

WHY MUST I SUFFER?

By F. J. REMLER, C. M.

(Continued)

Fourth Reason

Natural Results of Sins Against the Ten Commandments

IF SINS against right reason are productive of much suffering, sins against the Ten Commandments are still more so. It is no exaggeration to say that violation of the Commandments is directly responsible for the greatest portion of the misery that scourges the human race. In proof of this let us single out just a few sins, which, as experience and observation show, are a common and fruitful source of much self-inflicted suffering.

Nothing has worked so much detriment to the health of mankind for many centuries as the habits that may be generalized under the term of impurity. The ravages of venereal diseases have increased just in proportion to the gradual diminution of the influence of religion during the past few generations. (James J. Walsh, "*Health and Religion*," p. 185.) In countless slaves to the vice impurity the words of Sacred Scripture are literally verified: "He that sinneth in the sight of his Maker, shall fall into the hands of the physician" (Ecclus. 38, 15). "If thou givest thy soul her desires, she will make thee a joy to thy enemies" (Ecclus. 18, 31). "He that joineth himself to harlots, shall be wicked; Rottenness and worms shall inherit him" (Ecclus. 19, 3). "His bones shall be filled with the vices of his youth; they shall sleep with him in the dust" (Job 20, 11). The life of many a man and woman is embittered by a disease so loathsome that it makes its victims a grievous torment to themselves and to their surroundings, and often tempts them to seek relief from their misery in a suicide's death. But how did they contract it? Very commonly by sinful indulgence of the passion of lust, either on their part or on the part of those with whom they are associated. A life of purity and chastity would have preserved them from the ravages of this dreadful scourge.

To understand how much misery is caused by the vice of impurity, we need only visit some general hospital or asylum. Persons of every age and rank, young and old, rich and poor, are there reaping the harvest of iniquity and sin. Decay of the body, and often, too, of the mind, is apparent in their wretched forms. They are dying a living death. How dearly they are paying for having tasted the poison-cup of forbidden pleasures! And what an unequal bargain they struck! For a few brief and fleeting moments of sensual delight they are enduring the ravages of a disease which causes them unceasing pain and defies the skill of the best physicians.

But it is not in hospitals and asylums only that we see the havoc impurity creates among its slaves. There

are many persons living in their homes, both in stately mansions and in lowly hovels, who must pay dearly for their sinful excesses. Some are suffering from painful disorders which are directly traceable to their past sins; while others are punished in their children, who are afflicted in mind or body. The lot of these innocent victims is pitiable in the extreme. Who bears the blame? In a large number of cases, none other than their parents. By indulgence in unlawful pleasures before or after marriage they became infected with the virulent poison, which they in turn transmitted to their unfortunate offspring.

It was a very natural process, a blind working out of the stern law of cause and effect. Had the parents lived in the fear of God and kept His law, their marital happiness would have been insured; but having trampled on the law, the consequences of their sin involve not only themselves but also their posterity down to the third and fourth generation. There was no need on the part of God to send them a special punishment. These afflictions are so intimately bound up with certain forms of sin, and so necessarily promoted by them, that nothing but a miraculous interference with the laws of nature could save the transgressors from the penalty of their immoral actions. Not only is death a consequence of these diseases, but they are also frequent causes of long years of suffering and crippling, of the blinding of children and the birth of dead or idiotic children, or of little ones who grow up to be epileptic or to become insane in early adult life, or to exhibit other sad marks of the diseases of their parents. (Idem, p. 186.)

The same is true of the victims of alcoholism or of the drug-habit. They are guilty of a species of suicide. They wreck their manhood, degrade their reason, and bring on themselves all kinds of domestic trouble, poverty, disease and an untimely death. In addition to this they are usually guilty of grave injustice to their offspring, to whom they transmit their evil propensities, or bequeath bodily or mental infirmities. Great indeed is the number of those persons who owe their defects of mind and body to the fact that the one or the other of their parents was a slave to alcoholism or to the drug-habit.

Finally, to take a case which occurs with increasing frequency in these days of neo-pagan ideals in regard to the duties of the married state: A surprisingly large number of women is suffering from no other cause than cold-blooded interference with the order established by God for the procreation of human life. Extremely painful diseases, such as cancer, blood-poison, serious mental or nervous disorders which sometimes end in insanity, are making their life prolonged agony. Once they may have gloried in it that they succeeded in frustrating God's will and designs; they may have rejoiced over the fact that they

escaped the burden of bringing up children; they may have succeeded in quieting the reproaches of their conscience by adopting the pagan maxims of the modern world which pronounces even the grossest forms of immorality something innocent and harmless; but there is one thing they could not succeed in doing, and that is to abrogate or change the immutable law of God, the law of nature. They were free to violate the law by committing sins which cry to heaven for vengeance; but they were not free to escape the natural penalties of these sins. Outraged nature knows no pity and grants no pardon. Their present painful lot is purely the wages of sin—not God's sending, therefore, but entirely their own making.

Converting Evil Into Good.

We have seen how people bring upon themselves much suffering through failure to live according to the laws of good sense and to keep the Ten Commandments. Now the question arises: Is it possible to derive any advantages from such self-caused and self-inflicted sufferings, or is there nothing to do but to resign one's self to the inevitable and stoically put up with the results of one's folly, much the same as a pagan or a fatalist might do, who claims that blind chance controls all human affairs? To this we must answer: As in His infinite wisdom and goodness God contrived to turn Adam's sin into a source of immense spiritual blessings to the world through the life and sufferings of Jesus Christ, so has he made it possible for us to convert all our afflictions—not only those which are unavoidable, but also those which are self-inflicted—into a source of everlasting benefit.

It remains for you, therefore, dear reader, in case you are a victim of sufferings which you have brought on yourself in any way, to learn the secret of turning these to good account. It is true, it was not God's will that you should be thus afflicted. But now that you have failed and thereby brought this evil on yourself, it is God's will that you derive from it all the good that He has made it possible for you to obtain.

For this purpose carefully attend to the following important conditions:

1. Imitate the Prodigal Son and return to God with sincere sorrow for your sins, securing the fullness of His pardon by a contrite confession. You must be in the state of grace before your sufferings can be made meritorious for heaven.
2. Humbly acknowledge that you have fully deserved your sufferings—nay, more—even the eternal pains of hell—by mortal sin. If you have not been condemned, it is solely because God's mercy has spared you and given you time for repentance.
3. In the spirit of an abiding sorrow for your sins, make sure to unite all your sufferings with those of our Lord dying on the cross, and make a frequent offering of them thus united, to the Divine Justice in atonement for the wrong you have done.

By acting in conformity with these suggestions you will reap a threefold benefit: You will insure the complete pardon of all your sins; you will quickly cancel the debt of temporal punishment contracted by them and thus shorten your purgatory hereafter; your penitent dispositions will win for you a much higher place in heaven than you might obtain if you had never fallen into serious sins of any kind.

If therefore you are suffering from self-inflicted sickness, poverty, domestic troubles and the like, do not fail to sanctify them and to beg of God to accept them in payment of the temporal punishment due to your sins. Or, if there is some one in your family, a child or other relative, that needs your constant care and attention, know that this affords you an excellent opportunity for practising the most perfect kind of Christ-like charity. Lavish upon the sufferer all the kindness you can command, for it is not so much to him that you are ministering as to our Lord Himself. Never lose sight of His words in this connection: "Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25, 40).

See then how mercifully God has contrived to make it possible for you to derive endless benefits from your folly.

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