

The Wondrous Cross.

STUDIES IN THE ATONEMENT.

II.

LEAVING, however, the historical development of this doctrine, it seems essential to consider it [in the light of modern thought, which follows two main lines, subjective and objective. These are the two classes into which all theories of the Atonement can be divided.

A. SUBJECTIVE.

This is concerned with the Atonement as directed towards man, and the work of Christ is to be understood as a revelation of Divine Love to elicit our repentance. In Ritschl the Atonement is a test of fidelity to God ; with Bushnell it is expressive of God's sympathy ; in Maurice and Robertson it is indicative of the surrender of Christ ; in McLeod Campbell and Moberly the Atonement is regarded as vicarious penitence. Thus, in one way or another the Atonement is a revelation of truth and of the Divine character as Love, which is intended to overcome the fears of the sinner, to assure him of God's friendship, and thereby to incite him to rise to a true life.

All this is, of course, accurate and helpful, but in itself it is inadequate, and therefore unsatisfactory as a full explanation of the Atonement. The illustration has been given of a man throwing himself into the water from a pier to prove his love, but the mere effect of throwing himself into the water without accomplishing a rescue does not seem to be sufficient. The man who rescues another who is drowning at once proves his love and saves the lost. It is also pointed out that this theory fails to deal with the reality of sin and to justify forgiveness, since evil is passed over and not brought to an end. When a man has gone headlong into sin for years and then sees the horror of it and changes his life, there is still the stain of sin, its effects upon his character, and its results on others. Then, too, the general weakness of this theory is that there is nothing in it to show how those are affected who are unconscious and cannot correspond. There are many on whom such a revelation of Divine Love cannot possibly make any impression or elicit any response, such as infants, the insane, and the heathen. Are these to be unsaved because they remain uninfluenced ?

Of these various interpretations of the moral theory, that of McLeod Campbell and Moberly is at present most prevalent, and it has received additional confirmation through the Essay in *Foundations* by Mr. W. H. Moberly, who therein presented afresh his father's view. It would seem, however, as though the criticism of this interpretation is convincing. Thus, the Bishop of Down (Dr. D'Arcy) has asked how penitence can be vicarious any more than punishment, especially since penitence cannot atone for past sin.¹ Nor does it explain why the quality of penitence should culminate in the act of death. Then, too, it gives no account of the New Testament imagery of Ransom, Propitiation, Redemption, nor does it explain how the soul is enabled to break the power of sin. Dr. Armitage Robinson is of opinion that the use made by this theory of the word "penitence" is at once unreal and unfamiliar.

"Does not *penitence*, we are bound to ask, involve as an indispensable element *self-blame*, and not merely the sense of shame? Must not its language be, 'We have sinned . . . of our own fault'? Love's self-identification with the sinner may go as far as the sense of shame on the ground of physical relationship (as of mother and child) or of deeply affectionate friendship. It may go as far as self-blame without losing touch with reality, if it is conscious that further effort on its part might have prevented the shameful issue. But can self-blame be genuine where *ex hypothesi* there has been no responsibility for the sin?" (*Journal of Theological Studies*, January, 1913).

To the same effect are the criticisms of Dr. Denney, who holds that to express the Atonement as penitence is really, unthinkable.

"No rhapsodies about love and no dialectical juggling will ever make this anything but a contradiction in terms. It is a thoroughly false way of describing a familiar fact, which has, no doubt, its significance for the Atonement, though it does not exhaust it. . . . Resolved the Atonement into 'a perfect lesson in humanity to the judgment of God in the sin of man'; a response to God which has in it 'all the elements of a perfect repentance—a perfect sorrow—a perfect contrition—all excepting the personal consciousness of sin.' The exception, it may be said, destroys the theory" (*British Weekly*).

Indeed, it may be said without much question that such a theory changes the entire meaning of the word "penitence" and involves an utter contradiction.

"The theory—unless the whole meaning of the word 'penitence' is altered—is a contradiction in terms. An infinite repentance is performed to avert an infinite penitence. The repentance is for human sin. The repentance is by Him Who knew no sin. The guilt is incurred by the

¹ D'Arcy, *Christianity and the Supernatural*, p. 80.

human race, and availing repentance takes place in the guiltless Jesus. How can this be? What element of penitence can enter into the mind of One Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth? One of the most extraordinary passages in the theology is that of McLeod Campbell, when he says that our Lord's mind had 'all the elements of a perfect repentance in humanity, for all the sin of man—a perfect sorrow—a perfect contrition—all the elements of such a repentance, and that in absolute perfection—all excepting the personal consciousness of sin.' Need we point out that the exception is the very essence of the whole? Where there is no personal consciousness of sin, penitence is impossible. Contrition is the sign of an inner change from evil to good. How can such a change take place in the Eternal Son?" (*Church Family Newspaper*).

When Dr. Moberly's book first appeared, a similar criticism was made.¹ Dr. Clow has made a brief, but acute criticism of Moberly :

"Moberly calls the Incarnation the crucial doctrine. Mark how he gives his case away even in his adjective" (*The Cross in Christian Experience*, p. 319).

