

THE GODWARD ASPECT OF THE ATONEMENT.

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PART I.

THE distinguishing mark of Modern Theology is its thorough-going appeal to experience. In one sense there is nothing new about this, for it has ever been the characteristic of genuine and vital religion. Long ago the Psalmist cried out, "O taste and see that the Lord is good: Blessed is the man that trusteth in him" (xxxiv. 8). Even the woman of Samaria, after our Lord's conversation with her, felt impelled to communicate to the men of her city her new experience. Having taken her at her own word, they go to the new Teacher, and finally arrive at the state when they can say, "Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world" (John iv. 42). Unlike the Scribes, our Lord spoke with authority which the ordinary folk of His day could recognize. His teaching rang true. Those who listened to His words knew that they were the expression of "unbroken and triumphant communion with His Heavenly Father," His immediate experience of God. Thus did His teaching find a responsive echo, and those who were willing to surrender themselves to Him heard His voice and were filled with truth.

On the other hand, what is new in Modern Theology is that it claims more seriously than in previous ages that theology should of necessity be based on experience. Our doctrine of God must be founded upon the moral and religious consciousness. This emphasis on experience lays us open both to the danger and accusation of subjectivity. The present Archbishop of York in his recent charge quotes Father Herbert Kelly as once saying to him: "There used to be a thing called theology; that is a Greek word which means 'thinking about God'; it is very old-fashioned now. Now there is a thing called the philosophy of religion; that means thinking about your own nice feelings; it is very popular."¹ Doubtless these words are an exaggeration. Every theologian worthy of the name is concerned to show that religious experience is not an illusion,

¹ Cf. *Thoughts on Some Problems of the Day* (London, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1931), p. 25. We cannot resist the temptation of quoting the Archbishop's definition of religious experience which appears on the same page. "By religious experience we ought to mean an experience which is religious through and through—an experiencing of all things in the light of the knowledge of God. It is this, and not any moment of illumination, of which we may say that it is self-authenticating; for in such an experience all things increasingly fit together in a single intelligible whole." "The Validity of Christian Experience," by Dr. W. Robinson, which comes in the essays on the *Future of Christianity*, edited by Sir J. Marchant, should also be read.

but is an integral part of reality, and that his conception of God is not just simply a case of "projection" upon the unknowable, but, whilst fully allowing for its inadequacy, is objectively true. Nevertheless, this quotation has a sting in it. The tendency of the age is to make man the measure of all things. It is hard to resist the impression that an acceptance of Christian truth often depends on whether we find it agreeable or otherwise. Divine truth is regarded too much from our end, how it harmonizes with our needs and wants. Hence the strangest of all cries, "I have no use for religion." Whereas the experience of those who know is wonder and awe at the discovery that God can actually make use of them. With pain and difficulty, and above all, with reverent humility, must we endeavour to think God's thoughts after Him. Religion ultimately rests upon what He has to say, what the Lord God wills for us. We stand or rather He enables us to stand before Him. Rightly in such a subject as that of the Atonement we must be concerned with the effect that the Atonement has upon us, since we are sinners standing in need of salvation. The human side must absorb much of our attention. But if sin means anything at all we can have no adequate view of its poignancy and terror so long as our eyes are fastened upon ourselves. We learn its true significance alone when we come to see how God regards it. It follows also that the taking away of sin, the being made at one with God, cannot be estimated aright until we attempt to look at it from the Divine side. Fail we must, but in the very failure lies our hope, since we are not left to our own unaided efforts. The Holy Spirit of God will take of the things of Christ and show them unto us.

Our first consideration will be towards discovering what was our Lord's mind on this all-important subject. His whole life was lived in a Godward direction. Alone amongst the sons of men He was in constant communion with His Father, so that it was quite natural for Him to say, "All things have been delivered unto Me of My Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father: neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him" (Matt. xi. 27; Luke x. 22). Were this *logion* not a genuine utterance of our Lord, which we are convinced that it is, yet a reverent study of His life would leave us with the conviction of its absolute truth.

