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THE BEARING OF THE LORD'S PRAYER
ON THE
PROBLEM OF EVIL.

A GRADUATING THESIS

by

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THE BEARING OF THE LORD'S PRAYER
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1. Justification of our Theme.

The existence of evil is a problem. Doubtless it will remain a problem as long as evil exists. Why there should be so much pain and sorrow and wickedness in the world is not easy to understand. "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform," and man cannot fathom the mystery in many cases. However, this fact need not be construed as an injunction against speculation along this line. We may hope to gain good from a consideration of our theme, if we are careful to bear in mind our limitations and to remember that we may not posit our findings as ultimate truth. An approximation of truth is all we may hope to attain.

In a speculation of evil, any data bearing on the subject may be examined. While at first sight the Lord's Prayer may seem foreign to the subject, yet we believe consideration will reveal a relation close enough to warrant the assumption of our theme. If we may not be able to deduce from the prayer, a solution complete in logical detail, we may at any rate find that the prayer does suggest such a solution, and even lends no inconsiderable support thereto.

2. Method to be Pursued.

In our discussion we may assume a certain solution of our problem before investigating the data, and then fortify our position by our findings from the data. Or we may have no preconceived solution, but find one by examining our data. As a general rule for speculative procedure the former method is unsafe. In following it, one is in danger of forming a conclusion from insufficient evidence; but more serious than this, one is almost sure to distort the data to suit this preconceived notion. The latter method will therefore be employed. But we will do well again to call our attention to the fact that no complete solution of the problem of evil is to be expected from the Lord's Prayer. The data is too scanty for extensive investigation, and moreover, is not primarily a treatise on evil. Not being engaged in a critical discussion, we shall use the most common form of the Lord's Prayer as found in Matthew. We shall take it up clause by clause and note what may be suggested as bearing on our problem. If this does not result in a complete logical solution, it will at least satisfy the claim of our theme, which

is not to solve the problem from the prayer, but merely to note the bearing of the prayer on the problem.

3." Our Father Which Art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name."

In any discussion the standpoint is of vital importance. Especially is this true of the present discussion, for the outcome of the solution to our problem depends upon the standpoint we occupy at the outset. If we adopt a theistic standpoint one solution will follow; but if our world-view proceed from a mechanical view-point, our solution will be entirely different.

In general, one or the other of these two stand-points is adopted in any scheme of philosophy. There are to be sure many variations and differences, due to the particular advocate, but in general this two-fold classification will hold. In the theistic view the "forward look" is the essential feature. Things seem to be operating with regard "to some far off, divine event, toward which all creation moves." The present exists not so much because of the past as for the sake of the future. The world in it's manifold activities is operated not

by blind chance or opaque necessity, but all things work in harmony with the divine purpose that is operating through the ages. This view makes provision for improvement and progress. It tinges life with optimism, and spans the future with a rainbow of hope. On this view the true nature of a thing is not that from which it came, but that into which it develops. "By their fruits ye shall know them" - not by their roots. Thus, if, in considering the problem of evil, we adopt the personal view of the world, the view which posits a Supreme Personal Being as the world-ground, we have made provision whereby we may escape pessimism, even though we may not be able to understand the inscrutable ways of Providence. After having examined all the facts within our present range of experience, if we are not able to account for the presence of evil, we may find relief by referring it to some place in the infinite world plan. It's true meaning is to be found not in it's past history, nor in it's present manifestations, but in it's future results. When the world-plan is completed, then evil is to be judged by ^{its} fruits.

Mechanism affords no such relief. Here all is

determined by the past. What was, determines what is; what is, necessitates what is to be. There is no "forward look" Purpose or design is to be found no where. Even the human eye, with it's marvelous machinery for vision, is not designed to see, but since it happened to be as it is, seeing results; and so with all things. An egg has no more design than the pebble lying beside it. Both alike are the results of mechanical antecedents, and in neither is to be found design. The world series originated from chance and not purpose, but once started the series must run off into eternity and no change or break can occur.

This view makes no provision for progress, from the beginning of the series everything is implicit in it. Thus the first member of the series contains implicitly the entire series. Manifestly not the fruit, but the root determines the nature. An oak is to be viewed as an acorn- enlarged it may be, but essentially acorn, rather than the acorn to be viewed as an embryonic oak. Such a viewpoint renders our problem hopeless. If all things are alike necessitated, one thing is as necessary as another, and distinctions of evil are obliterated.

It is absurd on this view to raise the question why evil exists. It exists for the same reason that all other things exist- as the result of necessity. This view rules out all optimism as regards evil. If it is necessitated, there can be no hope of escape for us, for as creatures of necessity we cannot employ volition, and can do nothing to ameliorate conditions. Thus mechanism renders our problem absurd, and makes no provision for a solution either in speculation or life.

