

poseless, when placed in positions of difficulty and responsibility, have exhibited powers of character before unsuspected; and where we before saw only pliancy and self-indulgence, we now see strength, valor, and self-denial.

As there are no blessings which may not be perverted into evils, so there are no trials which may not be converted into blessings. All depends on the manner in which we profit by them or otherwise. Perfect happiness is not to be looked for in this world. If it could be secured, it would be found profitless. The hollowest of all gospels is the gospel of ease and comfort. Difficulty, and even failure, are far better teachers. Sir Humphry Davy said: "Even in private life, too much prosperity either injures the moral man, and occasions conduct which ends in suffering, or it is accompanied by the workings of envy, calumny, and malevolence of others."

Failure improves tempers and strengthens the nature. Even sorrow is in some mysterious way linked with joy and associated with tenderness. John Bunyan once said how, "if it were lawful, he could even pray for greater trouble, for the greater comfort's sake." When surprise was expressed at the patience of a poor Arabian woman under heavy affliction, she said, "When we look on God's face we do not feel His hand."

Suffering is doubtless as divinely appointed as joy, while it is much more influential as a discipline of character. It chastens and sweetens the nature, teaches patience and resignation, and promotes the deepest as well as the most exalted thought.\*

\*"What is it," says Mr. Helps, "that promotes the most and the deepest thought in the human race? It is not learning; it is not the conduct of business; it is not even the impulse of the affections. It

"The best of men  
That e'er wore earth about Him was a sufferer;  
A soft, meek, patient, humble, tranquil spirit;  
The first true gentleman that ever breathed."\*

Suffering may be the appointed means by which the highest nature of man is to be disciplined and developed. Assuming happiness to be the end of being, sorrow may be the indispensable condition through which it is to be reached. Hence St. Paul's noble paradox descriptive of the Christian life—"As chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

Even pain is not all painful. On one side it is related to suffering, and on the other to happiness. For pain is remedial as well as sorrowful. Suffering is a misfortune as viewed from the one side, and a discipline as viewed from the other. But for suffering, the best part of many men's natures would sleep a deep sleep. Indeed, it might almost be said that pain and sorrow were the indispensable conditions of some men's success, and the necessary means to evoke the highest development of their genius. Shelley has said of poets:

"Most wretched men are cradled into poetry by wrong,  
They learn in suffering what they teach in song."

is suffering; and that, perhaps, is the reason why there is so much suffering in the world. The angel who went down to trouble the waters and to make them healing, was not, perhaps, intrusted with so great a boon as the angel who benevolently inflicted upon the sufferers the disease from which they suffered."—*Brevia*.

\* These lines were written by Decker, in a spirit of boldness equal to its piety. Hazlitt has said of them, that they "ought to embalm his memory to every one who has a sense either of religion, or philosophy, or humanity, or true genius."



Does any one suppose that Burns would have sung as he did had he been rich, respectable, and "kept a gig;" or Byron, if he had been a prosperous, happily-married Lord Privy Seal or Postmaster-general?

Sometimes a heart-break rouses an impassive nature to life. "What does he know," said a sage, "who has not suffered?" When Dumas asked Reboul, "What made you a poet?" his answer was, "Suffering!" It was the death, first of his wife, and then of his child, that drove him into solitude for the indulgence of his grief, and eventually led him to seek and find relief in verse.\* It was also to a domestic affliction that we owe the beautiful writings of Mrs. Gaskell. "It was as a recreation, in the highest sense of the word," says a recent writer, speaking from personal knowledge, "as an escape from the great void of a life from which a cherished presence had been taken, that she began that series of exquisite creations which has served to multiply the number of our acquaintances and to enlarge even the circle of our friendships."†

Much of the best and most useful work done by men and women has been done amidst affliction—sometimes as a relief from it, sometimes from a sense of duty overpowering personal sorrow. "If I had not been so great an invalid," said Dr. Darwin to a friend, "I should not have done nearly so much work as I have been able to accomplish." So Dr. Donne, speaking of his illnesses, once said: "The advantage you and my other friends have by my frequent fevers is,

\* Reboul, originally a baker of Nismes, was the author of many beautiful poems—among others, of the exquisite piece known in this country by its English translation, entitled, "The Angel and the Child."

† "Cornhill Magazine," vol. xvi., p. 322.

that I am so much the oftener at the gates of Heaven; and by the solitude and close imprisonment they reduce me to, I am so much the oftener at my prayers, in which you and my other dear friends are not forgotten."

Schiller produced his greatest tragedies in the midst of physical suffering almost amounting to torture. Handel was never greater than when, warned by palsy of the approach of death, and struggling with distress and suffering, he sat down to compose the great works which have made his name immortal in music. Mozart composed his great operas, and last of all his "Requiem," when oppressed by debt, and struggling with a fatal disease. Beethoven produced his greatest works amidst gloomy sorrow, when oppressed by almost total deafness. And poor Schubert, after his short but brilliant life, laid it down at the early age of thirty-two; his sole property at his death consisting of his manuscripts, the clothes he wore, and sixty-three florins in money. Some of Lamb's finest writings were produced amidst deep sorrow; and Hood's apparent gayety often sprang from a suffering heart. As he himself wrote,

"There's not a string attuned to mirth,  
But has its chord in melancholy."

Again, in science, we have the noble instance of the suffering Wollaston, even in the last stages of the mortal disease which afflicted him, devoting his numbered hours to putting on record, by dictation, the various discoveries and improvements he had made, so that any knowledge he had acquired calculated to benefit his fellow-creatures might not be lost.

