even though the soul has not formed new earthly attachments or fallen into deliberate sins.

> But fast after each striving, through the corruption of the flesh, it falleth down again to some thought, or to some done or undone deed. But what matter? For fast after, it riseth again as suddenly as it did before (c. 4. p. 19).

The analyses and schemes of all spiritual writing can give the principles, but none can map out the actual working of God. We are not dealing with a mechanical engine constructed to climb funicularly the Mount of Carmel. This ascent depends on two free wills of which the free will of God is unpredictable, though it can be appreciated with great understanding at every single instant.

ERRATUM: In the article in this series in July LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, through a printer's error, five lines were repeated out of place. On page 13 delete the first five lines from 'Of these works . . .' to '. . . and partly to'.

SUFFERING IN ISRAEL[1]

BY

J. STEINMANN

IT may fairly be said that in ancient Hebrew poetry suffering holds the place reserved for love in the lyrical compositions of the literature of the West. It is, moreover, under the pressure of tragic events that suffering has become the *leitmotiv* of the latter part of the Bible in which the book of Job occurs.

It is true that there is very little mention of suffering in the accounts of the Thorah. Not a few massacres are there related—without any pity for the victims. The reason is that at the time of the conquest of Palestine and during the beginnings of the Monarchy the Hebrews were still an insensitive and uncivilised people. They were a young and conquering race. Their will to power was intact. The sages of the court of Solomon or of Jeroboam II were the diplomats or poets of a tiny nation possessed with the certitude that it would endure and conquer.

From the eighth century onwards the two monarchies begin to totter. Suffering now becomes the teacher of the Hebrew people. She finds her poets in the great Prophets. They create the hallucinating picture of the ruins which presage the final political catas-

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trophe of 586 B.C. Jerusalem then falls to Nabuchodonosor after a long siege marked by scenes of unforgettable horror. War had then a character of ferocity which we have recently begun to experience anew. King Sedecias was taken prisoner. In his presence, and probably with unheard of refinements of cruelty, his sons were put to death. Then his eyes were torn out so that his last memory should be that appalling sight. Everywhere rape, blood and fire. The Temple and Solomon's Palace were set on fire, the intellectual élite of the country massacred or deported. The kingdom of Juda suffered practically the same fate as befell Poland in 1940. The caravans of prisoners made their way through the desert towards Mesopotamia, leaving a trail of corpses along their tracks.

Among the Sages and Priests some few thought that all these frightful sufferings were the work of Yahweh. He had unloosed that terrible anger against his people which the Prophets had foreseen and foretold. It was really Yahweh who was the author of all these massacres. The Babylonian soldiers were only tools in his hands. The minority of exiles or of escaped prisoners who did not lose faith in Yahweh and those whose outlook remained religious experienced a feeling of bewilderment, of being crushed. In the *Lamentations of Jeremias* the echo is prolonged until it comes down to our own days.

Suffering was, then, the direct work of Yahweh and it struck down all without distinction because all were guilty, jointly and severally. In conquered and pillaged Jerusalem there must have been many who were innocent, people without influence over the fluctuations of the Court's religious policy, the poor, those who were faithful to Yahweh. They died of hunger like the others. The old narratives related, however, that Yahweh had caused Lot and his family to leave Sodom before it was burned. Abraham had said to Yahweh: 'Far be it from thee, Yahweh, to cause the just to perish with the wicked'. But Lot was not a native of Sodom. He was living in the city by chance and did not belong to it. An attempt was made to justify the death or suffering of the innocent by affirming that one of their ancestors had sinned. Yahweh's terrible curse continued to haunt the family, a figure of the fatality which the Greeks felt to hang over the race of the Atrides. Had not Yahweh affirmed in the code of the Covenant: 'I am the Lord thy God, mighty, jealous, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me' (Exodus 20, 5). Among other memories was there not that of Yahweh causing the innocent little child born of the union of the King and Bethsabee to expiate David's adultery?

