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## **"WHEREAS I WAS BLIND, NOW I SEE."**

– MARCH 12. – JOHN 9:1-11. –

EVERY traveler in eastern countries is sure to be impressed by the fact that blindness is much more common there than in Europe and America. Tabulated information on this subject, in Encyclopedia Americana, shows that in 1870 the proportion of blind in America was one in 1900 population; in Europe the proportion was larger; viz., 1 in 1094; while in China the average was 1 in 400 population. According to no less an authority than Dr. Geikie, Egypt has one blind person to every 100 of population. Palestine lying near to Egypt, and having conditions very similar, especially amongst the lower classes, may be supposed to have had at least half as many; viz., the terribly large proportion of 1 in every 200 of population.

Canon Tristram, writing on the subject, says: –

"Blindness is common in Palestine to a degree which we in western lands can scarcely realize. There is probably no country in the world, except Egypt, where this affliction is so prevalent. At Gaza, for instance, it is said that one-third of the population have lost one or both eyes; and from my own observation in that city I should unhesitatingly say that the statement is not exaggerated. But amongst these cases it is difficult to find any born blind."

This blindness is in great measure the result of the scarcity of water, and the neglect of children whose eyes are in consequence attacked by the flies. The miracle brought to our attention in this lesson differs from the five other instances of the healing of the blind by our Lord, mentioned in the Scriptures, in that this man was born blind. In our Lord's time the science of surgery had not advanced so far as at present, and consequently, as herein stated by the one healed, the cure was a marvel, the like of which had never been heard of. Even yet we believe that there are only five cases on record of successful operations

upon those born blind. Our Lord's cure of such blindness, with the simple prescription used, would therefore be a remarkable miracle to-day, and much more so was it in that day.

### **ORIENTALISM, MORMONISM, THEOSOPHY.**

The question of the disciples, whether it was this man's sin or the sin of his parents that caused him to be born blind, implies either an extreme simplicity on their part, not to see that the man could not have sinned before his birth, or quite possibly it implied that some of the absurd notions of the far East – of India – had reached the Jews: one of these was and still is that each child born into the world had a previous existence, in which it had done either good or evil, the rewards or punishments of which were represented in the conditions of the present life. This absurdity is being revived, even in Christian lands, by so-called Theosophists, and by two bodies of people known as "Mormons," in the United States. It is scarcely necessary to point out that such a theory finds no support whatever in any statement of the Scriptures. Quite to the contrary, it is most emphatically contradicted by the Scriptures, which declare man's creation to have been a direct creation from God – not a reincarnation of some being which had previously existed. This thought is consistently maintained throughout the Bible, in that we are distinctly told that the child receives its life from its father, and inherits good or evil according to his course of life, and not according to any course of life of its own in a previous condition or in another world. Thus the Lord declares that he visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation, and shows mercy unto thousands of them that love him and keep his commandments. – Exod. 20:5; Deut. 5:9.

This heredity, we see, comes in the natural order of things. The tendency of sin is not only to break down the moral character, but also to vitiate and impair the physical system, while godliness, altho it cannot repair and make good the impairments of sin, can check these, and hold them measurably in restraint. The Scriptures again contradict

this thought, in the declaration, "By one man's disobedience sin entered into the world, and death as a result of sin, and thus death passed upon all men because [thus] all men became sinners" – by heredity. And if by heredity then not as Theosophy, Mormonism and Orientalism declare; – not in consequence of some previous existence and sin on the part of the child.

The whole matter is squared by the doctrine of the *ransom*, as all may readily see: for if our present blemishes, with which we are born into this world, were the results of sins committed in some previous condition of existence, the death of our Lord Jesus could not cancel them, and the doctrine of a ransom would be disproved. The doctrine of the ransom is unchangeably linked to the doctrine that Adam was a perfect human being in his creation, and that it was *his sin* and condemnation that passed to all of his posterity, through the channel of natural birth. The ransom ("*corresponding price*") given by our Lord Jesus, was a man's life for a man's life: that, "as *by a man* came death, *by a man* also should come the resurrection of the dead." Our Lord's ransom sacrifice, being the complete and corresponding price and offset to father Adam's sin, was constituted thereby an offset to all the results of his sin as they appear in his posterity – and thus we all were redeemed by the one sacrifice of Christ, the just for the unjust.