Afflictions often prove but blessings in disguise. "Fear not the darkness," said the Persian sage; it "conceals perhaps the springs of the waters of life." Experience is often



bitter, but wholesome; only by its teaching can we learn to suffer and be strong. Character, in its highest forms, is disciplined by trial, and "made perfect through suffering." Even from the deepest sorrow the patient and thoughtful mind will gather richer wisdom than pleasure ever yielded.

"The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,  
Lets in new light through chinks that Time has made."

"Consider," said Jeremy Taylor, "that sad accidents and a state of afflictions is a school of virtue. It reduces our spirits to soberness, and our counsels to moderation; it corrects levity, and interrupts the confidence of sinning. . . . God, who in mercy and wisdom governs the world, would never have suffered so many sadnesses, and have sent them, especially, to the most virtuous and the wisest men, but that He intends they should be the seminary of comfort, the nursery of virtue, the exercise of wisdom, the trial of patience, the venturing for a crown, and the gate of glory."\*

And again: "No man is more miserable than he that hath no adversity. That man is not tried, whether he be good or bad; and God never crowns those virtues which are only *faculties* and *dispositions*; but every *act* of virtue is an ingredient unto reward."†

Prosperity and success of themselves do not confer happiness; indeed, it not unfrequently happens that the least successful in life have the greatest share of true joy in it. No man could have been more successful than Goethe—possessed of splendid health, honor, power, and sufficiency of this world's goods—and yet he confessed that he had not, in the course of his life, enjoyed five weeks of genuine

\* "Holy Living and Dying," ch. ii., sec. 6.

† *Ibid.*, ch. iii., sec. 6.

pleasure. So the Caliph Abdalrahman, in surveying his successful reign of fifty years, found that he had enjoyed only fourteen days of pure and genuine happiness.\* After this, might it not be said that the pursuit of mere happiness is an illusion?

Life, all sunshine without shade, all happiness without sorrow, all pleasure without pain, were not life at all—at least not human life. Take the lot of the happiest—it is a tangled yarn. It is made up of sorrows and joys; and the joys are all the sweeter because of the sorrows; bereavements and blessings, one following another, making us sad and blessed by turns. Even death itself makes life more loving; it binds us more closely together while here. Dr. Thomas Browne has argued that death is one of the necessary conditions of human happiness, and he supports his argument with great force and eloquence. But when death comes into a household, we do not philosophize—we only feel. The eyes that are full of tears do not see; though in course of time they come to see more clearly and brightly than those that have never known sorrow.

The wise person gradually learns not to expect too much from life. While he strives for success by worthy methods, he will be prepared for failures. He will keep his mind open to enjoyment, but submit patiently to suffering. Wailings and complainings of life are never of any use; only cheerful and continuous working in right paths are of real avail.

Nor will the wise man expect too much from those about him. If he would live at peace with others, he will bear and forbear. And even the best have often foibles of char-

\* Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," vol. x., p. 40.



acter which have to be endured, sympathized with, and perhaps pitied. Who is perfect? Who does not suffer from some thorn in the flesh? Who does not stand in need of toleration, of forbearance, of forgiveness? What the poor imprisoned Queen Caroline Matilda, of Denmark, wrote on her chapel-window ought to be the prayer of all—"Oh! keep me innocent! make others great."

Then, how much does the disposition of every human being depend upon their innate constitution and their early surroundings; the comfort or discomfort of the homes in which they have been brought up; their inherited characteristics; and the examples, good or bad, to which they have been exposed through life! Regard for such considerations should teach charity and forbearance to all men.

At the same time, life will always be to a large extent what we ourselves make it. Each mind makes its own little world. The cheerful mind makes it pleasant, and the discontented mind makes it miserable. "My mind to me a kingdom is," applies alike to the peasant as to the monarch. The one may be in his heart a king, as the other may be a slave. Life is for the most part but the mirror of our own individual selves. Our mind gives to all situations, to all fortunes, high or low, their real characters. To the good, the world is good; to the bad, it is bad. If our views of life be elevated—if we regard it as a sphere of useful effort, of high living and high thinking, of working for others' good as well as our own—it will be joyful, hopeful, and blessed. If, on the contrary, we regard it merely as affording opportunities for self-seeking, pleasure, and aggrandizement, it will be full of toil, anxiety, and disappointment.

There is much in life that, while in this state, we can never comprehend. There is, indeed, a great deal of mys-

tery in life—much that we see "as in a glass darkly." But though we may not apprehend the full meaning of the discipline of trial through which the best have to pass, we must have faith in the completeness of the design of which our little individual lives form a part.

We have each to do our duty in that sphere of life in which we have been placed. Duty alone is true; there is no true action but in its accomplishment. Duty is the end and aim of the highest life; the truest pleasure of all is that derived from the consciousness of its fulfillment. Of all others, it is the one that is most thoroughly satisfying, and the least accompanied by regret and disappointment. In the words of George Herbert, the consciousness of duty performed "gives us music at midnight."

And when we have done our work on earth—of necessity, of labor, of love, or of duty—like the silk-worm that spins its little cocoon and dies, we too depart. But, short though our stay in life may be, it is the appointed sphere in which each has to work out the great aim and end of his being to the best of his power; and when that is done, the accidents of the flesh will affect but little the immortality we shall at last put on:

"Therefore we can go die as sleep, and trust  
Half that we have  
nto an honest, faithful grave,  
Making our pillows either down or dust!"