It is not by any means the least important of all criticisms of this view that it cannot find any real foundation in the passages of the New Testament dealing with the Atonement. This is the general line taken in a recent searching criticism which, at the same time, preserves all the truly valuable features in Moberly's view. Dr. H. R. Mackintosh in an article, "The Vicarious Penitence of Christ" (*Expositor*, February, 1916), while speaking in the warmest terms of the moral and spiritual value of this position in several respects, nevertheless points out that there is nothing like it in the New Testament, that it gives no explanation why all the features of our Lord's experiences should culminate in death and that it is not true to ordinary life. Dr. Mackintosh concludes that the Atonement is fundamentally something that God does, and on this account, whatever is the heart of the Atonement must be predicable of God. Dr. Stalker ("The Atonement"), while apparently approving of McLeod Campbell's view in one place, subjects it to severe criticism in another as that which is not found in connection with New Testament teaching on the Atonement.

B. OBJECTIVE.

This is concerned with the Atonement as directed towards God, and the work of Christ is to be understood as a revelation of Divine righteousness and grace to convict and convert. On this view the Atonement includes three great truths.

¹ H. G. Grey, Introduction to Dimock, *The Death of Christ* (2nd edition).

1. The Manifestation of the Divine Character. The Death of Christ is a demonstration of God's righteousness, God's holiness, God's love. Very few modern books give any true consideration to a crucial passage like Rom. iii. 21-26, where the Cross is shown to be the revelation and vindication of righteousness. Pardon, according to the New Testament, is based on justice as well as mercy.¹

2. The Vindication of the Divine Law. Is not Christ's Death in some way "penal"? Retribution is in the very constitution of the universe, and on this view God in Christ bears the "penalty." And yet it has been pointed out that the transference is not of guilt, or of moral turpitude, but simply of legal liability.² It is surely in this sense that the Death of Jesus Christ is "vicarious"; otherwise, what meaning can be attached to that term? If we are not to be allowed to speak of vicarious punishment, why may we speak of vicarious suffering? What is the precise meaning and value of "vicarious"?

3. The Foundation of the Divine Pardon. It is sometimes argued that as human forgiveness does not need an atonement, God's pardon should be regarded as equally independent of any such sacrifice as is now being considered. But this is to overlook the essential features of all forgiveness, which means that the one who pardons really accepts the results of the wrong done to him in order that he may exempt the other from any punishment. Thus, as it has been well illustrated, when a man cancels a debt, he, of necessity, loses the amount, and if he pardons an insult or a blow, he accepts in his own person the injury done in either case, so that human pardon may be said to cancel at its own expense any wrong done, and this principle of the innocent suffering for the guilty is the fundamental truth of the Atonement. It is, therefore, urged with great force that every act of forgiveness is really an act of Atonement, and thus human forgiveness, so far from obviating the necessity of Divine Atonement, really illuminates, vindicates, and necessitates the Divine pardon, for "forgiveness is mercy which has first satisfied the principle of justice." And so we hold that on this view Christ's Death made it possible for God to forgive sin. What His justice

¹ One of the most useful books discussing the legal aspects of the Atonement is *Law and the Cross*, by Dr. C. F. Creighton. The value of the book is largely due to the fact that it consists of Addresses to Lawyers, Students, and Professors at College and Law Schools (Eaton & Mains, New York).

² Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ*, p. 316.

demanded His love provided. This fact of the Death of Jesus Christ as the foundation of pardon is unchallengeable in the New Testament. Repentance cannot undo the past ; it can only affect the future, and any religion which does not begin with deliverance can never be a success as a discipline. Christ spoke of and dealt with the fact of deformity as well as of growth. " That we being delivered . . . might serve." ¹

The value of this view is that it keeps close to the New Testament and gives a satisfying explanation of such words as Redemption, Propitiation, Reconciliation, Substitution, Representation, Identification, Satisfaction. It appeals not only to the heart, but also to the conscience, and is based at once on absolute righteousness and on the power of Divine grace to undo sin. This is also in harmony with the deepest needs of human nature.

Thus, the Atonement means that God in the Person of His Eternal Son took upon Himself in vicarious death the sin of the whole world. The offer of mercy is made to every one, since there is no sinner for whom Christ did not die, and every sin, past, present and future, is regarded as laid on and borne by Him.

" This, then, is the New Testament doctrine of Atonement, that He whose office it had ever been to reveal the mind of the Father, and who had assumed human form, having passed through this mortal life without sin, and being, therefore, non-amenable to any penalty decreed upon transgression, had voluntarily submitted to that cause of death, with all its mystery of meaning, which He had Himself announced and thereby rendered the forgiveness of sins possible to man " (Cave, *ut supra*, p. 324).

" To describe the central fact of the Gospel in ethical terms as a revelation of love, and exhibition of obedience, or a manifestation of the Divine character, expresses a side of truth, apart from which a doctrine of substitution may become, if not immoral, at least superstitious. But such descriptions cease to be true, if they are taken for definitions. The Cross is no longer a revelation, if it be not a redemption. If it be large enough to deal with a situation of which the factors are God, man, and sin ; if it be a fact of religion through which men approach that Personality in whom they have their being, its significance cannot be understood unless it be recognized as a mystery, illuminating and illuminated by life and experience, but itself not reducible to simpler terms. . . . It is essentially an eternal fact, embracing, but not embraced by experience ; and its theory, though to the spiritual man increasingly rational, must ever be less than that which it seeks to explain " (*Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, Article Atonement, by Canon J. G. Simpson, p. 138).

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(To be continued.)

¹ In various forms this is the essential view of Dale, Denney, Forsyth and Simpson.