

THE ATONEMENT IN CHRISTIAN CONSCIOUSNESS

WILLIAM HENRY WALKER, PH.D., D.D.

FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA

“ Now I saw in my dream that . . . he ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up with the cross his burden loosed from off his shoulder, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, ‘ He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death.’ Then he stood still awhile to look and wonder, for it was very surprising to him, that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden.”

With these words does Bunyan describe the experience of the Christian in the forgiveness of his sins. They were written well nigh two hundred and fifty years ago, yet they find a response in every age. From Paul, “ reconciled unto God by the death of his Son,” through Augustine, Thomas à Kempis, Luther, Wesley, down to the brutal murderer whom Dr. W. J. Dawson found at midnight in his death cell singing,

“ What though my sins as mountains rise,”

the experience is fundamentally the same. Accompanying circumstances and conditions are as varied as human nature and the characteristics of widely different ages, but the fundamental fact is ever the same. The Christian life begins, not with an act of self-assertion, but with one of self-surrender — with a “ making connection with the higher powers,” as Professor James vaguely and yet correctly describes it; and out of that connection comes an experience of relief.

Analyzing this fundamental fact of Christian experience there will be found these elements: First, the Christian knows himself to be forgiven, and forgiveness means the

restoration of immediate fellowship with God. Secondly, he knows that this forgiveness is immeasurably precious, and hence immeasurably costly. He has been redeemed "not with corruptible things, as silver and gold," but with something infinitely more precious. Thirdly, he knows that that cost has not been paid by himself. The forgiven man is a grateful man because of the immeasurably costly boon which he has received. Fourthly, the cost of this immeasurably costly boon is indissolubly associated with the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. Fifthly, this costly forgiveness flows out of the boundless grace of his Heavenly Father.

It might be difficult to secure unanimous assent to these propositions, but that is due to the fact that a meaning has been attached to them which is not immediately implied in them. If they could be detached from these further interpretations, and considered simply in themselves, would they not be accepted by every sincere Christian as the content of his experience?

Here, then, are facts of Christian consciousness calling for explanation. The man of whose consciousness they are a part may have an explanation of them, and he may not. The facts are not identical with their explanation. Any theory of the atonement must start with them, and the value of the theory will be measured by the adequacy of its interpretation of them. It is these facts of Christian consciousness that constitute the fundamental problem for any theory of the atonement. It is important to know what Jesus taught regarding the significance of his own death, but in the nature of the case he could not adequately define the consequences for Christian experience of his own sufferings before those consequences were facts. It is important to know the teachings of the apostles regarding the atonement, but those teachings are first a transcript of their own experience, and then an explanation of that experience. The experience itself is continuous with that of Christian believers in all ages. It is that experience in its first form, its purest form perhaps we may say, — that

is, at its fountain head, — but it is experience nevertheless. View it as we will, the fundamental thing in the interpretation of the atonement is the facts of experience as reflected in Christian consciousness.

A summary way of dealing with them is to assert that they are the consequences of an assumption. Men have experienced forgiveness and associated it with the sufferings of Christ because they have assumed God to be a Shylock demanding his pound of flesh — in this case, his quart of blood. Perish the assumption, and the experience which grew out of it goes with it. Forgiveness becomes free. It has neither cost man anything nor God anything. Indeed, forgiveness itself ceases to be a part of experience, for the need of it has gone.

It cannot be denied that Christian theology has sometimes made its God resemble Shylock, but it is easy to overestimate that fact. Such a thought cannot be said to be characteristic even of Christian theology. It was not the original conception, it was no sooner introduced than it was combatted, and it has now been abandoned by most theologians for a more gracious conception. But, more than that, it never had much vogue outside of speculative theology. It was a matter of the head rather than of the heart. It was itself an attempt at the explanation of facts of consciousness, not a cause of them. It was a consequence rather than a cause. The Shylock conception of God has vanished, but the facts show no signs of vanishing. A habit of thought founded upon a false assumption could not be so persistent, so strong, and so universal. No sooner was the Shylock conception of God abandoned than men, instead of abandoning its supposed consequences, sought other explanations of the facts of consciousness. To-day this search for an explanation has largely given place to a kind of agnosticism. "What were the secret laws," says Dr. Van Dyke, "and what were the mysterious relations of the world to God which made this offering of the sinless life of Jesus necessary for the rescue of mankind from sin, no man knoweth, nor can any man explain

them and set them in order." Still the Christian believer feels himself redeemed at countless cost, even the death of the Son of God. I conclude that to sweep the whole matter aside as an outworn superstition is a case of *hysteron proteron*.

