

WHY MUST I SUFFER?

By F. J. REMLER, C. M.
(Continued)

Third Reason

Natural Results of Indiscretions

IN VINDICATION of God's goodness and love and of His dealings with men, it must be said with clearness and emphasis, that He is by no means to be held responsible for all the evil there is in the world. A very large amount of human suffering is not at all of God's sending, but entirely of man's own making.

We do not hesitate to assert that probably half, if not more, of present-day miseries would quickly disappear from the face of the earth if people could be universally induced to fulfill faithfully just two conditions, and they are, that they live according to the dictates of right reason and common sense, observing the fundamental laws of health and well-being, and that they make an honest effort to shape their moral conduct according to the Ten Commandments and the maxims of the Gospel.

In this chapter we will consider the first of these two points and study how *sins against right reason*, as we shall call them, are the direct and necessary cause of much unnecessary suffering. Sins against the Commandments as necessary causes of suffering we shall treat in the next chapter.

Sickness and Disease.

No one can question the evident truth that our life, health and temporal happiness are controlled by well defined laws, which cannot be changed or abolished by the will of man. They can indeed be disregarded and violated, but never with impunity. Their observance is generally rewarded with the enjoyment of health and freedom from many forms of sickness and other evils; while no man can violate these laws with impunity, any more than he can hold his hand in the fire and sustain no injury. In fact, so close and necessary is the connection between cause and effect, that nothing but a miracle can save a man from the consequences of violating one of these laws. Let us give a few examples by way of illustration.

There are people who in their advanced years are sorely tried by chronic ailments which make their life one of prolonged misery. Can it be true that in every case these ailments were sent by God? By no means. Very often they are the necessary results of the indiscretions which these persons committed times without number in their younger days. The stern laws of health were violated, and here is the punishment. People who recklessly expose themselves to the inclemency of the weather; who have the injurious habit of eating in a hurry and of not taking the time to masticate their food properly; who neglect to take a sufficient amount of outdoor exercise; who habitually breathe incorrectly; who indulge immoder-

ately in innutritious delicacies to the exclusion of plain but wholesome and nutritious food; women who by the foolish use of tight or otherwise incorrect clothing inflict permanent injuries on certain members and organs whose proper functioning is indispensable for good health,—these people in later life pay dearly for the sins against good sense which they committed by violating the unchangeable laws which control life and health. Outraged nature knows no mercy and grants no pardon. Sooner or later she wreaks a terrible vengeance, exacting full payment of the penalty.

These ills must therefore not be considered as being of God's sending but of man's own making.

Others there are who are afflicted with very painful diseases of the heart, stomach, liver, kidneys, or other organs, which render them invalids for life. Does God always send these diseases? No. Very often they are only the necessary results of irrational and intemperate living, of gluttony, or long continued indulgence in alcoholic drinks, or in opiates, or other injurious drugs,—self-caused ailments, everyone of them, for which God must not be blamed. Habits of life regulated by common sense, self-control, and the cardinal virtue of temperance would have been rewarded with complete freedom from these painful afflictions.

Then again there are many victims of what is called nervous breakdown. What is the cause of it? In very many cases it is a mode of life which tramples under foot every known law of health. During the day the victims are shut up in close, stuffy, unsanitary shops, mills, factories, stores or offices; their meals are usually taken in a hurry, they consist mostly of articles that merely stimulate or gratify the taste, but do not nourish the body, being void of those elements which are necessary to repair wasted tissue, to build up new tissue, and to produce the required heat of the body. Many of the products sold in our confectioneries, drug stores, and refreshment parlors have very little nutritive value, not to mention the fact that they are often adulterated by unscrupulous makers and dealers who are more interested in making big profits than in maintaining the health of their patrons. As well might we try to keep up a good fire with a low grade of coal as try to keep up health and vigor with food that lacks the elements necessary for proper nutrition.

But this is not all. Frequently a weakened constitution is still more taxed by spending the greater part of the night in exhausting and nerve-wrecking excitements, at theatres, parties, socials, dances, and the like, thus depriving it of the sleep and rest essential to good health. And finally, there is often enough a reckless indulgence in sins of impurity, which by themselves and apart from all other causes, are destruc-

tive to the nervous system and often ruin it beyond the hope of repair.