### **IS ALL SICKNESS OF THE DEVIL?**

An increasingly large number of Christian people – including those who refuse medicines – are reaching the conclusion that all sickness is the direct result of sin and the work of the devil; and therefore that godly living will prevent sickness: and that in the event of sickness, if it be a punishment for sin, medicines should not be used, but, on the contrary, prayer should be made to God for the forgiveness of sin for which sickness is a punishment, and that the cure of the disease should be expected as a reward of repentance and faith exercised.

We wonder how these Christian friends view this lesson. Like the disciples, they evidently would conclude that a man born blind must have been so born on account of sin – if not his own sin, the sins of his parents – for they account for all disease from this standpoint. Unfortunately they feel so satisfied with their conclusions on the subject that they do not inquire of the Lord, as did the apostles. And they do not hear **[R2440 : page 60]** his answer here given – that it was neither sin on the part of the man, nor on the part of his parents, which occasioned his blindness.

If they were students of the Word they would note also the numerous statements of Scripture which clearly point out that calamities are not always punishments for sins: for instance, our Lord's declaration respecting the Galileans whose blood was mingled with the sacrifices, and those upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and slew them. (Luke 13:1-5.) Our Lord distinctly declares that these calamities did not indicate that the sufferers were sinners above other men. Likewise, in the case of the sickness and death of Lazarus. Our Lord declares, not that it was because of sin on the part of Lazarus, but that it was permitted in order to be for the glory of God. So in this lesson he declares that the fact that the man was born blind was not on account of sin, but on the contrary, "that the works of God should be made manifest in him."

We are not denying that sin frequently brings sickness; on the contrary, we affirm this, and confirm this view with our Lord's words to some of those whom he healed, "Go, sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee." There is a great difference, however, between claiming that all sickness is of sin and the devil, and admitting that much of it is produced or intensified by sin. We go even further than this, and admit that in a general way all the blemishes of the present time may be indirectly traced to our great Adversary, Satan. For had it not been for his fall, and for the temptations which he presented to our first parents, we may suppose that there would have been no sin in the world; consequently no imperfection, no sighing, no crying, no dying.

But it is thoroughly wrong to credit to Satan's power all the difficulties which we experience. We are glad indeed that he is limited and restrained; because under the weaknesses with which we are born we find quite sufficient of evil disposition and weakness received by heredity, and operating, not only between parent and child, but between neighbor and neighbor. We may be glad indeed that Satan's power to deceive is not permitted to vitiate our minds contrary to our wills, and not permitted to break down our wills, except as we give them over to sympathy and contact with evil things. We may be glad also that sickness and death working in man are not wholly subject to the prince of darkness, for altho the Scriptures declare that Satan's power is deathward, they also show us that he does not have this power unlimitedly, but can exercise it only under restraints and restrictions. This is most clearly indicated to us in the case of Job and his family. Rather, the Scriptures teach that Satan's power or influence is the result of the Adamic death operating in mankind and rendering all amenable to Satan's devices and deceptions. – Heb. 2:14.

And, by the way, Job's case is another illustration of sickness and calamities of various kinds which were not the punishments of sin; for have we not Job's own testimony of his love for God, his confidence in him, and his faithful reliance upon him? "Tho he slay me, yet will I trust in him!" And more, we have the Lord's testimony to the same effect, in favor of his servant Job, and in reproof of his friends who wrongly represented that his sickness and calamities were punishments for sin.

We conclude, then, upon Scriptural grounds, that not all sickness is in the nature of sin penalties, but that some sicknesses are as penalties. Hence, when the Christian shall find himself overtaken with sickness or other disasters, he should first of all inquire of himself, before the Lord, whether or not his difficulties are the result of –

(1) A direct violation of the laws of his reason, as, for instance, indiscretion in eating, gratification of the appetite in respect to food

which he knows is not suited to his physical conditions: or violation of recognized principles of conduct, as, for instance, the endorsing of a note, contrary to the instructions of the Lord's Word (Prov. 6:1), which has brought disaster to many. If he does not find his troubles to be the result of personal *indiscretion* he should look –

(2) To see whether or not *sin* lies at his door; whether or not he has been living inconsistently, and might properly recognize his sickness or trouble as a punishment for his sin, his inconsistency. If he finds it to be so, he should of course immediately rectify the wrong to the extent of his ability, and seek forgiveness, mercy, at the throne of the heavenly grace, and expect that after suffering some chastisements he will be released.

