power of God, was the idea, and ideal, of Divine Redemptive Sacrifice.

3. We have again anticipated another factor in that old religious life of Israel, concurrent with the teaching of a Divine Redemption. There was a great *Divine Assurance*.

Most tenderly, and with infinite persuasion, does God assure His people, by the prophetic word, 'I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake; and I will not remember thy sins.' 'O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick mist, thy transgressions, and, as a black cloud, thy sins. Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.' 'For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall my covenant of peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee' (Is 43²⁵ 44^{21, 22} 54¹⁰).

4. This leads us to yet another factor, closely connected with the former. God was seeking to lead His people to the anointing of a great *Divine Consecration*.

Not only the specific covenant made with the people at Horeb, as represented in Deuteronomy, so searchingly rehearsed in Josiah's time that it

led to an amazing reformation; but the whole character of Jehovah's agreement, or covenant, with His people in the old dispensation, was one prolonged re-utterance of the claim, 'Ye shall be holy, for I am holy.' God was pledged to them; they must pledge themselves to God. Hundreds of times we are confronted with the words 'holy' and 'holiness,' in the Hebrew Scriptures. The persuasion of the promises was at once the release from all bondage of fear, and a constraint to joyful service. The Law was a law of holiness; the words of the Prophets were a call to holiness; the piety of the Psalms shines with the 'beauty of holiness'; the Wisdom teaching sought to consecrate common life with holiness.

Such, then, is the Ethic of the Hebrew Religion—a revelation of grace, and of anticipated redemption, pressed home upon the hearts of the people, and finding its outcome in the praise of God and the service of man. The very commandments of Sinai, thus inspired, and transfigured by the prophetic teaching, become a law of liberty, anticipating the Sermon on the Mount, and preparing for One in whose life Holy Love was made perfect.¹

¹ T. F. Lockyer, *Paul: Luther: Wesley*.

'The Man Borne of Four.'

A STUDY IN SPIRITUAL HEALING.

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It is even more remarkable than it seems that our Lord says to the paralytic, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.' The utterance is remarkable, because the man and his friends had come seeking healing for his body, not for his soul. It is far too easy an interpretation to say that no doubt this man was the victim of sensual indulgence, and that he reaped what he had sown. This is to narrow down the significance of the story far too much. The significant point is that Jesus assumes that a case of severe 'paralysis'—a very general medical term; for there can have been no proper classification of disease—requires for its cure an assurance of the forgiveness of sins. We know now that not only does actual sensual indulgence produce evil physical effects; we know that not merely a wrong

thing done by a man, but a wrong done to a man, may so *unconsciously* rankle in the abysmal deep we call the soul as to produce actual symptoms of severe physical malady. We are prone to assume that 'forgiveness' belongs to another region of things, to a 'world' separate from the 'world' to which bodily ailments belong. We set the two worlds, 'spiritual' and 'natural,' too sharply over-against each other; we separate 'soul' and 'body.' To-day medical science is recalling us to another view.

It is well that, in dealing with this particular story, we should avoid an unnecessarily wide extension of the problem, and any general consideration of the question of miracles. Neither is it necessary to assume that all our Lord's miracles

are on the same psychological plane. Miracle has a much wider connotation than is usually given to it. Prayer involves miracle; conversion is a miracle; the achievements of Christian love, and patience, and sympathy equally involve the supernatural. There is a miracle behind and beneath all Jesus' miracles, the wonder of a compassionate insight which descends swiftly, at a glance, to the hidden sources of each sufferer's particular need, and is able to satisfy it. This man has up till now been treated by his friends, and has regarded himself, merely as a paralytic. His physical condition has occupied all their attention and his. Jesus alone knows that the root of the trouble is spiritual, and He treats it accordingly.

I am not attempting to enter at all fully or adequately into the question of spiritual healing. It is, however, an immense relief to know that this whole question is being rapidly taken out of the hands of the ignorant and the charlatan, and is being dealt with by trained scientific minds. Very many of these do not claim that 'spiritual healing' is a substitute for religion. I think I am right in saying that the most successful psycho-therapists are themselves men and women who recognize the supreme value of the religious motive in their work, whether their religion is expressed in orthodox form or not. True spiritual healing is no substitute for religion. Rather is it 'a new weapon added to the religious armoury.'

1. In this story we have a warrant, in the teaching of Jesus, for regarding certain sicknesses of the body as due to sickness of the soul. This is not true because Jesus says so; Jesus says it, and acts upon it, because it is true. Therefore a name like 'Christian Science' is a misnomer. Science is neither Christian nor un-Christian. It is either true or false.