It is necessary, however, to define our attitude towards the Gospels, wherein is disclosed to us the mind of Christ. St. Mark is our oldest Gospel, having been written probably between A.D. 65 and 67. Canon Streeter would place it as early as A.D. 60.¹ Our next source is a document often referred to as Q, which is used both by the author of the First Gospel and St. Luke, though it may be they had different versions before them. These references contain for the most part sayings of Jesus. The version or versions of Q used by our first and third Gospels may have been in existence in A.D. 67 and 68. Each great Church may have had its version of Q,

¹ *The Four Gospels* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1925).

e.g. Rome, Antioch, Cæsarea and Jerusalem. Streeter considers that there was an overlapping of Q and St. Mark; if, however, St. Mark did make use of Q he must have trusted to memory, and never once have referred to the written source. Granted that St. Mark used a version of Q, then this version may have been in existence by A.D. 50. That St. Luke had access to another source, or sources, called L quite as primitive as St. Mark and Q, we may accept after reading Streeter's great work, though we need not endorse the particular form in which he gives his theory.

St. Matthew also has a special source alongside of St. Mark and Q. Concerning this source, namely M, it must be considered on its own merits, though so far as our Lord's words are concerned, as a rule it seems to be authentic.¹ A few words must be added to define our attitude towards the Fourth Gospel. Elsewhere we have tried to show that it is the inspired interpretation of a disciple of Christ who knew His mind and heart as few, if any, had ever known Him. To illustrate and interpret the Lord's teaching recourse may be made to St. John's Gospel.²

A second consideration must be borne in mind. We must never lose sight of the Jewish background of the Lord's teaching. Not only must we remember that He accepted the Old Testament Scriptures as bearing witness to Himself, but also that some of the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical Jewish writings may not have been unknown to Him, and that at any rate the ideas expressed in them were current amongst His hearers. They formed part of the religious make-up of His contemporaries. The Rabbinic Literature must also be used. This has been rendered accessible in Strack and Billerbeck's monumental work of four volumes consisting of a commentary on the New Testament illustrated from the Talmud and the Midrash. Unfortunately it is a very expensive work, and has not been translated, but in Mr. Montefiori's book, *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings*, important passages from it are translated and sometimes criticized. Far more stress should be laid on the Jewish setting of the Lord's teaching than has hitherto been the case. "When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal. iv. 4), "of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. i. 3).

First and foremost our Lord identified Himself with the suffering servant of Isaiah. Isaiah lii. 13-14 must be continually before us as we think of our Lord's mission and work.³ In St. Luke xxii. 37 our Lord expressly declares this identification: "For I say unto

¹ Cf. *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, S.P.C.K., 1920; *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, by P. P. Levertoff and H. L. Goudge, pp. 127-8.

² *The Atonement in History and in Life*, a Volume of Essays, ed. by L. W. Grensted, pp. 154 ff.

³ Attention should be drawn to *The Riddle of the New Testament*, by Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, and Noel Davey (London, Faber & Faber, Ltd., 1931). They show how a Messianic background pervades St. Mark's Gospel as well as the miracles, parables, and aphorisms. They imply the presence of the Messiah and His Kingdom.

you, that this that is written must be fulfilled in Me and He was reckoned with transgressors." Previous to our Lord no one had conceived of the Messiah as suffering for His people. It is true that Mr. Montefiori makes the statement that the sufferings of the Messiah for the sake of His people were not unknown to the Rabbis, but he adds that the passages in which these allusions occur are a good deal later than A.D. 30.¹ On the other hand, Professor Jeremias of Berlin maintains that before Christ, Isaiah liii., and probably Psalms xxii, xxxi, lxix and Zechariah xii. 10 ff., were interpreted in esoteric circles as referring to the Messiah, although the conception of a political Messiah was the prevailing view.² This latter opinion is not generally entertained by scholars, but as far as our purpose is concerned, we can leave the question undecided, provided it is allowed that our Lord identified Himself with the suffering servant of Isaiah.

Turning now to the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, let us note the Godward aspect of the servant's sufferings. Unfortunately there are many exegetical difficulties in this poem which necessitate caution, but in the main they hardly affect our point. In verse 4 the exclamation is made, "surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted." Then in verse 5, following Mr. Cripps' translation, "But pierced he was because of rebellions that we had committed, he was crushed because of our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement which was to produce our welfare, and it is with his scars that there has come about healing to us."³ Here make their appearance, whether for the first time or not does not signify, the ideas of vicarious punishment for another's sake. This is further illustrated by the words at the close of verse 6, "while Yahveh on his part has caused to rest upon him the iniquity of us all." Verses 10 and 11 are obscure, and there are grave reasons for suspecting that the text is corrupt, but at least they contain the view that the servant's sufferings were in accordance with the will of God, and also an allusion to his vicarious suffering. He will make many righteous by instruction in the will of God and by example in constancy: "while it is he who will carry their iniquities" (verse 11). Once more he is spoken of as bearing the sin of many (verse 12), and the poem closes with his making intercession for the transgressors. Dr. Skinner rightly says, "the essence of the servant's sacrifice lies in the fact that whilst himself innocent he acquiesces in the Divine judgment on sin, and willingly endures it for the sake of his people."⁴