Can it be a surprise, then, if after several years of such an irrational mode of living there comes at last a collapse from which there is no recovery? The surprise would be if it did not come. Only a miracle could avert it. That nervous breakdown with its attendant misery, let it be well understood, is not of God's sending, but the necessary result of indiscretions,—it is of the sufferer's own making.

Domestic Troubles

Let us consider another class of sufferings. There are those who have no end of domestic troubles. But why? Often because they are reaping the harvest of their past folly. "What a man sows, that also shall he reap." They may have married thoughtlessly and at sight, without sufficient deliberation and in open violation of the laws of God and of the Church, and therefore without the blessing of heaven. Instead of preparing for marriage by prayer, the reception of the Sacraments and a virtuous life, they gave themselves up to sinful indulgence, and God's curse followed them into their newly established home. The young man married a woman of whom he knew that she was a flighty creature, giddy and vain, without character, unable or unwilling to attend to household duties, extravagant, a slave of fashion, unwilling to bring up children, not ready for any sacrifice. He married her face, as the saying is, or her money, or social standing. Now he must put up with the results of his foolish choice. Or, the young woman gave her affections to a man whom she knew to be unsteady in his habits, unreliable, dishonest and lazy, unable to hold a position, addicted to drink or to drugs, who did not respect her virtue during their courtship, and even at that time showed signs of future infidelity. Though aware of all this and often warned of her danger, she took no heed, but in her infatuation for him flattered herself that she would convert him. Now she is painfully undeceived, but it is too late. She is condemned to repent at leisure.

Or, it is a mixed marriage. The Catholic wife suffers much from her non-Catholic relatives, who ridicule her Church and her Faith; her husband makes life miserable for her by compelling her to do things which her conscience tells her are mortally sinful before God; or, she has the sorrow of seeing her children one by one give up the religion of their childhood to imitate the easy-going ways of their non-Catholic father.

Is it any wonder that in such homes there are frequent bickerings, quarrels, family scenes, desertions, leading up to the disgraceful proceedings of the divorce court, perhaps even to cruel murder? And will anyone have the hardihood to assert that sufferings springing from causes of this kind are sent by God? Thoughtfulness before marriage, a life of prayer and observance of the Commandments, and a faithful compliance with the wise laws by which the Church regulates the marriages of her children, would, we do not hesitate to affirm, do away with perhaps

nine-tenths of the unhappy marriages that we meet with in these days of reckless disregard for the sanctity of the holy state of matrimony.

Then again there are parents who suffer much from their grown children, who are unruly and wayward, and bring disgrace on their family by immorality and crime. Very commonly this is the natural outcome of a perverted or neglected education. Perhaps the parents gave their sons and daughters no religious training; they neglected to instill the knowledge, fear and love of God into their minds and hearts. Or, if they sent them to a Catholic school, they failed to set them a good example at home, thus neutralizing the efforts of pastors and teachers to make them god-fearing boys and girls. Then, there are parents who are over-indulgent towards their children, allowing them to have their way in everything, wilfully blind to their failings, not correcting, much less punishing them, even when they commit very serious faults. They "spare the rod and spoil the child." The day will come when their petted and spoiled sons and daughters will be the cause of great grief and sorrow to them by their ingratitude, neglect, ill-treatment, even cruelty, or through the shame and disgrace which they bring upon their families. "Bow down the neck of thy son while he is young, and beat his sides while he is a child, lest he grow stubborn and regard thee not, and so be a sorrow of heart to thee." (Eccles. 30, 12.)

When such fathers and mothers find their old age full of grief and sorrow caused by wayward sons and daughters, who is responsible? Surely they must not put the blame upon almighty God. They themselves are the authors of their unhappiness. If they had trained their children along the lines traced by right reason, common sense and the light of Faith, they would have found in their children a support in their old age and an unfailing source of happiness in their declining years. As it is, they are reaping the natural fruits of their past folly.

Other Troubles

Finally, there are many who for their indiscretions are reduced to great poverty. Either they did not practice thrift and economy in the management of their domestic affairs; or they were discontented with their humble station and tried to appear more wealthy than their neighbors; or their great ambition was to move in society. Living above their means made it necessary for them to contract large debts which they could not pay; a foreclosure of mortgages followed, and their ruin was complete. Sufferings, again, not God-sent but man-made.

These are but a few of the many examples that could be cited in support of our statement that sins against right reason and common sense are directly responsible for a large percentage of human sufferings, for which it would not be fair to blame God as the author.

(To be continued)