

WHY MUST I SUFFER?

By F. J. REMILER, C. M.

SUFFERING! Is anything more commonly man's lot? Is anything harder to bear? Is there not, even for the most perfect men, one form or other in the range of suffering which would be found a trial? Who then among us but needs consolation? Who but needs at least to be forearmed?

In the following fifteen reasons why God permits suffering, we trust the earnest reader will find strength and consolation, which under God's grace will disarm suffering of some of its bitterness, and make a blessing of what is often enough a stumbling block.

Reasons Why You Must Suffer.

First Reason: SHARING THE CONSEQUENCES OF ORIGINAL SIN.

Of the many reasons why you must suffer, the first and principal one is this: *As a child of Adam and a member of the great human family you must, like all the rest of men, endure your share of the painful consequence of original sin.*

Man's Original Endowments.

If there were no original sin, suffering would be unknown among the children of men. Conditions of life would be entirely different than they are now, for we would be living in that state of marvelous perfection in which Adam was created, a perfection which would exclude every physical and moral evil more effectually than the bright rays of the rising sun banish from the earth the darkness of night.

But in what would this perfection consist? It would consist in the first place in the endowments of what is called *Pure Human Nature*. By this is meant that we would possess the faculties of our soul—memory, understanding, and free will—and the members, organs and senses of our body, in that degree of completeness which would be required to make us what we were designed to be—rational beings—composed of a spiritual soul and an animal body. We would possess, without any defect or deficiency, all the qualities necessary to make us perfect in our order of being, namely a keen mind, a faithful memory, a strong will, and the perfection of bodily form, beauty, health, and vigor. There would be an entire absence of those numerous defects of soul and body which we now labor under because of the deterioration brought on by sin.

In the second place, we would be enriched with the endowments of what is known as the *Perfection of Supernature*. At our entrance into the world the gift of supernatural grace would be conferred on us, by which we would be elevated high above the plane of pure nature and adopted by God as His most dear children, with the right and title to the endless enjoyment of the glory of heaven. After having lived in bliss and happiness on this earth for the length of time decreed by God we would be translated, without tasting the bitterness of death, into "the kingdom

prepared for us from before the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25, 37).

In the third place, this elevation to the state of super nature would include the bestowal of a number of extraordinary endowments which constitute what is called the *Perfection of Preternature*. We would possess an extensive knowledge of natural and super natural truths; we would be free from ignorance and from liability to error in the acquisition of new knowledge; we would also be free from evil concupiscence because our inclinations and the so-called passions would be so perfectly at the command of the will that they could not become rebellious nor impel us to commit sin. In addition we would possess two very remarkable endowments, the one of *Impassibility* or freedom from every form of suffering, and the other of *Immortality* or freedom from the painful ordeal of death. God created man incorruptible and immortal. Death was not meant for him.

In a word we would all be the happy heirs of that vast assemblage of wonderful gifts which Adam received in his creation and which he possessed up to the moment of his fall from grace.

The Effects of Our Disinheritance.

The effects produced by our disinheritance are the following:

First, we were completely stripped of *all the endowments of supernature*. We lost sanctifying grace and with it the sonship of children of God and the right and title to heaven. No longer well beloved children of God, we were children of wrath and outcasts from our home in heaven. Only for the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ heaven would have remained closed against us forever.

Second, we also completely lost *all the endowments of preternature*—our freedom from ignorance, concupiscence, sufferings and death. Our intellect has become clouded; our will greatly weakened, and our passions have grown turbulent and rebellious; we suffer much from sickness and disease, from the elements, from accidents and catastrophes, from famines and wars; we must endure the natural results of our own sins and of the sins of others, such as unkindness, hatred, deceit, injustice, oppression, cruelty and the like. And finally, we must undergo the penalty of death. "It is appointed unto all men once to die" (Heb. 9, 27).

Third, while we did *not incur the loss of the gifts of pure nature*, since these are essential for our existence as human beings, we nevertheless suffered a great deterioration in them. Our natural faculties were much impaired. Our intellect lost its former keenness and wide range of perception; the reason became clouded and liable to every kind of error; the will was so weakened that it became the plaything of the passions, which, like rebellious slaves, usurped the dominion

(which was) exercised by the reason and the will. As a consequence we find that they keep impelling us into the commission of all kinds of sinful excesses.