(3) Should he fail to find a cause for his difficulties in either of the foregoing, he should consider that quite possibly his difficulty, whatever its nature, was one of the ordinary casualties of life from which God does not wholly forefend his children – desiring them to walk by faith and not by sight: such casualties are necessary, that we may be very sympathetic with the world's troubles.

(4) In some instances, as in Job's case and the case before us in this lesson, troubles may ultimately be found to have been *permitted* by the Lord, to be channels of mercy and blessing, if rightly received, as in these cases.

(5) In all troubles, whether for discipline or for instruction in righteousness and the development of character, the children of God (and we are not considering others now) should forthwith begin to seek the blessing which they may be sure God has in store for them when he permits adversities. And this should not hinder their use of any means for relief upon which they can conscientiously ask the divine blessing: on the same principle that we labor for and eat the daily bread for which we pray, and which is none the less of divine provision.

The work of God made manifest in this blind man was not merely in the miracle performed upon his natural eyes. It extended beyond this, and testified to the beholders the power of God, operating in Messiah. And it extended still further, in the case of the man who was healed: leading to the opening of the eyes of his understanding, it inducted him into discipleship to Christ. Had he not been born blind, had he not passed through just the experiences through which he did pass, how can we judge that he would have been in a better condition of heart to receive the Messiah than the educated Pharisees, who, with good natural sight, were thoroughly blinded respecting Messiah, his teachings and his work, so that they crucified him?

And so it is in many instances with many who become the Lord's people. Looking back they can clearly see that things which at the time seemed to be adversities, [R2440 : page 61] disappointments, troubles, disadvantages, hardships, were really great blessings, in that they led to the opening of the eyes of their understanding, – were really providences and blessings in disguise. Those who do so realize the divine care, looking back, can praise the way God has led them day by day.

### **CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MISBELIEFS.**

Amongst the various false doctrines of to-day none appears more inconsistent from the standpoint of science and Christianity than the system which brazenly and defiantly and in perversion of truth and conscience unites these two words as its name. It would be amusing, we may be sure, to hear one of the devotees of this theory explain this Scripture. For, notwithstanding the fact that their entire system is in opposition to the Scriptures, they make a cloak, a pretense, of believing the Scriptures, and of using them in support of their theory – chiefly with novices. We may be sure that they would attempt to twist and juggle it in some manner, and get it so far away from the truth and the subject as to at least confuse many people, who have very little knowledge of the Bible, and shallow powers of reasoning,

especially those "who have not their senses exercised by reason of use," in connection with Scriptural subjects. – Heb. 5:14.

Their theory is that there is no such thing as blindness, that it is simply a mistaken thought, a misbelief: since the parents of the blind man could not have misbelieved that their child would be born blind, the child itself, we presume they would say, got this misimpression before its birth. And then we have the inconsistency increased, for every one of intelligence knows that the infant at birth has no thought, correct or incorrect, on any subject. The fallacy of this theory is likewise proved, in the case of those born deaf and dumb. But argument and reason have no more force with "Christian Scientists" than have the Scriptures. Their infatuation with their delusion is so great that they are fully prepared to wrest facts, reason and Scripture – and then in perversion of all truth and consistency they call this "Christian Science."

We are not contending with them respecting their use of the word "Science," for the most stupid should be able to see that there is nothing scientific in connection with their theory: but we do contend respecting their use of the word "Christian," because many do not recognize that they have not the slightest right to the use of this term. Our contention is that a Christian Scientist of full development cannot be a Christian, in any Scriptural sense of the word.