Let us bring the historic theories of the atonement to the test of these facts of Christian consciousness. For a thousand years after Christ the only theory of the atonement, so far as theory there was, was that Christ's death was a ransom paid to the devil as the price of the release of sinners. The Son of God was worth more to the devil than the entire human race, so he took Christ and let men go. As the devil did not get Christ, the theory must finally assume that the devil was deceived. As to this theory, it is manifest that it furnishes no explanation. The devil is not entitled to a ransom even if he could hold men in bondage. If devil there be, he is the one being in all this universe who has no rights which any one is bound to respect. Brought to the test of the facts of Christian consciousness, the theory fails altogether. It shows no connection in consciousness between the death of Christ and the forgiveness of sins. It has nothing to say about forgiveness. It apprehends the Christian life as a life of freedom, but does not apprehend that freedom as freedom from the inner burden of guilt, which is what forgiveness means to the Christian consciousness. That consciousness knows nothing of a release from the devil; for, barring Luther and some of the medieval monks of hypervivid imagination, it knows nothing directly about a devil to whom it can be in bondage. It does know bondage to sin, and it knows release from that bondage through forgiveness.

Anselm of Canterbury terminated the reign of the patristic theory by putting God in the place of the devil, much to the improvement of the theory, and much to the detriment of God. Anselm made way for a kind of release, but in accounting for its cost he lowered the Christian conception of God. Living in the days of chivalry when men

sought satisfaction for their injured honor with their swords, living too in the days when the Catholic Church taught that an excess of merit might be acquired through works of supererogation, Anselm combined the two ideas in his doctrine of the atonement. Satisfaction, honor, merit, are the key words of that theory. God's honor is impaired by the sinner's withholding from him of that which is his due, namely, his will. That honor must be satisfied. Punishment is the satisfaction of God's honor. To punish sin is just. Therefore to remit sin without punishment is unjust. But Christ by dying, when in view of his blameless life he was under no obligation to die, furnishes the needful satisfaction. Whereupon God can with justice forgive men, or, rather, release them from the satisfaction of his injured honor by punishment.

The theory proves too much. It is inconsistent with itself. If God's honor is impaired by withholding from him that will which is his due, and that honor can be satisfied by taking from man through punishment something which is dear to him, namely, his happiness, then God's honor demands the punishment of man, and there is no escape from it. Nothing can ever be substituted for the individual will, and nothing not dear to such a will can ever bring satisfaction to God for its loss. Anselm seems to have been dimly conscious of this inconsistency in his theory, for he makes the release of sinners not the direct consequence of the satisfaction of God by the death of Christ, but rather a reward of merit given by the Father to the Son in view of the Son's superior desert through his voluntary death. But "satisfaction" and "merit" are mutually exclusive terms. What is done to win "merit" cannot be "satisfaction." Brought to the test of the facts of consciousness, moreover, Anselm's thought is scarcely an improvement on that which preceded it. It offended the Christian conception of God by bringing into it the qualities which the patristic theory reserved for Satan. For Anselm everything turns upon the thought of God as a being whose personal honor has been impaired by sin,

and who takes satisfaction into his own hands. Does Christian consciousness admit any such conception of God? The Christian thought of God is of a Father. Is a father concerned about his private honor in dealing with his children? We cannot bring order into consciousness by reference to ideas that are not in consciousness. The Anselmic theory was responsible for the rise of that conception of God which has been denominated the Shylock conception; but, as I have said, that was not the Christian conception of God in the beginning, nor was it ever held more than half-heartedly by the mass of Christian believers. It may be doubted whether its sponsors held it more than as a speculative proposition. How could they and be Christians? Finally, the Anselmic theory does not account for forgiveness. Forgiveness and satisfaction are contradictory terms. Forgiveness is of grace, satisfaction is of debt. To cancel a paid account is not to forgive.