The outstanding fact in this story is that Jesus recognized swiftly that this man's physical need could only be met by the satisfaction of a deeper need than he himself or his friends were conscious of. There was a sickness of the soul. How that soul-sickness had come about we do not know. He had evidently done some wrong. What the wrong thing was we do not know. The disease need not have been the fruit of sensual indulgence. He may at the moment have had no conscious recollection of any wrong thing. What wrong he had done he may have buried in the past; he had forgotten it.

Buried in the past? The popular notion of the past is that it is a region out of which we have moved; with which we need not necessarily have anything more to do. This man, like many another, did not know that in God's universe there are no rubbish-heaps where our wrong-doings can be shot. They remain lying in the hidden abysmal depths of our own personality. We carry these forgotten experiences of the past about with us. The teaching of modern science is that they are not dead and done with; that the output of mental energy required to persuade ourselves that they are—often unconsciously exercised—is itself a serious drain on the general energy needed for spiritual and physical control. These so-called 'forgotten' things are septic centres in our spiritual life and outlook. We do not know why we are cynical, jealous, irritable, or depressed. Often, also, these unconscious influences produce evil physical effects, nervous prostration, paralysis of physical power.

We must, however, guard ourselves against the assertion that all disease is the fruit of personal wrong-doing; or that all disease, including organic, will yield to spiritual treatment. That certain mental conditions can ultimately induce certain forms of organic disease is certain. It is not the same thing to say that organic disease so induced can be cured by dealing with the mental condition. What can be definitely asserted is that in all healing, spiritual and religious influences must now have a place. Jesus is again given, in all healing, the supreme place. His Spirit is the ultimate source of all medical science.

The man in our story lay on his pallet, helpless and dependent upon his friends. His whole shattered nervous system had to stand the strain of the lifting, and pulling, and lowering needed to lay him at the feet of Jesus. One wonders whether, for such a case as his, these unwonted movements were merely torture, or whether they provided a stimulus to the nervous system not unfavourable to the cure. However that may be, his friends apparently had the determination, and the faith. Jesus saw 'their faith,' not his; for apparently he had none. Instead, He looked down with an irresistible divine intuition into the forgotten depths of the man's soul, and from that depth the man looked up. And Jesus said, 'Be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee.'

Lord, from the depth to thee I cry'd;
My voice, Lord, do thou hear.

Jesus' words were themselves a quickening of memory. He knew now whence all that disorder and depression of soul had come which for long he had attributed to growing weakness of body. He knew the meaning of that bitterness of rebellion which physical suffering had brought, and which itself had produced this physical collapse. Jesus reverses the order of all his thoughts. He was ill and weak, he thought, therefore God had forsaken him. Really the conviction that God was against him, and had either permitted or imposed his suffering, was the cause of his illness, 'Son, thy sins are forgiven thee.'

2. What shall we say of the answer of Jesus to the hostility of the Pharisees present? Apparently their chief preoccupation was not with the question of a possible healing miracle, but with the claim that was involved in Jesus' words: 'Who can forgive sins but God alone?'

It is important to note the significance of Jesus' answer. Very often, in interpretations of this story, commentators have seen in the healing miracle that follows only an illustration and a proof, before the eyes of His opponents, that His claim to forgive sins is really a valid one. 'That ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins' (He said to the sick of the palsy), 'I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk.' It is usually assumed that here are described two separate divine acts, in answer to two separate needs which the man had: one, the need of forgiveness, the other—the need of which he was conscious—of bodily healing. We may, however, ask ourselves again, why Jesus, in His defence, lays such emphasis on the word 'say.' 'Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise . . . walk?' The meaning can only be that the former utterance appears to His opponents to be a mere empty claim. The words sounded not only blasphemous, but futile. They said in effect, 'No assurance of God's favour to this man can have any result at all.' In their own minds, following the lines of the conventional thinking on such matters, they traced the man's physical condition to a judicial act of God. There was no psychological connexion for them between the sense of God's disfavour and the physical condition. God had simply shown His antipathy to a sinner by thus afflicting him. The connexion

between sin and suffering was to them an arbitrary connexion, founded on the sheer will of God.

In answer to this, Jesus seeks to convince them that the promise of forgiveness is no mere utterance that wastes itself in air, but that the words are actually followed by a physical result, which could not have taken place unless their full meaning had been realized in the man's own consciousness. He is seeking to do much more than give a palpable illustration, represented in the bodily healing, of the effect of His words. He does not seem to mean, 'A result follows clearly in one case; surely then in the other.' Rather He means that the cure *is* the actual result of an acceptance of forgiveness on the man's part. Jesus here forges no new link between sin and suffering. He does forge a link between suffering and a mood of alienation from God, perhaps of inward bitterness and rebellion—the mood of a man who knew no better way of ridding himself of a wrong done by him, or to him, than to forget it; or of a moral struggle within himself than to repress it. Perhaps the alleged absence of 'a sense of sin' to-day in the average man is largely the result of an ignorance which knows not where to go when it sins or is sinned against.