Thus we see the choice of a starting place is a vital part of our solution. Personalism allows at least the possibility of solution, while mechanism makes a solution impossible. What has the Lord's Prayer to suggest in the matter? If it can assist in our choice at this point, it will contribute positive help; and it does assist in unmistakable manner. The expression "Our Father" is utterly irreconcilable with any mechanical conception of the universe. It renders the verdict positively in favor of personalism. When Christ taught us to use this phrase at the beginning of the prayer, he was teaching us to pray to a Person and not to a chain

of necessity. To be sure, this is not peculiar to the Lord's Prayer. Christ always emphasized this view. In fact he himself was but an incarnation of this Supreme Person, who created and maintains the universe. But our concern is at present with the prayer, and it does unmistakably make provision for the possibility of a solution for our problem, by giving the proper viewpoint to the discussion.

4. Thy Kingdom Come , Thy Will be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven.

This clause suggests that Christ recognized the unideal state of the world. Clearly he here teaches that God's kingdom had not yet come and that God's will was not done on earth as in heaven, and thus He recognizes the existence of evil. Whatever exists in our world that is a barrier to the coming of God's Kingdom, may well be called evil. There have been certain cults, and are today, who deny the existence of evil. By a strange admixture of credulity and bad metaphysics these folk have persuaded themselves that evil is imaginary, and that nothing in all the realm of created things may be called evil.

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To be sure, the problem is at first glance perplexing. We have accepted a theistic standpoint as suggested by the term "Our Father". We must for the sake of logic attribute omnipotence and infinite goodness to this Father. Moreover, to be a father, he must have a filial love for man, and this implies a desire on his part to do the best thing possible for man. Inasmuch as his power is without limit, we should expect to find this power continually exercised to provide for man's pleasure, and to see nothing save that which contributes to this end. In short, evil seems incompatible with the thought of a God, at once omnipotent and infinitely good. It seems that with evil before us we must either sacrifice God's ethical character to conserve his omnipotence, or deny his omnipotence to save his goodness. This is the problem. Those who deny evil escape this, but encounter other difficulties greater. Between the two positions, the Lord's Prayer gives the verdict in favor of recognizing evil. How it may suggest a solution for the apparent contradiction remains to be seen, but there can be doubt that Christ was not a "Christian Scientist."

The clause before us, while not giving a definite solution to this problem, does suggest such a solution. The instruction to us to pray for the coming of the Kingdom, assumes that it is no idle fancy to hold that the Kingdom will some day actually come. This means that some day we may hope for evil to be overcome. When the Kingdom of God is ushered in " God himself shall be with them, and be their God: and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more: neither shall there be mourning nor crying, nor pain, any more." The world will exist in it's ideal state, and God's will will be done on earth as in heaven.

While this hope is suggested by the Prayer, it gives no hint as to why the evil is here at present. It will not be impertinent at this point, however, to suggest that evil exists for the development of man. Man was put into the garden "to dress it and keep it". If perchance he allows some weeds to flourish, it is better thus to "work out his own salvation", than to sit and sing his soul away to everlasting bliss. This is in line with our adopted viewpoint. In his infinite plan God has a

purpose for evil in the evolution of human character that escapes our limited vision. With our finite knowledge, we must beware of denying to God either omnipotence or goodness. His infinite wisdom can see a purpose in evil that transcends human insight.

The rainbow of optimism spans the future for us. Through succeeding ages man will continue to develop until in very deed the "Sons of God" will inherit the land. We are taught that "as many as are led by the Spirit of God" are the children of God. What a wholesome thought, to think that the Spirit of God is leading the human race ever onward and upward in the scale of progress, until at length evil and pain are left behind! This is the doctrine of evolution that it pays to hold. Such a doctrine makes for hope and progress, and suggests a practical, if not, a logical solution for our problem. If we may not be able to show why evil should exist, or how it can be compatible with our idea of God, we can by holding this view, at least, hope for the day when evil shall vanish. Then the human race, having risen above sin and evil, will be in very deed Sons of God. So much, at least,

this clause of the Prayer suggests.

5. "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread."

The view of evolution set forth above is optimistic from the point of view of race solidarity. As a race it holds hope for the future. But in it, there is to be found scant comfort for the individual of today. What the race in the future may be is no doubt pleasant to contemplate, and may even be a positive and more or less powerful stimulus to right doing; but in the face of present evil, we must confess that our arrival in the scale of progress is at best untimely, if we look only from this standpoint of race solidarity. This would more likely lead to pessimism for the individual, than to optimism. A proper balance can be found only as provision is made for the escape of the individual from evil, while the race evolution is going on. The individual must not be sacrificed to society. A society of worthless individuals would be a worthless society. Hence the individual is to be provided for, since the value of the individual is the sole criterion of the worth of the race. A race progress that ruthlessly used up the individual as raw material

to furnish the developement would be immoral and cannot be defended. While humanity is growing God-ward human beings must be saved.

