corpse would putrify than that society would destroy itself. By the penalty of suffering man is induced to respect laws whose operations secure the purity and permanence of human society.

Common experience abundantly proves the fact that the way of transgressors is hard. Vice is the seed of misery. Great sinners are generally great sufferers. It is not among the virtuous but the vicious that the greatest amount of wretchedness is found. There is far more weeping and wailing on the broad way with all its pleasures than on the narrow way with all its self denial. Vice impoverishes and ruins thousands for one that it enriches. The dregs and pests of society are for the most part vicious and godless. Ungodly communities are generally hot-beds of crime. Abodes of misery are often dens of iniquity. Profligacy is the parent of poverty; sensuality is the begetting cause of disease and death; dishonesty is the pathway to disgrace; the haunts of vice are the banqueting-halls of wretchedness and destitution.

Much vice is restrained by the fear of punishment. Men who have no fear of sin dread its consequences. They may care nothing about offending God, they are careful not to injure their health. They may have no conscientious scruples, but they are frightened of losing their money. They do not fear the anger of God, but they fear the penalty of disgrace. The dread of the felon's cell, or the gallows, prevents many a criminal act. God prevents wickedness by making suffering the penalty of transgression.

Suffering develops character. The deepest, most lasting, and most powerful experiences of our life are begotten in suffering. Our characters are moulded not so much by what we enjoy as by what we endure. It is the shaking of the storm that fastens the roots of the oak firmly in the earth. It is the winds of trouble that fasten the roots of character deep in the soil of our being. The veterans in life's great battle are not rocked in the lap of luxury and care, but in the cradle of hardship and suffering. The wounds of sorrow may lose their pain, but they leave their scar behind them, and often, unconsciously to ourselves, like the healed-up wounds of the soldier, they form the most prominent features of our characters. The marks of trial become the evidences of manhood.