

## THE SECRET OF SIN AND SUFFERING

By Clara M. Codd

The problems of life, to be even faintly understood, must be viewed from a great standpoint. Man is not a newly created, arbitrarily endowed being. He is a creature in process of evolution, and not only one life, but many lives are his in the great school of the world, which is the field of his growth and development.

### OPPOSITES—CHOICE—GROWTH

Sometimes we wish we could mold that world differently and leave out all evil and pain. But then, instead of being self-determining, self-directing intelligences, human beings would be mere automata. Evil is part of the divine order. "I form the light," says the prophet Isaiah, "and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things" (Isaiah 45:7).

It is a necessity for the evolution of self-consciousness that the divine possibilities within us should come under the play of the pairs of opposites. Everything has its opposite: black and white, day and night, joy and sorrow, activity and rest, and, finally, good and evil. Unless we have had experience of the night, we should not know that it was day; unless we have been unhappy, we should not know that we were happy; unless we have experienced evil, we should not know wherein good truly lay.

Life is a continual round of choices. Often we choose unwisely, but that is because we have not yet had sufficient experience. The "original sin" of ignorance taints us all. If some would ask why Life created us ignorant, we can but reply that it seems a universal law. Is a child born grown-up? Does a tree spring at once into being?

How does our primeval ignorance become removed? Here we come to the real origin of sorrow and sin.

What is sin? Dr. Hastings, in his *Dictionary of the Bible*, writes:

Three cognate forms in Hebrew with no distinction of meaning express sin as missing one's aim, and correspond to the Greek and its cognates in the New Testament. The etymology does not suggest a person against whom the sin is committed, and does not necessarily imply intentional wrongdoing. It indicates a quality of actions rather than an act itself, and presupposes the existence of law.

## LAWS UNIVERSAL AND IMMUTABLE

It is clear that sin is a violating of natural law, a *transgression*, a movement across the flow of the evolutionary tide, instead of *progression*, a movement forward with it. Life evolves under the reign of majestic, immutable laws—these are the impress of the Divine Mind upon matter. These are the real commandments of God, which act according to their nature with a magnificent disregard of our personal likes and dislikes, perhaps because their aims are directed towards impersonal, cosmic ends, even for ourselves.

Thus our thoughts—great and lovely, ignoble and petty—are not only affecting the minds of others within our neighborhood, but are fashioning and forming our inner selves, creating character and capacity for future lives. Our longings and intentions are exerting magnetic pressure on the surrounding universe, finally bringing to our hands the things we long for, or aspire after. And our actions are creating our environment; these results are more easily seen, for we know that every word and deed makes a difference to the rest of the world. Rarely do we stop to ask ourselves what kind of difference. It must be one of two. Either each word and act is adding to the sum of the world's happiness and progress, or it is detracting from it. Whichever it is, the like will one day return to ourselves, creating the help or injury, the friends and foes, of everyday life.

This fundamental law is described in the words of the Christ: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law" (Matt. 7:12). We learn to obey that law by the reactions from life which we call sorrow and pain, for the Great Law is the Divine Life in action.

So when a man chooses that which helps the evolutionary will, joy comes with enlightened choosing. But when he chooses that which is for himself alone, without consideration for the progress and the good of all, misery and darkness follow close upon his heels. They are not separate, the cause and its inevitable result.

## HINTS ON LESSONS OF LIFE

Too frequently we look upon our sorrows and frustrations only as retribution. They are not so much retribution as education. Like a seed planted in the ground, the divinity in each one of us lives and grows upwards. It is shone upon by the sunshine of human joy, and nourished by the rain of human tears. Each has a different function in Nature's economy. Happiness is the expanding force, sorrow the purifying power, or to use a more modern term, the "sublimating" force. If we do not let ourselves grow bitter, sorrow will make us more sensitive, more refined. The ancient Celts said of a man who suffered much: "That man is making his soul."

Sometimes it seems as if the kind and good had more than their share of sorrow, whilst the selfish and careless flourished like the green bay tree! This is because Life will not ask of a man to learn a lesson too hard for him. Often the lesson comes long afterwards, when the man has grown, and like gold tried in the furnace, he is refined, not destroyed. This is the real forgiveness of sins. We can never escape the results of our deeds. But by those very results are we purified and set free, the Immortal One within making atonement for the sins of his personalities life after life.

One day all will come to final beatitude and bliss. Understanding this, let us try to learn the lessons of sorrow and trouble. Have we a weakly body or frail health? Let us take it as an opportunity to realize ourselves as souls and not only bodies. Our best plans go awry. Knowing that ideals are living things, we stoop to build again, perchance with worn-out tools. Another injures us; he is but the unconscious agent of the Law. Never seek revenge, for that belongs impersonally to that Law.

The pain of love scorned is our own denial of love come back to us. Hypocrisy returns as unmerited reproach and misunderstanding by others. And when blind rage or selfish cruelty defaces the body of a brother or sister, to our door thereof comes back in the future deformity or terrible disease. Most dreadful of all is the reaction caused by cruelty of a more refined type: the deliberate torture of another's mind and heart. This shall come back to the perpetrator as a broken mind and heart. Again, opportunities denied, what are they but the other side of opportunities let slip at other times? So shall frustration teach us, in the end, how to turn sloth to power of effort and of will.

#### THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

All things shall come to us in the long future: the ideals we long after, the reparations we would make. Meanwhile let us be glad to suffer for the guerdon of wisdom and compassion that crowns pain bravely borne. For if we would know the true inwardness of life, it is just that—strength to bear another's burden, understanding to compassionate and sustain.