

Contributions and Comments.

Christ's Message of the Kingdom.

OWING to my temporary absence from Madras it was only a few days ago that your June issue came into my hands in which Dr. Eugene Stock pays my book on *Christ's Message of the Kingdom* the unexpected compliment of describing its contents in some detail. If I ask to be allowed, in a few words, to rectify one incorrect impression which Dr. Stock has inadvertently given, this is not due to any lack of gratitude for the service which he has thus rendered to the cause I had at heart in writing that book, but simply to a feeling that its power to further this cause would be injured if the impression I refer to gained currency.

Christian thought in general regards with justifiable suspicion any teaching which seems to avoid giving to the idea of propitiation a foremost place among the conceptions to be employed in interpreting the Cross of Christ. Now the exposition which I have attempted seems to me not only to emphasize the principle of propitiation, but at the same time to evade, in a surprisingly simple manner, the ethical difficulties which beset any substitutionary application of this principle, by taking the very natural step of interpreting Mt 5³⁸⁻⁴¹ in the light of 5¹⁷. If in His other new injunctions Christ's 'But I say unto you' introduces not something new but just the fulfilment or perfecting of the old law, then here too His purpose must be the same, namely, not to supersede the moral demand which expresses itself in retribution, but to give it a form perfectly adequate to its true nature. His meaning must be, not that the Christian is to abstain from enforcing the law of justice, but that true justice consists in the kind of conduct of which He proceeds to give instances—conduct which, so far from deserving the label 'non-resistance' which we commonly attach to it, is really the one transparently sincere and thorough way of assailing wickedness and repudiating it without compromise. How such conduct can have this value I have sought to explain in my book. Nevertheless I seem to have been so little successful in making clear the significance of the view suggested that even a careful reader like Dr. Stock is able to remark regretfully on 'the absence of any direct

reference to "propitiation," and to do so immediately after quoting certain sentences which were intended to be nothing else than such a reference. In order to show, very briefly, how misleading this remark is, perhaps I may venture to formulate my real view quite roughly in four propositions.

i. There is no atonement unless the righteousness of God is manifested in so perfect a manner as to set His forgivingness above all suspicion of implying indifference to sin. Only so can He morally forgive, and only so can men morally accept His forgiveness.

ii. If punishment were a perfect—and the only perfect—manifestation and vindication of the righteousness of God in relation to sin, then there could be no propitiation without the exaction of penalty.

iii. But (a) the O.T. revelation, interpreted as a whole, teaches only that *some* satisfaction of God's righteousness is necessary, not that it must be one manifested through the exaction of an equivalent penalty (pp. 27-30, 91 *foot*, 186-7); and (b) Christ in the 'Sermon on the Mount' definitely teaches that punishment is not a perfect manifestation and vindication of righteousness in relation to sin, but that the only perfect manifestation is that afforded when the righteous will freely allow the evil-doer to wreak his pleasure upon itself and continue all the while to serve and befriend the evil-doer (pp. 90-97, 100 *middle*).

iv. Therefore any interpretation of Christ's death that describes it as a penalty exacted by God is an explanation which, although pointing in the right direction, falls short of adequately exhibiting the perfection of its propitiatory value; while an interpretation which regards it as God's act of self-surrender into the hands of sinners, whereby they are enabled to wreak their evil will freely and directly upon Himself who continues to love and serve them none the less, is an interpretation which for the first time exhibits it as a perfectly adequate propitiation, a great act wherein God has given free play to that need which resides in His nature to oppose and condemn sin to the uttermost (pp. 199-202, 204-206).

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