Anselm's theory as it left his hands never found wide acceptance, for its fundamental conceptions were altogether too medieval. It was possible, however, to modify it; and with these modifications it became the accepted theory, especially of Protestant theologians. Those modifications were introduced by Peter Lombard, though they were hinted at long before by Athanasius and Augustine, and were given their full significance only by the Reformers. The important changes were the substitution of God's justice for his honor, and of Christ's bearing the penalty of sin for his offering a work of superior merit. Anselm had at least brought thought to deal with God in relation to the atonement, and the modification of his theory brings it to deal with guilt and unworthiness. In other words, thought is beginning to get within its view the real facts calling for explanation. Otherwise the theory is no more satisfactory than Anselm's. God the Implacable Judge is not God the Heavenly Father of Christian consciousness, nor is the discharge of punishment equivalent to the forgiveness of sins. Moreover, the theory inevitably involves its supporters in difficulties as to the extent of the appli-

cation of the atonement. Either Christ bore the punishment of all mankind, in which case the inevitable corollary is universal salvation; or else he bore the punishment only of those who are finally saved, in which case no provision is made for the rest of mankind. For justice to get its full due in the case of all men, and yet to suffer some men to be lost, is for justice to act unjustly.

The positions won are not to be lightly esteemed. The atonement concerns God and it concerns guilt, though neither God nor guilt is satisfactorily explained. What can be done to bring these conceptions into harmony with the facts of Christian consciousness? As a matter of fact it is evident that Christ did not bear the exact penalty of sin. Between the eternal punishment of all mankind (or even of the elect) and Calvary no equation can be established. There was at least a substitution of penalty. Satisfaction, then, was not the satisfaction of an inexorable justice. Something else must be taken into account. God is not the implacable judge of the penal satisfaction theory, for he is willing to accept substitutes for penalty. It is evident that his interest is not in securing an exact equivalent for sin in the form of punishment. What, then, is God's interest in the matter? It is the merit of the so-called "Governmental Theory," suggested by Grotius and elaborated by the New England theologians from Edwards to Park, that it gets rid of the idea of a personal satisfaction of God altogether, either of his honor or of his justice, and so parts company with the Shylock conception of God. For the governmental theory, God in the atonement is the guardian of law and the ends of law. The sufferings of Christ were not the penalty of the law, but were a substitute for penalty, accomplishing the same end as penalty, and yet leaving God free to forgive. A necessity rests upon God as sovereign. He is too wise a ruler to dismiss sinners with a mere forgiveness, for that would put a premium upon sin. Something must be done to impress men with the awfulness of sin. By making Christ to suffer, the innocent for the guilty, God gave such an exhibition

of the awfulness of sin as made it safe for God to forgive believers in Christ.

The governmental theory is the first which recognizes on God's part a real forgiveness of sins, that is, a gracious act of God by which he does not exact the full penalty of sins; and it escapes most of the inconsistencies in which the Anselmic theory and all of its modifications involve the conception of God. It is strong in its apprehension of end, namely, the granting of forgiveness under such conditions as shall insure the ends of moral law; but it is weak in its apprehension of means to that end. It has no other means to suggest than the arbitrary infliction of suffering on Christ, the innocent for the guilty. Such an infliction, far from exalting righteousness, must produce the opposite effect. The chief defect of the theory, however, is that into the close and tender relation of a forgiving Father and a forgiven child the governmental theory introduces a foreign element. God as a father could forgive his repentant child: God as a sovereign cannot. Man as a repentant sinner could be forgiven: man as the subject of moral government cannot. It is needless to say that such a conception of God does not lie within the view of the Christian consciousness. The Christian consciousness of God is personal, not official. It is of a father and of nothing else. Fatherhood involves the maintenance of the integrity of the moral law, but the governmental theory fails to bring the maintenance of righteousness within the functions of the divine Fatherhood. It must go entirely outside the idea of fatherhood, must import the idea of sovereign or judge. Consequently its substitute for penalty does not meet any real moral needs of the soul.

