

## The Meaning and Constructive Value of Suffering

by Teilhard de Chardin

Illness tends to give those who suffer from it the impression that they are no use, a burden.

The following dispels these thoughts by showing the efficacy of suffering in building the visible world.

First and foremost, the world is still building.

The world is to be likened, not to a gathering of individual elements assembled with art, but to some organic system, animated by a growth, special to itself. Over the centuries a plan seems to be unfolding which can be described as a process of gestation and birth: the birth of the spiritual reality formed by the souls of men and the matter of human activity; the new earth is emerging, purifying itself. We are not like the blooms in a bunch of flowers; rather the leaves and blossoms of some great tree on which all things appear, at the behest of the All. In a bunch of flowers it would be surprising to find sickly blooms, because they have been hand-picked. On a tree, which has had to fight the hazards of growth and rough weather, the broken branches, bruised blossoms and sickly, flowers are in their rightful place; reflecting the difficulty the trunk has undergone. The world is an immense groping, only progressing at the cost of many failures and casualties. Sufferers are the reflection of this austere, noble condition. They are not useless. They pay the price of universal progress and triumph.

In mankind as a whole, what member can we conceive to be more especially charged with sublimating and spiritualising the labour of progress and conquest? Contemplatives. Also the sick and suffering. Their part is to tend toward the divine more explicitly, with greater purity than the rest. Those who bear in their enfeebled bodies the weight of the world, find themselves the most active factor in that very progress which seems to shatter them.

The sick man has a special task in which no-one else can take his place - to co-operate in the transformation of human suffering.

What makes up human suffering is potential energy. In suffering is concealed, with extreme intensity, the world's power of ascension. What a leap forward the world would make toward God if all sick people converted their pain into a common desire that the reign of God mature throughout the earth. Would not that be one of the highest forms creation could take in our eyes?