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Yet this doctrine of the collective solidarity of a whole people or, in the course of time, of an entire race, was gradually to become less and less important in the religious consciousness of Israel. During the Exile Ezechiel is witness of a step forward, a more complete revelation made to the Jewish people: that of the individual character of retribution. He is the first to dare to affirm that each man is responsible only for his own sins. One is not punished for the sins of one's parents or ancestors. This was a great theological advance. But could an innocent man be punished for the sins of his people? The poems of the suffering Servant of Yahweh in the second part of the book of Isaias known as 'the Book of the Consolation of Israel' answer affirmatively. It is the picture of a martyr expiating for an entire people:

> And he shall grow up as a tender plant before him, and be as a root out of a thirsty ground. There is no beauty in him, nor comeliness: and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of him:
> Despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity: and his look was as it were hidden and despised. Whereupon we esteemed him not.
> Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows: and we have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted.
> But he was wounded for our iniquities: he was bruised for our sins. The chastisement of our peace was upon him: and by his bruises we are healed. (Isaias 53, 2-5.)

Despite this heroic example, after the Exile the theory of the reciprocity of suffering lost ground and religion became more and more a personal matter. In future when suffering and pain are in question, as a rule their cause will no longer be sought among the sufferer's ancestors or contemporaries. Each one is responsible for himself.

And yet the problem was not solved. What meaning could disease, ruin, grief, humiliation, every form of misfortune and finally death have for the Sages of this people who had suffered so deeply? In the final event the solution of the problem depended on the idea formed of the survival of man after death. After a man's death, however holy his life had been, the most wretched of fates began for him. What remained of him entered the Shadow world known as Sheol.

Sheol, like the Greeks' Tartarus, was situated in the underworld. It resembled that dwelling place of Hades which, according to Homer, 'in its frightful putrefaction freezes even the gods with horror'[2]. The dead dwelt there, entirely naked, in total darkness,

2 *Iliad*, XX, 64 ff.

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living a sort of disembodied life. They were kept under lock and key, far from Yahweh, whose interest in them was no greater than theirs in him. The psalmist exclaims:

> Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? Or shall physicians raise to life and give praise to thee?
> Shall anyone in the sepulchre declare thy mercy: And thy truth in destruction?
> Shall thy wonders be known in the dark: and thy justice in the land of forgetfulness? (Ps. 87, 11-13.)

And again the psalmsit affirms:

> For there is none in death that is mindful of thee: And who shall confess to thee in hell? (Ps. 6, 6.)

The kingdom of the dead was guarded by porters who kept its gates bolted. A multitude of kings, princes, warriors and men of the past would be found there. There Samuel would be placed on the same footing as the Pharaohs and Assyrian generals.

On what did these dead in their shadow world live? The Assyro-Babylonians, whose idea of Sheol was very similar to that of the Hebrews, thought that unless their descendants offered them funeral sacrifices the shades were nourished on dust or on dung left by the living:

> Dust is their nourishment and mud their food.
> Hast thou seen him for whose shade there is no one to care?
> The leavings of the dish, the remains of food which lie in the street, these he eats.[3]

For the Hebrews the dead are not tortured. They rest. But they enjoy none of the benefits of life and in particular are deprived of light. There is no one among them who would not have been ready to ratify these lines of the Odyssey:

> . . . . . rather had I be
> A thrall upon the acres to a man
> Portionless and sunk low in poverty
> Than over all the perished dead below
> Hold lordship.[4]

The prophets have often described Sheol, just as the Babylonian poets had described the descent into Hell of the goddess Ichtar. A magnificent passage of Isaias depicts the great king Sargon going to rejoin the shades of the underworld:

> Hell below was in an uproar to meet thee at thy coming: it stirred up the giants for thee. All the princes of the earth are risen up from their thrones, all the princes of nations. All shall answer and say to thee: Thou also art wounded as well as we. Thou art become like unto us.

[3] Text quoted by Dhorme
[4] *Odyssey*: XI, 489 (Tr. J. W. Mackail).

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> Thy pride is brought down to Hell: thy carcass is fallen down. Under thee shall the *moth* be strewed, and worms shall be thy covering. (Isaias 14, 9-11.)