Chronological sequence would have led to Abelard, the author of the moral influence theory, before the governmental theory was taken up. Abelard belonged to the generation after Anselm. It is Bushnell to whom the currency of the theory is due. Abelard simply shifted the end of the atonement from God to man. It was intended not to make God forgiving, but man forgivable. It was such

an exhibition of the love of God as wins man from his rebelliousness and makes him repentant. So far the theory is eminently unsatisfactory, for it leaves the sufferings of Christ mere stage play, an exhibition gotten up for effect. They are not the cost of forgiveness, for man could have had forgiveness whenever he wanted it. They are an appeal to his emotions to make him want it. Emotions excited by the drama are wholesome just so long as we recognize in the drama the portrayal of life. They become morbid as soon as the drama goes beyond the possibilities of life. Here is a drama behind which there lies no reality. The only reality is the emotions excited by the drama itself. Such an effect could be nothing but morbid, and the effect itself would become impossible the moment its true character was recognized.

Bushnell makes the theory respectable, and a real contribution to the subject, by making the sufferings of Christ real. They are not an arbitrary infliction, but they are the inevitable consequence of God's reaching out after his erring children. They are not therefore the sufferings of Christ apart from God, but they are the very sufferings of God coming to the light in Christ. "Love," he says,

"is a principle essentially vicarious in its own nature, identifying the subject with others, so as to suffer their adversities and pains, and take on itself the burden of their evils. . . . If it be true that love is a principle of vicarious sacrifice, then it will be so, not in Christ only, but as truly in God the Supreme, or the God of revelation previous to Christ's coming. . . . What then was Christ in his vicarious feeling and sacrifice, what in his Gethsemane, but a revelation in time of just that love that had been struggling always in God's bosom; watching wearily for the world and with groanings unheard by mortal ears?"¹

Bushnell here maintains the antithesis of the governmental theory. That was strong as to end, weak as to means. Bushnell is strong as to means, weak as to end. For when we ask what this suffering love of God does for

¹ *The Vicarious Sacrifice*, vol. 1. pp. 42, 69.

us, what is the work which it accomplishes, how it is related to the forgiveness of sins,—in other words, What is its end? Bushnell in his first volume is silent. He does not even repeat the thought of Abelard, that the suffering love of God is necessary to move men to repentance. In his supplementary volume Bushnell says that, in suffering, God propitiates himself. He cannot be sure of the passing of his own resentment against sinners till he has suffered for them. In other words, God's suffering is a kind of penance which God imposes upon himself for ever having been angry with men. But the need for such an expiation presupposes that God is conscious of having been wrong in his feeling of resentment against sin. Such a consciousness, God, according to the Christian conception of him, could never have. It is natural in sinful men, and we shall have more to say of it in the sequel, but Bushnell introduces it in an impossible relation.

We may pause to sum up the defects of the three great historical theories of the atonement. They are all abstract. The Anselmic theory in all of its forms tears God out of his human relations, and addresses the atonement to him without reference to anything it accomplishes in the hearts of men. It takes no account of any of the facts of man's consciousness. The transactions involved might as well have taken place on Mars as on the earth. The moral influence theory in its pure forms does precisely the opposite. It takes man out of his relation to God, and addresses the atonement to man alone. God needed not that anything should be done to restore him to right relations with man. There was no barrier on his side. The governmental theory abstracts a relation, so to speak, from both terms of the relation, makes it a *tertium quid*, neither God nor man, and addresses the atonement to this relation. Common to all is the failure to interrogate consciousness as to the demands of man's spiritual life which must be met by the atonement.