(1) A Christian is one who believes in God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent to be a propitiation for our sins, our Redeemer and ultimately the Deliverer of all those who obey him. But Christian Science denies the very existence of God, claiming to believe merely in a *principle* of Good. To whatever extent a man has a good principle the God-quality is in him, say they; and to whatever extent a horse or a dog may have the good principles, to that extent these are Gods, and to be loved, etc., accordingly. Denying the Father, they of course deny also the Son whom he sent: and altho they acknowledge Jesus, it is not with a Christian acknowledgment. On the



contrary, they hold that he was merely a member of the Adamic family, and that his preeminence above others was in respect to his character and teachings. And they claim that while in these respects he stood higher than other men of his day, yet he but feebly grasped at certain principles or truths which are to-day brought to the world by her distinguished highness, "Mrs. Dr. Eddy," who thus poses as being greater than Jesus, as an elephant is greater than a mouse; tho there be certain resemblances.

(2) A Christian is one who believes in Christ as a Savior from sin as well as from its consequences; – death and its concomitants of pain, etc. But Christian Scientists deny that there is any sin, and deny also that there are any consequences of sin; hence, logically, they deny the ransom, for how could there be a *ransom* for sinners if none are sinners. Thus do they deny and ignore the very *foundation* of Christian faith, without which no one is a Christian – Scripturally.

The absurdities of Christian Science commend themselves only to those who are either Scripturally ignorant or mentally weak; and their chief attractions are therefore –

(1) The fact that they put on, as a garment of light, gentleness and kindness of word and manner. That these do not grow out of hearts thoroughly converted to the Lord, and begotten of his spirit of love is manifest: for altho kindness and patience and gentleness are manifested, the true essence of these is lacking, namely, love. Instead of manifesting love to be the mainspring of their meekness, patience, gentleness, they manifest ambition and money-love as their inspiring motives – so far as we are able to judge the tree by its fruits. So far as we are able to learn, their efforts to promulgate their views are confined to those who are able and willing to *pay* for the instruction good round prices; and so far as we are able to discern, their care of the sick shows a love of money and love of fame; and hence very few of the poor of this world have been injured by the doctrines of Christian Science, or cured of disease by its treatment.

(2) The cure of disease without medicine, and sometimes almost miraculously, is in the nature of things calculated to attract and interest the "groaning creation" – just as the advertisements of patent medicines attract them. We unhesitatingly assert our conviction, that this power, manifested through Christian Scientists, is not of God, but of the Adversary, directly or indirectly. He no doubt directs his servants into the use of channels and means of which humanity in general, and even many learned physicians, are comparatively ignorant – channels of human nature which possibly in the future may be used by the Lord during times of restitution of all things. Our justification in ascribing their cures to an evil source, instead of to a good source, lies in the fact that they utterly repudiate the principles of Christianity, and we may be sure God would not cooperate to assist with his power those who deny his very existence, and who make void the gospel of the redemption through the blood of Christ. The miracle-working power in them we believe to be the same as the miracle-working power in Spiritism and in Orientalism, and in the charms of other Occultists – namely, Satanic power. **[R2440 : page 62]**

If it be asked, How could Satan be interested in doing a good work? we answer: he does no such work amongst those who are thoroughly and stupidly ignorant: he is doing these works merely in the most civilized lands, and especially amongst the most enlightened of the people in the various denominations of Christendom. The Adversary thus assumes the garment of an angel of light and mercy, not to lead to the Light of the world – not to lead to the cross of Christ – not to lead to the Bible – but to lead away from these, to another hope of salvation, and to another teacher: to deceive, if it were possible, the very elect. And be it remembered that our Lord's words indicate that when matters come to this condition, where Satan will cast out Satan and heal disease, it is a marked evidence that his throne is tottering to its fall – that, so to speak, this is the last extremity of the Adversary's efforts to deceive.

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The Lord's method of giving sight to the blind man, we may reasonably suppose, was parabolic – that is to say, it contains a lesson under a figure. Since our Lord did not explain the significance of his action in making a clay ointment out of the dust with his spittle, and anointing the man's eyes with this, and sending him to wash them and to receive sight at the Pool of Siloam, we may each exercise our mental powers in thinking of what these different things would signify. But we are limited in our speculations, nevertheless, and may not run wild, but must restrain ourselves within the limits of plain statements of the Word of God respecting his plan of salvation.