And Ezechiel relates the descent of the Pharaoh into Sheol:

> Assur is there and all his multitude: their graves are round about him, all of them slain and that fell by the sword.
> Whose graves are set in the lowest part of the pit.
> And his multitude lay round about his grave: all of them slain and fallen by the sword, they that heretofore spread terror in the land of the living.
> There is Elam and all his multitude round about his grave, all of them slain and fallen by the sword: that went down uncircumcised to the lowest parts of the earth. . . . (Ezechiel, 32, 22-4.)

Notions on the fate of the dead so devoid of hope and so different from those of the Egyptians could not but have considerable repercussions in Israel, not only on religious speculation but also on social life. Moral behaviour had no consequences beyond the tomb. An Egyptian who defrauded his neighbour secretly incurred the risk of finding himself condemned after death at the tribunal of Osiris. The Hebrew knew nothing of the existence of a judgment of Yahweh after death. Judgment took place at once during life and it was during life that Yahweh distributed rewards and punishments. As these rewards consisted of riches and good health, long life and numerous posterity, temporal success tended to be regarded as the synonym of holiness. On the other hand, adversity and disease were regarded as the scarcely less infallible signs of sin and therefore of Yahweh's punishment. One has only to re-read the curses with which the book of Deuteronomy ends or the Law of sanctity as laid down in Leviticus to realise the very natural and substantial connection which existed for the Jews between temporal prosperity and moral goodness on the one hand and between misfortune and sin on the other. The respect with which the wealthy, mothers of numerous families and, above all, old men were surrounded was a consequence of this state of mind, as was also the contempt with which childless women, those afflicted by disease, the poor, widows, orphans and all those without means were treated. A further consequence was the fact that piety was not always disinterested: for certain souls prayer seemed a gilt-edged investment.

Unfortunately this rather naïve kind of religious pragmatism would sometimes be cruelly belied by facts. The just *were* persecuted, obvious evildoers did enjoy the most glaring prosperity. At a pinch it was always possible to attribute some sin to those who were innocent victims, but to justify the prosperity of the wicked was more difficult. It was even more scandalising to see avowed

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sceptics or non-believers enjoy long life, great riches and all the outward signs of divine favour than to see the innocent suffer. And so the Psalmist wrote:

Arise, O Lord God, let thy hand be exalted: forget not the poor.
Wherefore hath the wicked provoked God?
For he hath said in his heart: He will not require it.
(Ps. 9, 12-13.)

This was not primarily a question of a feeling of jealousy but of a kind of scandal of the metaphysical order.

But my feet were almost moved: my steps had well-nigh slipped.
Because I had zeal on occasion of the wicked, seeing the prosperity of sinners.
For there is no regard to their death: nor is there strength in their stripes.
They are not in the labour of men: neither shall they be scourged like other men.
Therefore pride hath held them fast: they are covered with their iniquity and their wickedness. (Ps. 72, 2-6.)

The historians who, at the time of the Exile, collated and revised the history of the monarchy came up against these difficult points in Israel's past. Evil kings like Jeroboam II or Manassah had enjoyed prosperous reigns, not to mention great heathen conquerors like Assurbanipal or Nabuchodonosor, who were both cruel and rapacious. This made the historians almost more ashamed than did the fact of Josias the Good's dying prematurely. In their books, therefore, they shrouded in holy silence the prosperity of these accursed kings.

But the more highly cultured men became, the greater these difficulties grew. The return from the Exile must have been a golden opportunity for unscrupulous people who were living like pagans to grow rich. The God-fearing who were repatriated remained poor. A double scandal.

The unfortunate were indeed in sorry plight! Far from help being given to them, stones were thrown at them. The Psalms, which so frequently remind one of the book of Job, re-echo with the cries of terror and the tears of these wretches, abandoned by all in this crude society in which enmities were relentless and pity all too rare. Sometimes even their nearest and dearest despised the sick, just as certain sections of society would formerly refuse to have any contact with a bankrupt or a divorcé.

For if my enemy had reviled me I would verily have borne with it.
And if he that hated me had spoken great things against me, I would perhaps have hidden myself from him.
But thou a man of one mind, my guide and my familiar.
Who didst take sweet meats together with me: in the house of

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God we walked with consent. (Ps. 54, 13-16.)