It is worthy of note that Bushnell nowhere uses the

phrase "moral influence." He does use the phrase "moral power." "In one way or another," he says,

"the gospel teachers appear to have been trying everywhere and in all past ages, if not consciously, yet unconsciously, to get beyond their own doctrine, and bring out some practically *moral-power* view of the cross, more fruitful and sanctifying, than by their own particular doctrine, it possibly can be."¹

Now moral power is not moral influence. Moral influence is pressure brought to bear from without. With reference to it a man is passive. Moral power is something which a man must appropriate and make his own in order to profit by it. To explain the cross as a power that supplies a felt need in man's spiritual life has been the aim of all recent speculation upon the atonement. Such, for instance, is J. McLeod Campbell's view that the sufferings of Christ were "a perfect Amen in humanity to the judgment of God on the sin of man"; that is to say, that the sufferings of Christ offered to God that perfect repentance for sin which man could not offer. This brings us at once face to face with a real human need, the need of repentance — of a perfect repentance, one that shall be adequate to the sense of the guilt of sin. It has been commonly assumed that we know all about repentance, and that it is a perfectly simple and easy thing to repent. On the contrary, a perfect repentance is a supremely difficult thing.

The little town of Uttoxeter in England is one of the least distinguished in the realm, yet it was once the scene of a unique event. The father of Dr. Samuel Johnson used to keep a book-stall in the marketplace of the town, and Samuel when a boy used to accompany his father thither. "Once, indeed," he says,

"I was disobedient. I refused to attend my father to Uttoxeter market. Pride was the source of that refusal, and the remembrance of it was painful. A few years ago [but a few before his death], I desired to atone for this fault. I went to Uttoxeter in very bad weather, and stood for a considerable time bareheaded in the rain, on the spot

¹ *Op. cit.*, vol. 1. p. 28.

where my father's stall used to stand. In contrition I stood, and hope the penance was expiatory."

Dr. Armitage, in quoting the saying, remarks that the deed was scarcely Christian. That is true. It contains no suggestion of Christian ideas or motives. Nevertheless, it expresses a great elemental need of human nature, a need that was pre-Christian, a need that Christianity came into the world to satisfy, and that never was satisfied till Christ came. The need is that of penance or expiation for wrong done.

There is the wrong of yesterday, a deed that you recognize now in all its hideousness. What can you do about it? You cannot recall it. Will Carleton was right, not only as to words, but as to all actions:—

"Boys flying kites haul in their white-winged birds,
You can't do that way when you're flying words.
Thoughts in the heart may often fall back dead;
But God himself can't stop them, once they're said."

You can go to the one you have wronged, and express your sorrow, and crave forgiveness. Is that enough? For the deed that hurt and wronged a brother, will words of confession suffice as amends? He may be quite ready to forgive you. Can you forgive yourself so easily? Words are but feeble expressions of our real selves. Deeds are the language of our deepest thought and feeling. To express the sincerity of your repentance, your repudiation of the wrong done, and your desire, so far as in you lies, to make restitution for it, you will seek some service you can render your wronged brother. If your repentance be sincere, this desire will have no reference to the possibility that your brother needs to be appeased before granting his pardon. The expiation you impose on yourself is the expression of your own sense of the wrong you have done. It is Bushnell's self-propitiation. It is a tribute to your sense of violated law.

When we turn to man's relation to his sin taken in itself, can we be blind to the existence of the same impulse? What mean the altars that have run red with the blood of

victims? What mean the privations and tortures which men have inflicted upon themselves both as a means of making themselves acceptable to the deity, and as a way to get rid of their own torturing sense of guilt? Robertson Smith traces sacrifice back to the aspiration of man for some kind of physical fellowship with God. That there was such an aspiration for fellowship may be readily admitted. It was one of the two fundamental aspects of man's religious life. Samuel Ives Curtiss in his "Primitive Semitic Religion To-day" has given abundant reason to recognize that that was only one phase of primitive religion. A shadow falls across the relationship of man to his God, a shadow deep, dark, and portentous, the shadow of his own guilt. The strenuousness of man's religious life grows out of this sense of guilt. It may be the expression of his terror, in which case sacrifice, offering, penance, self-torture, self-consecration, may be an attempt to buy off God and mollify his anger. Doubtless heathen sacrifices and religious activity fell under the influence of this gross view of the relation of man to God. Just here the faith of Israel reveals its immeasurable superiority to the ethnic faiths. It definitely transcended such a conception of the relation of man to his God.

"Wherewith shall I come before Jehovah, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

In these words the prophet Micah does not finally meet the problem of guilt, but the possibility of placating the Deity is definitely laid aside.

In man's relation to his brother, expiation for a wrong done is possible. My obligation to my brother does not cover the whole range of my possible service. There are practical limitations upon my capacity to do for him.

