
The Cure of Souls

“The art of arts and the science of sciences”

The guiding of man, the most variable and manifold of creatures, seems to me in very deed to be the art of arts and science of sciences. Any one may recognize this, by comparing the work of the physician of souls with the treatment of the body; and noticing that, laborious as the latter is, ours is more laborious, and of more consequence, from the nature of its subject matter, the power of its science, and the object of its exercise. The one labours about bodies, and perishable failing matter, which absolutely must be dissolved and undergo its fate ... The other is concerned with the soul, which comes from God and is divine, and partakes of the heavenly nobility, and presses on to it, even if it be bound to an inferior nature.¹

The scope of “the art”

The scope of our art is to provide the soul with wings, to rescue it from the world and give it to God, and to watch over that which is in His image, if it abides. To take it by the hand, if it is in danger, or restore it, if ruined, to make Christ to dwell in the heart by the Spirit: and, in short, to deify, and bestow heavenly bliss upon, one who belongs to the heavenly host

This is the wish of our schoolmaster the law, of the prophets who intervened between Christ and the law, of Christ who is the fulfiller and end of the spiritual law; of the emptied Godhead, of the assumed flesh, of the novel union between God and man, one consisting of two, and both in one.²

The struggle, skill and variety of treatments required

We, upon whose efforts is staked the salvation of a soul, a being blessed and immortal, and destined for undying chastisement or praise, for its vice or virtue, - what a struggle ought ours to be, and how great skill do we require to treat, or get men treated properly, and to change their life, and give up the clay to the spirit.³

As then the same medicine and the same food are not in every case administered to men’s bodies, but a difference is made according to their degree of health or infirmity; so also are souls treated with varying instruction and guidance. To this treatment witness is borne by those who have had experience of it. Some are led by doctrine, others trained by example; some need the spur, others the curb; some are sluggish and hard to rouse to the good, and must be stirred up by being smitten with the word; others are immoderately fervent in spirit, with impulses difficult to restrain, like thoroughbred colts, who run wide of the turning post, and to improve them the word must have a restraining and checking influence.⁴

¹ Or. 2.16-7, (NPNF², Vol.7, p.208a-b)

² Or. 2.22-3, (NPNF², Vol.7, p.209b) (punctuation slightly modified)

³ Or. 2.28, (NPNF², Vol.7, pp.210b-211a)

⁴ Or. 2.30, (NPNF², Vol.7, p.211a)