Another sufferer cries out:

> . . . my heart hath expected reproach and misery. And I looked for one that would grieve together with me, and I found none. And they gave me gall for my food: and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. (Ps. 67, 21-22.)

In ancient Israel, any who were so ill as to render recovery doubtful, those who were ruined, were considered as pestilential creatures to whom one would not hesitate to give the finishing blow.

> I am forgotten as one dead from the heart.
> I am become as a vessel that is destroyed. (Ps. 30, 13.)

In the very presence of these unfortunate wretches the wicked mocked and abused them as only Easterns can.

Theologians and apologists strained every nerve to solve the problem. They displayed a great deal of ingenuity. It was said that on the miscreant whose affairs were prospering Yahweh's punishment would fall suddenly and that the longer the blow were deferred the more frightful it would be. Or again they would fall back on the terrors of the night. The wicked is tortured by his conscience. He is haunted by nightmares. But in the face of the satisfied laugh of 'the fat', for such was the term applied to the unscrupulous and mighty rich, and in the face, too, of the obvious inadequacy of this apologetic, the old solutions would come to the fore: it is in the person of his children that the rich will be chastised. And, finally, it was always the innocent who paid. In this dilemma Jewish thought has found its greatest anguish and has experienced its most poignant drama.

The problem of Yahweh's existence scarcely entered into Hebrew thought. No one doubted but that Yahweh was the creator of the world. Philosophical reflection after the manner of the pre-socratic philosophers did not exist in Palestine, nor did the rudiments of Hellenic science. It was from the angle of this problem of the retribution of the good and the wicked that the strong minds of the fourth or fifth century B.C. would approach religious questions and experience would sometimes seem to justify their doubts. If they did not deny the existence of Yahweh in general, they did affirm that he had no power over human lives. They were touching theology's tender spot. And very often apologists had only sophisms with which to answer them.

Moreover, this conception of Yahweh's role was very narrow. According to the Thorah it seemed as if he were a God who was always on the look out for man's sin that he might punish it. Self-interest seemed to be the motive-spring of virtue. Nowhere did love find a place in the scheme of things. And even when in

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Deuteronomy the love of God does come into question, a double series of promises and threats is there to remind the Israelite that it is very much to his interest to follow Yahweh. Repentance seems based on the most imperfect contrition possible, that which is rooted in egoism. Fortunately men's souls proved to be of finer mettle than their theology. The Bible is studded with examples of holy men who love Yahweh for himself. But they were in advance of the theology of their times. The prophets alone visualised the whole depth of the love of Yahweh which went far beyond the mathematical calculations of the moralists. When they pondered over these things, those minds which were most deeply religious were tempted by all that was best in themselves to utter a protest against the traditional theology. This was precisely the case of the author of Job, who wrote his poem in this atmosphere of troubled uncertainty and perhaps barely two or three generations after the return from the Exile.

Translated by K. POND.

A LETTER TO NOVICES

BY

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA[1]

To certain novices of the Order of Our Lady of Mount Olivet

N the name of Jesus Christ crucified and of sweet Mary. Dearest sons in sweet Jesus Christ. Catherine, servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, writes to you in his precious blood, with a desire to see her sons obedient unto death, learning of the spotless Lamb who was obedient to the Father, even unto the shameful death of the cross. Consider that he is the way and the rule which you and all creatures must follow. Put him before you and look at him with the eye of your mind; see how obedient he is, the Word of God made flesh. He does not shrink from the heavy burden put upon him by the Father. On the contrary, he shoulders it and runs with great desire. He made this clear at supper on Holy Thursday when he said, 'With desire I have desired to feast with you before I die'. That is to say, he intended to keep the paschal feast, fulfilling the will of his Father, and his own obedience. Seeing at last the time draw near in which he was to sacrifice his body to the Father for our sake, he was filled with joy and exultation. In his happiness he said, 'With

[1] Translated by D. E. K., O.P. This letter has not appeared before in English.

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