The world is full of distress, I cannot relieve it all. It is full of heart hunger and sorrow, I cannot comfort it all. It is full of weakness and need, I cannot help it all. In any given case I may redouble my exertions to be of actual service to one of my fellow men, and thereby I may express my repentance for some wrong that I have done. But the path of penance in relation to the wrong I have done God — that is impossible. For to him I owe all that I have, all that I am, all that I can do. There is no margin left that I may use as the expression of my repentance. When I have done all, I can only say that I am an unprofitable servant: I have done that which it is my duty to do. How vain is the practice of penance to expiate sin and gain peace of conscience, let every anchorite, every penitente, every Paul, every Luther, bear witness. It is spanning an infinite gulf with the film of a human bridge. It is filling a bottomless pit with the infinitesimals of human merit. It is matching human weakness against the infinitude of divine holiness. The terms "infinite" and "bottomless" are here used in no academic sense, but as expressions of human emotion stirred by the consciousness of guilt. The awakened sinner needs no scholastic argument to prove the enormity of his sin. He knows it because he feels it thrilling through him.

Just here I may be met with the objection that the state of mind which I am portraying is altogether exceptional, if not non-existent, in these days. Men are not seeking means of expiation because of their profound sense of guilt. Quite likely that is true. Yet I present this consciousness of guilt as the limit toward which every sense of unworthiness tends. It is the asymptote which the hyperbola of repentance approaches, but with which it never coincides. Often we are not conscious of needs until we find them supplied. Many a man is not profoundly conscious of his guilt until he finds salvation in Christ, and then it comes to him as something which might have been had he realized his condition and never known Christ. Just because that salvation meets the consciousness of

guilt in some other way than by penance, the consciousness of guilt itself is changed in character. Most of us do not know the terrors of an awakened conscience just because we know Christ, and because we know him so early and so well. But there are evidences enough of what those terrors might be in the case of sensitive souls if there were no Christian salvation.

" For pleasure I have given my soul;
Now, Justice, let thy thunders roll!
Now, Vengeance, smite — and with a blow
Lay the rebellious ingrate low."

These words of Henry Kirke White are a transcript of the experience of some souls tortured by guilt. That experience is shadowed forth in the Greek myths of Nemesis and the Eumenides, in the legends of Oedipus and Agamemnon. Bunyan could write so powerfully of Christian at the foot of the cross because he himself had carried Christian's burden. Luther could exult in the freedom in Christ because he had known the misery of unatoned guilt. Men have gone mad with the sense of unexpiated and inexpiable guilt. Paul's mighty wail of anguish, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" is the wail of humanity when it comes to itself as to the meaning of sin.

As to how far this sense of the need of expiation is associated in the consciousness of the one who has it with the thought of a personal God and of sin as an injury to him, there is need of a Professor Starbuck or a Professor Coe to determine. Where the cherished conception of God is of a vengeful and jealous tyrant, the need of expiation will doubtless be associated with the thought of God; but to hold such a conception is to fall back into the pagan idea of God, and almost inevitably to fall into the pagan notion of placating God. So far as the Anselmic, or Shylock, conception of God has really laid hold upon Christian thought, it may well be that the feeling for expiation is directly associated with the thought of God; but, as has been repeatedly asserted, that conception of God belongs

to theology rather than to experience to a much larger extent than has often been recognized. It is to be doubted whether the feeling of guilt that demands some kind of penance is generally associated with anything more than the consciousness of a violated law. It is a tribute of respect for law. It is the "curse of the law" written in consciousness. In other words, it is the condemnation of conscience. The association of the thought of sin with the thought of God will arise in the Christian's mind, not as he thinks of sin as a violation of law, but as he comes to realize the love of God, and sees that his sin has been all along a spurning of that infinite love. The more he thus thinks of God, the less will he be able to think of God as demanding any form of expiation. The man needs expiation to balance accounts with himself. He needs it to satisfy his own conscience.