Such salvation is suggested by the present clause of the Prayer, and also by the two immediately following. Here our Lord reveals a possibility of our present escape from evil. Want is one of the most common forms of evil. All about us we see those who hunger, and hear pleadings for bread. Famine, pestilence, sickness and wickedness, all these bear their melancholy harvests of want and penury. Why He who holds the universe in the hollow of his hand should allow so much suffering, especially when it falls upon the young and innocent seems difficult to understand. We think we get a hint of the reason when we consider the necessity of a fixed order of consequences for action, and the chaos that would ensue if like cause should not produce like effect. But at best this is only a hint, and it behooves one not to be dogmatic at this point. If God would allow the mill of causation to relentlessly grind on in accord with eternal laws, and deprive man of any volitional activity, or even

if God were to stand indifferently by and permit man to struggle in vain against the combined forces of evil arrayed against him, -such forces as custom, habit, social solidarity, heredity etc. - if God could witness such a pathetic sight and remain unmoved, he would be beneath the ethical level of the ordinary man. But that God is no such immoral ruler, the words of Jesus "Give us this day our daily bread" bear abundant proof. Here our Lord teaches that by living in harmony with God's plan, the individual may have the material necessities of life provided. To discuss how God answers this prayer or what part the individual must play in the answer, is no part of the purpose of our theme. We are concerned only in pointing out that God stands ready to aid the individual now; that his plan for the development of humanity does not exclude the salvation of the individual. "All things work together for good to those who love God," is a promise fulfilled to all who satisfy the condition. A hungry soul is satisfied by loving God, and for the good of such a soul all the forces of the universe are leagued together in a divine conspiracy. This clause of our

Lord's Prayer suggests the proper balance to our solution. It solves the problem of the evil of want, by lifting the individual above want.

6. "Forgive Us Our Trespases As We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us; and Lead Us not into Temptation, but Deliver Us from Evil."

The contribution of this clause to our theme, is quite similar to that of the one preceding. It is concerned with the individual in the present. It has this point of difference, however; it is concerned with wickedness and not want. Daily bread is sometimes denied those who are in no sense to blame for their plight; trespases can be affirmed only of those who trespass. This is a personal matter, and can never be any other than personal. The child may want bread because of the parent's sin, but the transgression is not the child's but the parent's. We may be inclined to consider the child as sharing equally with the parent in the results of the sin, but in so doing we lose sight of the subjective results of sin. In its essence sin is wandering from the will of God. "The sould that sinneth, it shall die"

This death is less a punishment, than a logical result. The first sin is the first step toward moral death, and no human[^] has power to retrace such a step once taken. Furthermore, no human[^], save Christ himself, has ever escaped taking such a step. The living death of a human soul is sad to contemplate. The most deadly fever has no more insidious attack on a human body, than sin on a human soul. The familiar illustration of the scriptures, in which sin is likened to leprosy is so apt as to need no comment.

being

The poet has well said-

Vice is a monster of such frightful mien,
That to be hated, needs but to be seen;
But seen too oft, familiar with it's face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

The prevalence of vice, without some antidote, would corrupt every human being so hopelessly, that there could be escape for none. Of all evil sin is the root, source and cause. In fact, sin may be considered the class term for the special kinds of evil. The problem of evil, is the problem of sin; without sin, there would have been no evil.

Remove sin and evil is eradicated. It is, therefore, of no small importance to note carefully the bearing of the Lord's Prayer on sin.

We have noted above that all have sinned, and that none can escape from sin once committed. There is no exception to this rule. So far as human possibility is concerned, there is no solution to the problem of sin, that will suffice to teach us to escape from it. But Christ shows us the way of escape. This is nothing more nor less than the forgiving of sin by God. The conditions of obtaining forgiveness, the question of the need of an atonement, the question of penalty for forgiven sin, the question of original sin, and many others can easily be raised at this juncture, but all alike are foreign to our purpose. We care only to note that the Lord's Prayer suggests the one sure way of escape from sin. Theories as to the nature of that escape are not suggested by the prayer, and however helpful a consideration of them might be, we must pass them by.

8. "For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory Forever."

Our prayer returns in it's close to the theistic standpoint. Christ began by acknowledging God as Father, He closes by recognizing him as the Almighty King and Ruler. The prayer is thus a perfectly rounded whole. The idea of God is the unifying principle throughout that syntesizes the various thoughts into one harmonious whole. Evil is to be understood in it's relation to God. As ruler of the universe, in the final analysis He is responsible for it. But as a Good Ruler, He has a benevolant purpose therefor.

To sum up the discussion, we note that the theistic standpoint is suggested by the prayer, and that this is the only standpoint that can even give the possibility of solution to our problem.

In keeping with this fundamental position the prayer suggests race developement as an ultimate escape from evil, and gives proper balance to the solution by providing salvation for the individual. We thus find the bearing of the Lord's Prayer on the problem of evil is practical rather than theoretical. It gives no theoretical solution which is original to it. But in it's general thought it does make very

positive and distinct suggestions as to how evil may be excaped. If we cannot understand evil, we may at least avoid it, and this is far more important than theory. We here stand in line with the advocates of pragmatism. The bearing of the Lord's Prayer on our problem is not for speculation, but for life. The person who is borne down by evil, will find a study of the prayer along the lines suggested by our discussion will pay expenses.