The final outcome of our disinheritance can be summed up as follows: Left to ourselves and unaided by grace we tend towards sin as naturally as a stone is drawn to the earth by gravity, as readily as a boat (that is) caught in a strong current is carried down stream. Sin is a deadly poison to soul and body alike. It invariably produces spiritual and physical deterioration. Of course with the help of grace it is possible to resist the allurements of sin; but as the greater number of men reject this God-given help, vice and crime inevitably abound, directly producing the distressing conditions we witness on every side. In the words of the prophet Osee: "There is no truth, there is no mercy, there is no knowledge of God in the land; cursing and lying and killing and theft and adultery have overflowed, and blood hath touched blood" (Osee 4, 1).

Thus were all the evils that afflict mankind introduced into the world by original sin.

An illustration taken from life will serve to make the truth of original sin and its effects more easily understood. Imagine a multi-millionaire, the father of a happy family of several children. As long as he administers his affairs carefully his children have everything they can desire to make them happy. They know nothing of poverty, want, destitution, hunger or starvation. Their needs are looked after, their health is tenderly cared for, and no pains are spared to give them a good education. When their father dies, each one will receive a fixed share of the paternal wealth, in virtue of the right of inheritance.

But the man becomes a drunkard and a reckless gambler. In a short time he loses all he owns, even his house and home,—he is a ruined man, reduced to beggary and want, forced to live in the poor-house.

However, his criminal conduct involves not only himself, who alone bears the guilt, but also his children, who are entirely innocent of their father's wrongdoing. Once they were happy in the possession of everything apt to make their life pleasant, and above all, they held the full right of one day inheriting their father's immense wealth together with his good name and social prestige; now they are reduced to wretchedness and misery, their hopes of a bright future are rudely shattered, and in place of a large fortune they are doomed to poverty, destitution and other sufferings. Though innocent of any wrongdoing, they are nevertheless affected in a most intimate and painful manner by the inexcusable folly of their father. The law of cause and effect is at work, and it is pitiless in its operation. It makes no allowance for the children's innocence. Though they are in no way implicated in their father's sinful conduct, they must suffer as much as if they, and not he, had been guilty of squandering their fortune and wrecking their home.

In much the same way are we now subjected to the sad consequences of the loss of our supernatural inheritance in which Adam involved us by his sin of disobedience. We are born into this world in a state of disinheritance, deprived of those wonderful gifts and endowments which were set aside for us from the

beginning. Like the unfortunate children of a ruined millionaire, we bear the miseries of life as though we, and not our first parent, were the real transgressors.

This is the first and principal reason why sufferings of every kind come thick and fast into our lives. "O Happy Sin of Adam!"

But here we must add a reflection that will serve for our consolation in the midst of our trials. Thanks to the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, our present lot, sad though it undoubtedly is, is by no means as hopeless as it would seem to be at first sight. In the light which our holy Faith sheds on this subject, the state of suffering is seen to be a state of great blessedness and of unlimited possibilities of increase of glory in heaven. Divine Wisdom has contrived in a most wonderful way to draw immense good out of so great an evil. "O felix culpa!"—"O happy sin of Adam, which has merited for us so great a Redeemer!" is the jubilant hymn of gratitude and gladness which echoes in our churches on Holy Saturday. And why? Because Jesus Christ has made adequate atonement for Adam's sin and now offers us a copious supply of His redeeming and saving grace which more than compensates for the loss of our original inheritance. True, this grace does not restore the paradise which once existed on earth, nor does it remove from our lives the evils and miseries which spring from original sin; but it does what is infinitely better and more profitable to us in the end,—it enables us to endure all sufferings with patience and resignation, to sanctify them by uniting them with the bitter Passion and Death of our Lord, converting them into sources of rich supernatural merits, which in turn will procure for us in heaven a throne far more glorious and exalted than we would obtain if we had not fallen in Adam from the state of our original perfection.

But it is objected: "If God foreknew the fatal consequences of original sin, why did He not prevent Adam from committing that sin?" or: "Why does God not hinder the commission of sin now?" or again: "Why does He not hinder wicked persons from doing what brings sufferings to the innocent?" To these objections the only answer is this: God has created man a *free agent*. The noblest faculty man possesses is his *free will*. With the exercise of this faculty God does not interfere in any way. Any interference would mean a limitation, a deprivation of free will, at least partially. This would in turn mean that man is not responsible for his moral actions. Interference with his free will would also do away with merit and demerit; reward for good deeds and punishment for evil acts.

Man is left entirely to his own counsel—perfectly free to choose between good and evil, obedience and disobedience, virtue and vice, heaven and hell. Whichever he chooses shall be his inheritance. In the lifelong struggle against the forces of evil,—the devil, the world and the flesh—man has at his disposal the powerful aids of divine grace, by the right use of which he can avoid sin and do good; but God will not in any way *compel* him to use this grace, or to act one way rather than another.