God meets the returning prodigal with forgiveness, but what is the nature of that forgiveness? Can it be a mere free and costless forgiveness, — a forgiveness out of hand, so to speak? The crux of the doctrine of the atonement lies here. Have the sufferings and death of Christ no necessary relation to the forgiveness of sins? And if they have any necessary relation, what is it? I have tried to show that there is such a necessary relationship in Christian consciousness; but how can we make it explicit for thought?

Mention has been made of that consciousness of the heinousness of sin toward which all repentance tends as a limit. A man who has that consciousness of sin is looking at it from the divine standpoint. He is judging it as God judges it. Could such a man ever be persuaded that God can merely say to him, "I forgive you, go and sin no more"; and that that is all there is of forgiveness? Such a belief would be a contradiction in terms. To hold it would be to say that God esteemed lightly what he does not esteem lightly. Sin is too heavy a thing to be puffed away like a wreath of smoke. Forgiveness is too precious a thing to cost only a word. A forgiveness out of hand

would not to the awakened conscience restore the disturbed moral balance of the universe. It would not restore the equation destroyed by sin. Those who point to the father's forgiveness of the prodigal as the analogy of God's action forget the years of agonized waiting that had gone before the forgiveness of the prodigal, and had left their marks on the father's face, — marks that were there as he spoke the words of forgiveness and of peace. They forget too that God can do, and does do, what the father of the prodigal could not. The earthly father ran to meet the prodigal when the prodigal was on the way home. The Heavenly Father pursues the prodigal into the far country to persuade him to come home. Without that persuasion of God the sinner would never start for the Father's house. But to follow the prodigal, to labor with him, to meet his rebuffs, to take the shame of all of it upon one's self, means cost, pain, suffering, to the heart of God.

Vicarious suffering is by no means the rarity that it has commonly been assumed to be in discussions of the atonement. We are all of necessity bearing one another's burdens. The more complicated society becomes, the more delicate the relations that bind us together, the more is it true that no man liveth unto himself, and no man dieth unto himself. The family as the sphere of closest fellowship furnishes the most striking illustration of the fact of vicarious suffering. Through long years the parents bear all the child's burdens, providing him with all the necessities of life, warding off every ill, furnishing him with ideas and even with character. The law holds the parent pecuniarily responsible for the child's misdeeds. There is a natural basis for this vicarious burden-bearing which is inevitable; but the more closely the family ties are knit by mutual affection, the more does this vicarious burden-bearing increase. The father suffers for the wrong-doing of the child, the husband for the wife, the child for the parent. The innocent suffer, as a rule, far more than the guilty; for that very sensitiveness to moral obligation which keeps them innocent makes them feel by sympathy

the curse of wrong whenever they stand in sympathetic relations with the wrong-doer. The guilty man is deadened in his capacity to feel his own guilt by that very obtuseness of moral perception which permitted him to incur the guilt. Indeed, the hardened conscience is generally awakened to its own guilt by the sympathetic perception of the reflex of that guilt in innocent loved ones. Anguish of spirit often comes first to the guilty son when he sees that his wrong-doing has broken a mother's heart—to the guilty father when he knows the misery his crime has entailed upon his innocent children. It is here that J. Mcleod Campbell's idea of a vicarious repentance finds its justification. The shame of an innocent man for the guilt of one he loves as his own soul becomes the source of a like shame in the guilty one.

Bushnell is right in asserting that we cannot except from this law of vicarious suffering the greatest love of all, the love of God for his children. Divine love would be meaningless without sympathy. Divine Fatherhood would be a mockery unless God suffered with us and for us. But our greatest suffering—at least that which ought to be the greatest, and would be the greatest if we only knew ourselves as God knows us—is the suffering which sin entails. If God be a Father, if he be the one of whom every family in heaven and earth is named, then God cannot but suffer in our sin as we guilty men can never suffer.