The paralytic man was conscious that nature was against him. We are all familiar with the way in which such a thought would be expressed to-day. Nature is a blind unconscious force, mechanical in its operation. There is a fate in human action, a fate in human character. The world to-day is full of men and women who have made up their minds that moral advance is either impossible, or that it proceeds at such a slow pace as practically to be negligible. Forgiveness, as things are, is a delusion. Nature, men say, never forgives, and Divine forgiveness is largely taken for granted, if thought of at all. '*C'est son métier*,' as Heine said. There is often—even in the utterances of the bravest souls who have lost religious faith, and glorify the courage displayed in facing life's shocks and menaces—a certain defiance which is far removed from that victorious 'Peace be unto you' which was our Lord's legacy to men.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced, nor cried aloud:
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody but unbowed.

While we must recognize the nobility of such a mood, Henley's whole poem, so characteristic of the human ideal of to-day, quivers with the nervous energy of one who seeks to forget pain by an act of will. It is a series of 'complexes' woven into the form of lyric poetry.

It is hardly fanciful to say that the mood of some of those sufferers who were brought to Jesus represented the failure of that very attitude to-day towards pain, evil, and death—an attitude of brave defiance—which seems to have some doubtful successes among the poets and philosophers of our day. For the moment, the menace to be met and conquered seems to be mainly that of pain and suffering. Most of us will agree with R. L. Stevenson in his criticism of a spurious kind of 'resignation,' which he describes as 'the cowardice that apes a kind of courage, and that lives in the very breath of health-resorts.' 'The man can open the door . . . he can be a kind of man after all, and not merely an invalid.' Most of us will, I think, agree that unless this heroism is to be captured and dominated by a religious faith which makes it certain that pain and death have not really the final word in the contest, serious reaction through failure is bound to come. The religious motive must pervade the modern tireless struggle against pain and disease. Spiritual healing to-day is a cheering signal that the mechanism of natural law is only a subordinate element in a wider spiritual world. 'That ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, I say unto thee, Arise.'

Forgiveness of sins means that God is our Friend, and stronger than all that makes us afraid. This assurance that God is our Friend, ever and continually, has certain definite results in human life. The longing for it is also a sign of returning health, and not of recurrent soul-sickness. Our message of forgiveness is not futile. The most deadly kind of opposition to the Christian faith is the idea that it can be ignored. It has unique results in human character, in society; even in our own bodily health. Whatever the results in health are or can be, it is not for us to set limits

to the power of God over disease, as some are disposed to do in arguing about spiritual healing. Even where suffering still remains or death enters, we are encouraged to believe that our Father's love can ensure that these will work out His precious purposes. The Christian is not dismayed by unanswered prayer. We must ever say, 'If it be thy will': but never with the suspicion or the fear that 'He will not.' Dr. John Brown once said, after hearing Dr. Candlish preach on prayer at St. George's: 'It was splendid; he first made you feel that you could ask for anything, a five-pound note, and then he dared you to have any overmastering wish, but, "Thy will be done."' It is just this assurance that we are here and now, in trials and difficulties and sufferings—in a Father's house—and children of God—that we need to-day. It is only in a home that children are in the habit of asking for anything; it is only in a home that they learn the meaning of refusals. Jesus opens the door of the Father's home and the Father's heart when He says, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.' Through Him we have the freedom of the universe. *Quis separabit?*

3. There is a surprising absence of any conditions in Jesus' offer of forgiveness. There is no encouragement given to the question that arises in our minds, 'Was it not only by His death that Jesus brought forgiveness to men?' Jesus did not in His Cross make forgiveness possible: He made it credible. Both natural law—the natural environment of His day—and the sin of men conspired to slay His love: and Love triumphed over both. At what cost, the Cross shows; but 'it was not for Jesus to magnify the cost; rather to magnify the freedom of the gift.' God forgives, the Father forgives. No mist of quiet, or shame, or fear, or doubt can dim for us that one radiant truth for which Jesus stood. No disabling sense of law can destroy our freedom. That accepted by the imprisoned soul is simply all that He stood for or cared to stand for. Without Jesus, forgiveness on this scale is incredible. 'No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.'