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mortality; in possessions of the devil, exorcisms, and soothsayers. It is persuaded that seeds must grow rotten in the earth to spring up again, and that the quarters of the moon are the causes of accessions of fever.

A Talapoin persuades his followers that the god Sammonocodom sojourned some time at Siam, and that he cut down all the trees in a forest which prevented him from flying his kite at his ease, which was his favorite amusement. This idea takes root in their heads; and finally, an honest man who might doubt this adventure of Sammonocodom, would run the risk of being stoned. It requires ages to destroy a popular opinion. Opinion is called the queen of the world: it is so; for when reason opposes it, it is condemned to death. It must rise twenty times from its ashes to gradually drive away the usurper.

OPTIMISM.

I beg of you, gentlemen, to explain to me how everything is for the best; for I do not understand it. Does it signify that everything is arranged and ordered according to the laws of the impelling power? That I comprehend and acknowledge. Do you mean that every one is well and possesses the means of living—that nobody suffers? You know that such is not the case. Are you of the opinion that the lamentable calamities which afflict the earth are good in reference to God; and that He takes
pleasure in them? I credit not this horrible doctrine; neither do you.

Have the goodness to explain how all is for the best. Plato, the dialectician, condescended to allow to God the liberty of making five worlds; because, said he, there are five regular solids in geometry, the tetrahedron, the cube, the hexahedron, the dodecahedron, and the icosahedron. But why thus restrict divine power? Why not permit the sphere, which is still more regular, and even the cone, the pyramid of many sides, the cylinder, etc.?

God, according to Plato, necessarily chose the best of all possible worlds; and this system has been embraced by many Christian philosophers, although it appears repugnant to the doctrine of original sin. After this transgression, our globe was no more the best of all possible worlds. If it was ever so, it might be so still; but many people believe it to be the worst of worlds instead of the best.

Leibnitz takes the part of Plato; more readers than one complain of their inability to understand either the one or the other; and for ourselves, having read both of them more than once, we avow our ignorance according to custom; and since the gospel has revealed nothing on the subject, we remain in darkness without remorse.

Leibnitz, who speaks of everything, has treated of original sin; and as every man of systems introduces into his plan something contradictory, he imagined that the disobedience towards God, with the
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frightful misfortunes which followed it, were integral parts of the best of worlds, and necessary ingredients of all possible felicity: "Calla, calla, senor don Carlos; todo que se hace es por su ben."

What! to be chased from a delicious place, where we might have lived for ever only for the eating of an apple? What! to produce in misery wretched children, who will suffer everything, and in return produce others to suffer after them? What! to experience all maladies, feel all vexations, die in the midst of grief, and by way of recompense be burned to all eternity—is this lot the best possible? It certainly is not good for us, and in what manner can it be so for God? Leibnitz felt that nothing could be said to these objections, but nevertheless made great books, in which he did not even understand himself.

Lucullus, in good health, partaking of a good dinner with his friends and his mistress in the hall of Apollo, may jocosely deny the existence of evil; but let him put his head out of the window and he will behold wretches in abundance; let him be seized with a fever, and he will be one himself.

I do not like to quote; it is ordinarily a thorny proceeding. What precedes and what follows the passage quoted is too frequently neglected; and thus a thousand objections may rise. I must, notwithstanding, quote Lactantius, one of the fathers, who, in the thirteenth chapter on the anger of God, makes Epicurus speak as follows: "God can either
take away evil from the world and will not; or being willing to do so, cannot; or He neither can nor will; or, lastly, He is both able and willing. If He is willing to remove evil and cannot, then is He not omnipotent. If He can, but will not remove it, then is He not benevolent; if He is neither able nor willing, then is He neither powerful nor benevolent; lastly, if both able and willing to annihilate evil, how does it exist?"

The argument is weighty, and Lactantius replies to it very poorly by saying that God wills evil, but has given us wisdom to secure the good. It must be confessed that this answer is very weak in comparison with the objection; for it implies that God could bestow wisdom only by allowing evil—a pleasant wisdom truly! The origin of evil has always been an abyss, the depth of which no one has been able to sound. It was this difficulty which reduced so many ancient philosophers and legislators to have recourse to two principles—the one good, the other wicked. Typhon was the evil principle among the Egyptians, Arimanex among the Persians. The Manichæans, it is said, adopted this theory; but as these people have never spoken either of a good or of a bad principle, we have nothing to prove it but the assertion.

Among the absurdities abounding in this world, and which may be placed among the number of our evils, that is not the least which presumes the existence of two all-powerful beings, combating which
shall prevail most in this world, and making a treaty like the two physicians in Molière: "Allow me the emetic, and I resign to you the lancet."

Basilides pretended, with the platonists of the first century of the church, that God gave the making of our world to His inferior angels, and these, being inexpert, have constructed it as we perceive. This theological fable is laid prostrate by the overwhelming objection that it is not in the nature of a deity all-powerful and all-wise to intrust the construction of a world to incompetent architects.

Simon, who felt the force of this objection, obviates it by saying that the angel who presided over the workmen is damned for having done his business so slovenly, but the roasting of this angel amends nothing. The adventure of Pandora among the Greeks scarcely meets the objection better. The box in which every evil is enclosed, and at the bottom of which remains Hope, is indeed a charming allegory; but this Pandora was made by Vulcan, only to avenge himself on Prometheus, who had stolen fire to inform a man of clay.

The Indians have succeeded no better. God having created man, gave him a drug which would insure him permanent health of body. The man loaded his ass with the drug, and the ass being thirsty, the serpent directed him to a fountain, and while the ass was drinking, purloined the drug.