These conceptions, we submit, must have a place in any true doc-

¹ *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings* (Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London, 1930), p. 305.

² *Deutsche Theologie*, Zweiter Band, Der Erlösungsgedanke (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1929), s.s. 106, 117.

³ *The Atonement in History and in Life*, pp. 22 ff.

⁴ *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, Chapters xl-lxvi (University Press, Cambridge, 1898), p. 134.

trine of our Lord's Person and work. However hard it may be to us modern people to make them our own, we must not pass them by or try to explain them away. If, as we believe, our Lord, in communion with His Father, and from the study of the Old Testament Scriptures, learnt to know the nature of the Messianic office and work, and His own vocation and ministry, then we must read His actions and sayings in the light of the famous fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

For us the first decisive fact in our Lord's life is His Baptism. Its significance lies partly in its being the inauguration of His public ministry, when, the heavens rent asunder, and the Spirit as a dove descending upon Him (Mark i. 10) gave Him the spiritual assurance from His Heavenly Father that He was called to be the Messiah. The temptations in the wilderness which followed can only be interpreted as signifying the decisive rejection on our Lord's part of all political views concerning the Messiah.¹ But we must not overlook the fact, and this has an important bearing on our subject, that the baptism of John to which He submitted Himself was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Here let us follow the excellent note on the significance of our Lord's Baptism given in Archdeacon Rawlinson's commentary on St. Mark. With him we believe that our Lord as the Messiah identified Himself with a sinful people. "Woe is me, for . . . I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." The Lord could echo the second part of Isaiah's confession, if not the first; like Daniel, He will have confessed "the sins of His people," with whom He felt Himself to be identified; and who should confess penitence for the national sins, if not the Messiah? ² Here at the Baptism, if not before, did our Lord begin to realize that on Him was being laid the iniquity of us all.

Now we must beware of confining our Lord's ministry and teaching within too narrow limits, but at the same time all that we know of the suffering servant of Isaiah was fulfilled in Him. Where was Jesus to be found? Amongst the lost, the forsaken and the suffer-

¹ This is surely a more adequate explanation than that given by the late Dr. Rashdall in his famous Bampton Lectures, who maintains that the account of the temptation hardly implies a consciousness of Messiahship. Is he also justified in saying that if we accept as historical the scene at Caesarea Philippi our Lord cannot have definitely taught His own Messiahship up to that moment? The very question our Lord put to His disciples, "But who say ye that I am?" (Mark viii. 29) implies their previous training and instruction on His part. His great concern was that they should have sufficient trust in Him when He should unfold to them the true view of Messiahship, that the Son of Man must suffer, that it should not be an offence unto them. There is no reason to hold with Dr. Rashdall that the account of the voice at the Baptism must be coloured by later ideas, or that Jesus only accepted His own identification with the Messiah at a late date, and then too with reluctance. Cf. *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (London, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1919), p. 6.

² *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Methuen & Co., Ltd., London, 1925), pp. 251-6. Cf. "He was, in vicarious love, being numbered with transgressors in sharing the baptism of repentance, though Himself sinless."—*The Christian Doctrine of the Godhead*, by Dr. A. E. Garvie (Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., London, 1925), p. 80.

ing. He identified Himself with them to such an extent that He was called the Friend of Publicans and Sinners (Matt. xi. 19; Luke vii. 34). The reproach was brought against Him that He consorted with them (Mark ii. 16; Matt. ix. 11; Luke v. 30). His purpose in life was to seek and to save those that were lost (Luke xix. 10; cf. Matt. xviii. 12 ff.). Montefiori makes the striking statement

" that a teacher should go about and associate with such persons, and attempt to help them and 'cure' them by familiar and friendly intercourse with them, was, I imagine, an unheard-of procedure. That the physician of the soul should seek out the 'sick' was a new phenomenon. According to the Rabbis, the visitation of the bodily sick was an obligation and a duty of the first order. But the seeking out of the morally sick was not put on the same footing, nor, so far as we can gather, was it practised. Here Jesus appears to be original."¹

In this respect our Lord was already numbered with the transgressors. All through His life He was saving others, though He spared not Himself. His miracles were not performed without cost to Himself, "virtue went out of them," and the author of the first Gospel (Matt. viii. 17) quotes Isaiah, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."