Into Christian consciousness this sense of a sympathetic and suffering God scarcely enters as yet; and it is that fact that has made the atonement so difficult a doctrine to interpret. This failure to apprehend a suffering God is due to the failure to learn the lesson of the Incarnation. Christians do see and feel the sympathy and the consequent suffering of Jesus Christ, but they have not learned that all that Christ was God is, that Christ was God manifested in the flesh. And all our theories of three persons in one substance, of two natures in one person, have but made the apprehension of this simple and fundamental fact of the gospel more difficult. For most Christians are in the

position of the Sunday-school scholar who said that when she thought of God's justice, she thought of God the Father, but when she thought of God's love she thought of God the Son. When we have learned the meaning of the Incarnation, we shall perceive that Gethsemane and Calvary were not transactions directed towards God, but were the manifestations in time of the eternal heart of God. Meanwhile the suffering of Christ with sinners and for sinners is an integral part of the consciousness of Christian believers. However much we speak the language of an arbitrary infliction of suffering upon Christ, the Christ we know and love suffered the contradiction of sinners against himself, and suffered through his unfathomable love for sinful men. "He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not."

Now what has all this to do with the awakened sinner's felt need of a means of expiation? The answer is twofold. In the first place, the forgiveness that is offered in view of the revelation of God's heart in Gethsemane and Calvary is not a costless forgiveness. It has cost the measureless sorrow of God himself. God's forgiveness is the expression of his love, and his love has brought upon him the whole burden and curse of the sin of his children. The sufferings and death of Christ are the sign, the seal, the symbol, the assurance, the manifestation, the demonstration, of this fact. The gulf that men could not bridge to reach God, God has bridged to reach men. The pit that men could not fill with their infinitesimal penances God has filled with his own suffering love. The tribute to the majesty of violated law which man the sinner could not pay, God has paid in the sweat drops of his own agony.

But, in the second place, this fact of vicarious suffering meets the importunate need of expiation with a vastly greater obligation. When love has suffered for my guilt, the great obligation that rests upon me is, not to seek some added suffering for my own guilt, but it is to meet that love with an answering love. My obligation is no longer determined by my past sin, but it is determined by my in-

debtedness to the love that has sought me at such cost. The fact that God in Christ has suffered for me creates an obligation so great that it sinks the thought of expiation out of sight. Penance becomes not simply needless, but the very thought of it becomes an insult to my Saviour, for it subordinates him to something else. Calvary's cross has swept away all altars of sacrifice, all penance, all expiation, wherever it has gone in its full meaning and power.

"Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

This is what Dr. Armitage meant by saying that Samuel Johnson's act was scarcely Christian. It was not in so far as it concerned a sin against God. In so far as it concerned the wrong to his father, the act was confessedly a sentimental satisfaction, with a vague hope that in some way it might come to his father as the evidence of a sincere repentance.

A redemption through the suffering love of God creates the strongest possible motive for the new life of obedience and love. It was the fatal defect of the earlier theories of the atonement that they stood in no relation to the new life that a man should lead as the child of God. Anselm's theory, confessedly, simply restored men to the position they held before they had sinned. No added power was assured them, no added motive to be right with God. But a redemption that has cost God infinite sorrow through his love for me, when once I have apprehended it as mine, changes the whole outlook and meaning of my life. The moral influence thus conceived is not attached to the atonement by some remote inference. It flows directly from it. I am redeemed by one and the same act both from the guilt of sin as a fact of my consciousness, and from the power of sin as the dominant motive of my life. If the atonement flows out of the sympathetic sufferings of God for my sin, it is no longer meaningless to speak of "fill [ing] up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ."

Once only in the New Testament is there any attempt

to give a real reason for the necessity of the atonement. It is in the third chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans.

"Christ Jesus: whom God set forth a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; for the showing, I say, of his righteousness at this present season; that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus."

A propitiation is offered by the offender to the offended to make him merciful. Here the offended offers it for the sake of the offender. It is not needful to make God merciful. God had always been passing over the sins done aforetime in his own forbearance. Now it was needful to show his righteousness in so doing. He did it by setting forth Jesus Christ as the manifestation of his own feeling. The manifestation was made in his blood, that is, in his sacrifice. Justice is satisfied by an infinitely costly forgiveness, without any arbitrary infliction of suffering contrary to every consideration of justice. The integrity of the moral law is maintained without sundering the governmental from the parental character of God. Moral power is generated, power to repent, power to live a new life, by God's meeting the actual needs of humanity, and energizing for their satisfaction. Does not all that men have sought to express in their various theories of the atonement here find recognition?