The Syrians pretended that man and woman having been created in the fourth heaven, they re-
solved to eat a cake in lieu of ambrosia, their natural food. Ambrosia exhaled by the pores; but after eating cake, they were obliged to relieve themselves in the usual manner. The man and the woman requested an angel to direct them to a water-closet. Behold, said the angel, that petty globe which is almost of no size at all; it is situated about sixty millions of leagues from this place, and is the privy of the universe—go there as quickly as you can. The man and woman obeyed the angel and came here, where they have ever since remained; since which time the world has been what we now find it. The Syrians will eternally be asked why God allowed man to eat the cake and experience such a crowd of formidable ills?

I pass with speed from the fourth heaven to Lord Bolingbroke. This writer, who doubtless was a great genius, gave to the celebrated Pope his plan of "all for the best," as it is found word for word in the posthumous works of Lord Bolingbroke, and recorded by Lord Shaftesbury in his "Characteristics." Read in Shaftesbury's chapter of the "Moralists" the following passage:

"Much may be replied to these complaints of the defects of nature—How came it so powerless and defective from the hands of a perfect Being?—But I deny that it is defective. Beauty is the result of contrast, and universal concord springs out of a perpetual conflict. . . . . It is necessary that everything be sacrificed to other things—vegetables to
animals, and animals to the earth . . . . The laws of the central power of gravitation, which give to the celestial bodies their weight and motion, are not to be deranged in consideration of a pitiful animal, who, protected as he is by the same laws, will soon be reduced to dust."

Bolingbroke, Shaftesbury, and Pope, their working artisan, resolve their general question no better than the rest. Their "all for the best" says no more than that all is governed by immutable laws; and who did not know that? We learn nothing when we remark, after the manner of little children, that flies are created to be eaten by spiders, spiders by swallows, swallows by hawks, hawks by eagles, eagles by men, men by one another, to afford food for worms; and at last, at the rate of about a thousand to one, to be the prey of devils everlastingly.

There is a constant and regular order established among animals of all kinds—a universal order. When a stone is formed in my bladder, the mechanical process is admirable; sandy particles pass by small degrees into my blood; they are filtered by the veins; and passing the urethra, deposit themselves in my bladder; where, uniting agreeably to the Newtonian attraction, a stone is formed, which gradually increases, and I suffer pains a thousand times worse than death by the finest arrangement in the world. A surgeon, perfect in the art of Tubal-Cain, thrusts into me a sharp instrument; and cutting into the perineum, seizes the stone with his
pincers, which breaks during the endeavors, by the necessary laws of mechanism; and owing to the same mechanism, I die in frightful torments. All this is "for the best," being the evident result of unalterable physical principles, agreeably to which I know as well as you that I perish.

If we were insensitive, there would be nothing to say against this system of physics; but this is not the point on which we treat. We ask if there are not physical evils, and whence do they originate? There is no absolute evil, says Pope in his "Essay on Man"; or if there are particular evils, they compose a general good. It is a singular general good which is composed of the stone and the gout—of all sorts of crime and sufferings, and of death and damnation.

The fall of man is our plaister for all these particular maladies of body and soul, which you call "the general health"; but Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke have attacked original sin. Pope says nothing about it; but it is clear that their system saps the foundations of the Christian religion, and explains nothing at all.

In the meantime, this system has been since approved by many theologians, who willingly embrace contradictions. Be it so; we ought to leave to everybody the privilege of reasoning in their own way upon the deluge of ills which overwhelm us. It would be as reasonable to prevent incurable patients from eating what they please. "God," says Pope,
"beholds, with an equal eye, a hero perish or a sparrow fall; the destruction of an atom, or the ruin of a thousand planets; the bursting of a bubble, or the dissolution of a world."

This, I must confess, is a pleasant consolation. Who does not find a comfort in the declaration of Lord Shaftesbury, who asserts, "that God will not derange His general system for so miserable an animal as man?" It must be confessed at least that this pitiful creature has a right to cry out humbly, and to endeavor, while bemoaning himself, to understand why these eternal laws do not comprehend the good of every individual.

This system of "all for the best" represents the Author of Nature as a powerful and malevolent monarch, who cares not for the destruction of four or five hundred thousand men, nor of the many more who in consequence spend the rest of their days in penury and tears, provided He succeeds in His designs.

Far therefore from the doctrine—that this is the best of all possible worlds—being consolatory, it is a hopeless one to the philosophers who embrace it. The question of good and evil remains in irremediable chaos for those who seek to fathom it in reality. It is a mere mental sport to the disputants, who are captives that play with their chains. As to unreasoning people, they resemble the fish which are transported from a river to a reservoir, with no more suspicion that they are to be eaten during the ap-
proaching Lent, than we have ourselves of the facts which originate our destiny.

Let us place at the end of every chapter of metaphysics the two letters used by the Roman judges when they did not understand a pleading. N. L. non liquet—it is not clear. Let us, above all, silence the knaves who, overloaded like ourselves with the weight of human calamities, add the mischief of their calumny; let us refute their execrable imposture by having recourse to faith and Providence.

Some reasoners are of opinion that it agrees not with the nature of the Great Being of Beings for things to be otherwise than they are. It is a rough system, and I am too ignorant to venture to examine it.

ORACLES.

SECTION I.

After the sect of the Pharisees among the Jews had become acquainted with the devil, some reasoners among them began to entertain the idea that the devil and his companions inspired, among all other nations, the priests and statues that delivered oracles. The Sadducees had no belief in such beings. They admitted neither angels nor demons. It appears that they were more philosophic than the Pharisees, and consequently less calculated to obtain influence and credit with the people.

The devil was the great agent with the Jewish populace in the time of Gamaliel. John the Baptist,