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"Way's End," Beech Ave., Camberley, Surrey,
England

My dear Friends,

I think I am coming to the end of my lecturing days, because I am getting so old! Still, I hope to be able to attend the International Congress at Salzburg, Austria, next summer. I hear that a large number of members are coming from overseas, so I shall have the pleasure of meeting many dear friends I have not seen for years. Only this morning I found myself repeating that sentence in Shakespeare's "Macbeth:" "I count myself in nothing so happy as in remembering my good friends." Which again reminds me of a funny story I heard in Australia, about an old lady who was taken to see "Macbeth", and her relations asked her if she had enjoyed it. "Yes, dears," she said, "but it was very full of quotations." Shakespeare and the Bible have formed the English language. That is why I do not like the modern versions of the Bible. The King James version may not be entirely accurate, but it is such glorious literature. Professor Quiller-Couch used to tell his students to study the Bible to acquire a good style.

Last time I talked about sin. This time I will continue the subject with the consideration of its Karmic result - suffering. It is indeed its cure, the knife of the heavenly surgeon. We would all like to avoid it. But the sage Patanjali says that to realise eternal Life we must become indifferent to either joy or pain, and be able to endure either quite calmly.

Madame Blavatsky calls pain the Teacher, the Awakener of consciousness. If we could fashion a world nearer to our heart's desire, we would leave out all sorrow and sin. But what kind of people would we be then? Instead of becoming strong, self-reliant sons of God we would be mere robots. I remember Dr. Besant once saying to me: "When I look back over a long life I would willingly surrender all my joys but not one of my sorrows, because I learnt the most by them"

Sin being mistaken, ignorant action, the resulting pain opens our eyes. Whom do we seek when sorrow overtakes us? Someone who has never suffered? The inevitable result of mistaken action is the cure. "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee." (Jer. II,19) This is the law of action and reaction, equal and opposite, called Karma in the East. It is embodied in St. Paul's well-known words: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." (Gal. VI,7) And the words of the Christ to St. Peter when he drew his sword and cut off a man's ear, that they that draw the sword would perish by the sword.

How implacable that sounds! But the laws of nature, which are the true "commandments of God," never vary, and act according to their nature quite impersonally. This is in reality not vengeance but mercy. "Unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work." (Ps.2) The word "mercy" comes from the Latin merces which means recompense. I can go on quoting St. Paul: "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth (Latin castus, pure). Now, no chastening for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them which are exercised thereby." (Heb.12) And he goes on to say, "If ye endure pain God dealeth with you as sons, wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed."

The ancient Celts said of a man who suffered a great deal, "He is making his soul." And the poet Keats, who certainly suffered in his day, wrote to a friend: "Do you not see how necessary a world of pain and trouble is to school an intelligence and make it a soul?"

The fully illuminated man is beyond all personal pain by virtue of having risen above the play of the "pairs of opposites." On the path of the soul's return, the awakened spiritual nature takes nothing and gives of himself continually. So St. Paul says, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." (Rom.8,2) The "law of sin and death" is what St. Paul calls the law of action and reaction, equal and opposite. Again St. Paul wrote that of even the Christ. "Though he were a son," he wrote, "yet learnt he obedience by the things which he suffered." (Heb.5,8) Surely not in that life but in earlier ones. So also H.P.B. told her students to take all trials with the joy of a disciple. Father Caussade said that all events are the Voice of God

speaking to us. And, says H.P.B., in the life of the truly dedicated man nothing happens by chance, and that sometimes the most insignificant event is full of the greatest meaning.

But of course such an attitude of mind is too much for the partially developed man, who needs comfort and strength. That is why the Lords of Karma keep some disastrous happenings away from a man until his soul has grown strong enough not to be crushed but to be refined. Suffering, rightly understood, is a refining force. This is where our God is a "refining fire." So let us give comfort wherever we can, but the word "comfort" means the strength-bringer. It was John Ruskin who said that much ancient wisdom lies buried in the derivation of words. Let us see what some common forms of sorrow can do for us.

1. Bad health. I think in the coming age disease will be conquered. But when a monk told the Lord Buddha that he was too ill to pray, the Lord replied that it was only his body that was ill, not his mind and heart. I once knew a woman who had a splendid body and whose chief joy in life was hunting. One day she fell with her horse and could never walk again. The prisoner of a couch said to me: "I was just a splendid body, but lying here I have discovered that I also have a soul."

2. Ambition frustrated. The pain is largely personal and egotistic. But you will remember that wonderful poem of Kipling's about stooping to build again with worn-out bricks.

3. Lost opportunities. There is a great truth in Shakespeare's words about the "tide in the affairs of men." But regret and remorse, as H.P.B. has told us, is so often egotistic. We have lost what might have been such profit and prestige to ourselves. That most occult of poets, Robert Browning, sang, "There shall never be one lost good, What was shall be as before." Another opportunity will arise, and we shall be the wiser to meet it.

4. Misunderstandings. How often have I heard people grieve over a misunderstanding which they can now no more put right because their friend has gone. But we can put it right in our minds and hearts and wait until we meet them again in another life.

5. Love denied or lost. That can cause intense pain but it is a little selfish. I know a woman who has grieved for six years over her mother's death, quite regardless of her patient husband's present happiness. What makes us grieve? The loss of the pleasure and comfort and security of their companionship? What of their gain? Perhaps they have now lost a tortured, aching body.

6. Failure or shame. The worst pain to endure may be one's own failure or shame. But at least it cures our self-love and pride.

7. To watch the pain of another, that is worse. And not perhaps be able to mitigate it. There is a saying in the Bible: "No man can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." (Ps.49,7) But we can stand by him. Sir Francis Bacon once wrote that a friend is one with whom our sorrows are halved and our joys are doubled.

Let me close with the splendid words from Robert Browning's "The Patriot:"

"One who never turned his back, but marched straight forward,
Never doubted clouds would break, Never dreamed though right were
worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, sleep to wake."

Your affectionate friend,

Clara Codd

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