In harmony with these plain statements we may interpret our Lord's symbolical act thus: The blind man would fitly represent the world of mankind in general, who during the present life are mentally blind – who cannot now see the goodness, mercy and love of God as these may be recognized by others who are now able to see them. His being born blind would harmonize with this thought, for the blindness that is upon the world is to a large extent at least a matter of heredity. His blindness does not represent a blindness on the part of those who have once seen God's grace, represented in his Word and plan, and who have then become blind thereto, and who would represent the class mentioned by the Apostle as having once been enlightened, and who subsequently lose that enlightenment. (Heb. 6:4-6.) If then the blind man represents the blind world (who do not see, in the sense that the Church sees, of whom the Lord said, "Blessed are your eyes for they see") the time of the healing of such blindness is in the Millennial age, as Scripturally pointed out, when "All the blind eyes shall be opened, and the deaf ears unstopped." (Isa. 35:5.) And this agrees with the conditions of our Lord's miracle, because we are informed that this miracle took place on the Sabbath or seventh day, which corresponds to and typifies the Millennial Day, the seventh-thousand year period.

Our Lord's words, nevertheless, seem to indicate that some part of this symbolical picture relates to the present age, for he said, "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh

wherein no man can work." In this statement the word "day" would seem to belong to the present time, and to be illustrated in the making of clay with our Lord's spittle, and the anointing of the blind man's eyes. The washing of his eyes and the cure would seem to belong to the next age, the Millennial age. The Lord's spittle, the secretions of his mouth, might represent the truth as fitly as would the words of his mouth – it is another figure, but seemingly of the same force and meaning. He uttered the truth, brought it in contact with the dust of the earth – not in contact with all the dust of the earth, but with a limited portion, an elect or select portion, – and of this he made the anointing clay. The Scriptures do inform us, in harmony with this, that the Word of God's grace, delivered through and by our Lord Jesus, is designed in the present age to act upon a small fragment of humanity, and to consecrate them and make them meet for the Master's use in the blessing of the world, in the anointing of the eyes of the blind. From this standpoint of view the making of the clay would represent the formation of the elect Church for the blessing of the poor, blind world. And quite possibly not only is this work of making the clay now in progress, but perhaps some portion of the anointing work is now being done, as is intimated by the Scripture which declares that the Gospel must first be *preached for a witness* in all the world before the end of this age. The world must be witnessed to during this age, but the world will not have the eyes of its understanding opened during this age: it must wait until the great washing time of the Millennial age, of which the Scriptures declare, "In *that day* there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David for sin and for uncleanness." (Zech. 13:1.) In full agreement with this is the significance of the word Siloam. It signifies "The sending forth," or "The fountain."

The Pharisees objected to the Lord's goodness, because forsooth it infringed some of their hypercritical dogmas and traditions. This is interesting, as showing to what extent religious forms and ceremonies may bind and blind intelligent and reverential people. And this should be a lesson to all the intelligent and reverent, leading them to great care in judging righteous judgment, according to the standard of the

divine Word, and not according to their prejudices and revered creeds and the traditions of the fathers.

Still another lesson may be found in the fact that the man who confessed our Lord Jesus, and who stood up in bold defence of righteousness, was greatly blessed, in that after he had thus demonstrated his loyalty to principle, and had suffered as a result excommunication from the Church – *then the Lord found him*. Thus his faithfulness under trials and difficulties, and his willingness to suffer the loss of earthly fellowship and honor amongst men, led directly to a still greater blessing, even direct fellowship and communion with the Lord himself. How many are there whose mental eyes have been opened to the truth, who have been so loyal to the Lord and so appreciative of his goodness as to be faithful in declaring the facts? How many of these have found that such faithfulness means separation from the synagogue, from the church nominal? How many of these have feared to lose prestige and influence, through confessing the light of present truth? But all who have followed the noble course of thankfulness, loyalty and obedience to God, have found that such obedience, while it led to a loss of fellowship in the nominal church, led also to a greater fellowship and communion, and a more intimate acquaintance with the Lord himself.

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