

Nicholas D. Nace

from [*Vic*]

CHAPTER XXIX
The Spanish Prisoner

How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?

(Job 4:19)

Charles Primrose <vicar@wakefield.net>

To: Nicholas D. Nace

Re: the equal dealings of providence demonstrated with regard to the happy and the miserable here below that from the nature of pleasure and pain the wretched must be repaid the balance of their sufferings in the life hereafter

my friends my children and fellow sufferers when I reflect on the distribution of good and evil here below I find that much has been given man to enjoy yet still more to suffer though we should examine the whole world we shall not find one man so happy as to have nothing left to wish for but we daily see thousands who by suicide show us they have nothing left to hope in this life then it appears that we cannot be entirely blest but yet we may be completely miserable

why man should thus feel pain why our wretchedness should be requisite in the formation of universal felicity why when all other systems are made perfect only by the perfection of their subordinate parts the great system should require for its

perfection parts that are not only subordinate to others but imperfect in themselves these are questions that never can be explained and might be useless if known on this subject providence has thought fit to elude our curiosity satisfied with granting us motives to consolation

in this situation man has called in the friendly assistance of philosophy and heaven, seeing the incapacity of that to console him has given him the aid of religion the consolations of philosophy are very amusing but often fallacious it tells us that life is filled with comforts if we will but enjoy them and on the other hand that though we unavoidably have miseries here life is short and they will soon be over thus do these consolations destroy each other for if life is a place of comfort its shortness must be misery and if it be long our griefs are protracted thus philosophy is weak but religion comforts in an higher strain man is here it tells us fitting up his mind and preparing it for another abode

when the good man leaves the body and is all a glorious mind he will find he has been making himself a heaven of happiness here while the wretch that has been maimed and contaminated by his vices shrinks from his body with terror and finds that he has anticipated the vengeance of heaven to religion then we must hold in every circumstance of life for our truest comfort for if already we are happy it is a pleasure to think that we can make that happiness unending and if we are miserable it is very consoling to think that there is a place of rest

thus to the fortunate religion holds out a continuance of bliss to the wretched a change from pain but though religion is very kind to all men it has promised peculiar reward to the unhappy the sick the naked the houseless the heavy-laden and the prisoner have ever most frequent promises in our sacred law the author of our religion every where professes himself the wretch's friend and unlike the false ones of this world bestows all his caresses upon the forlorn the unthinking have censured this as partiality as a preference without merit to deserve it but they never reflect that it is not in the power even of heaven itself to make the offer of unceasing felicity as great a gift to the happy as to the miserable to the first eternity is but a single blessing since at most it but increases what they already possess to the latter it is a double advantage for it diminishes their pain here and rewards them with heavenly kiss hereafter

but providence is in another respect kinder to the poor than the rich for as it thus makes the life after death more desirable so it smooths the passage there the wretched have long familiarity with every face of terror the man of sorrows lays himself quietly down he has no possessions to regret and but few ties to stop his departure he feels only nature's pang in the final separation and this is no way greater than he has often fainted under before for after a certain degree of pain every new breach that death opens in the constitution nature kindly covers with insensibility

thus providence has given the wretched two advantages over the happy in this life greater felicity in dying and in heaven all that superiority of pleasure which arises from contrasted enjoyment and this superiority my friends is no small advantage and seems to be one of the pleasures of the poor man in the parable for though he was already in heaven and felt all the raptures it could give yet it was mentioned as an addition to his happiness that he had once been wretched and now was comforted that he had known what it was to be miserable and now felt what it was to be happy

thus my friends you see religion does what philosophy could never do it shows the equal dealings of heaven to the happy and the unhappy and levels all human enjoyments to nearly the same standard it gives to both rich and poor and the same happiness hereafter and equal hopes to aspire after it but if the rich have the advantage of enjoying pleasure here the poor have the endless satisfaction of knowing what it was once to be miserable when crowned with endless felicity hereafter and even though this should be called a small advantage yet being an eternal one it must make up by duration what the temporal happiness of the great may have exceeded by intenseness

these are therefore the consolations which the wretched have peculiar to themselves and in which they are above the rest of mankind in other respects they are below them they who would know the miseries of the poor must see life and endure it to declaim on the temporal advantages they enjoy is only repeating what none either believe or practice the men who have the necessaries of living are not poor and they who want them must be miserable yes my friends we must be miserable no vain efforts of a refined imagination can soothe the wants of nature can give elastic sweetness to the dank vapour of a dungeon or ease to the throbbing of a woe-worn heart let the philosopher from his couch of softness tell us that we can resist all these alas the effort by which we resist them is still the greatest pain

death is slight and any man may sustain it but torments are dreadful and these no man can endure to us then my friends the promises of happiness in heaven should be peculiarly dear for if our reward be in this life alone we are then indeed of all men the most miserable when I look round these gloomy walls made to terrify as well as to confine us this light that only serves to show the horrors of the place those shackles that tyranny has imposed or crime made necessary when I survey these emaciated looks and hear those groans o my friends what a glorious exchange would heaven be for these to fly through regions unconfined as air to bask in the sunshine of eternal bliss to carrol over endless hymns of praise to have no master to threaten or insult us but the form of goodness himself for ever in our eyes when I think of these things death becomes the messenger of very glad tidings when I think of these things his sharpest arrow becomes the staff of my support when I think of these things what is there in life worth having when I think of these things what is there that should not be spurned away kings in their palaces should groan for such advantages but we humbled as we are should yearn for them

and shall these things be ours ours they will certainly be if we but try for them and what is a comfort we are shut out from many temptations that would retard our pursuit only let us try for them and they will certainly be ours and what is still a comfort shortly too for if we look back on past life it appears but a very short span and whatever we may think of the rest of life it will yet be found of less duration as we grow older the days seem to grow shorter and our intimacy with time ever lessens the perception of his stay then let us take comfort now for we shall soon be at our journeys end we shall soon lay down the heavy burden laid by heaven upon us and though death the only friend of the wretched for a little while mocks the weary traveller with the view and like his horizon still flies before him yet the time win certainly and shortly come when we shall cease from our toil when the luxurious great ones of the world shall no more tread us to the earth when we shad think with pleasure on our sufferings below when we shall be surrounded with all our friends or such as deserved our friendship when our bliss shall be unutterable and still to crown all unending

“The information in this email and any attachments may be confidential and privileged. Access to this email by anyone other than the intended addressee is unauthorized. If you are not the intended recipient (or the employee or agent responsible for delivering this information to the intended recipient) please notify the sender by reply email and immediately delete this email and any copies from your computer and/or storage system. The sender does not authorize the use, distribution, disclosure or reproduction of this email (or any part of its contents) by anyone other than the intended recipient(s). No representation is made that this email and any attachments are free of viruses. Virus scanning is recommended and is the responsibility of the recipient.”