But what is most noteworthy is our Lord's "sore amazement" and "heaviness of soul." Rudolf Otto says, "there is more here than the fear of death; there is the awe of the creature before the 'mysterium tremendum,' before the shuddering secret of the numen."² But it is not only in the garden of Gethsemane that the death which our Lord was to die was a burden on His heart. How impressive are the words "He set His face towards Jerusalem" | The Transfiguration would seem as if it were sent to support the Son of Man in the great load He was called upon to bear. St. Luke records that Moses and Elias appeared "and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" (ix. 31). "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Luke xii. 50). Πῶς συνέχομαι "oppressed, afflicted," as Klostermann rightly says, "Gethsemanestimmung," and Dr. Plummer, "the prospect of His sufferings was a perpetual Gethsemane."³ W. Bauer has in his edition of the Ignatian letters a special note on the great desire for martyrdom in the early Church, e.g. Ignatius writes to the Romans:

"I write to all the Churches, and I bid all men know, that of my own free will I die for God, unless ye should hinder me. I exhort you, be ye not an unseasonable kindness to me. Let me be given to the wild beasts, for through them I can attain unto God. I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread [of Christ]. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my sepulchre, and may leave

¹ *op. cit.*, p. 222.

² *The Idea of the Holy* (University Press, Oxford, 1923), E.T., p. 88.

³ *Das Lukasevangelium* (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1929), Zweite Auflage, S. 141, and *St. Luke. International Critical Commentary*, p. 334.

no part of my body behind, so that I may not, when I am fallen asleep, be burdensome to any one. Then shall I be truly a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world shall not so much as see my body. Supplicate the Lord for me, that through these instruments I may be found a sacrifice unto God." ¹

How different then is our Lord's attitude! It can only be explained by His knowledge that the time was coming when in the fullest sense "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

We must now consider the great passage to be found in St. Mark x. 45, and also in St. Matthew xx. 28. "For the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many, *καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν.*" It is the latter part of the sentence which demands the most careful study.

Before considering the meaning of these words we must notice that their genuineness as an utterance of our Lord has been assailed on two grounds.

First, they do not occur in St. Luke, but what he says in xxii. 27 is probably nearer the actual words of our Lord, "For whether is greater he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth."

Secondly, Wellhausen says that they do not fit in with *διακονῆσαι*, "minister," for that is "to serve, wait at table." The step from serving to the giving up of the life as a ransom is a *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος.* ²

Now in answer to the first objection we see no reason to put aside the Marcan saying which also satisfied the author of the first Gospel. But Streeter gives another reason. He considers that St. Luke had access to another written document which he prefers to St. Mark, and his preference is for this source as a whole, not merely for particular items in it on account of their intrinsic merit. Now although the non-Marcan version is a fuller and more interesting version, there are cases where the contrary seems to be true; among these Streeter quotes the saying in Luke about salt (Luke xiv. 34; cf. Mark ix. 49, 50), Mark's long discussion of divorce (Mark x. 2-12) with the single verse in Luke xvi. 18, and the two versions of the saying contrasting the Rulers of the Gentiles and the Son of Man (Mark x. 42-5; Luke xxii. 25-7). In all these cases Mark's version including the ransom passage is the more vigorous and interesting. ³

The second reason given by Wellhausen for rejecting the ransom passage is not at all convincing. The whole context has to do with ministering and also with death; Mark x. 45 follows the request of

¹ Ign. ad Rom., iv. Cf. Tert. ad Scap., v. Euseb. H. E., vii, 12. W. Bauer, *Die Briefe des Ignatius von Antiochia* (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1920), S.S. 247, 248.

² *Das Evangelium Marci*, S.S. 84, 85.

³ *op. cit.*, p. 210. The late Dr. Burney in his book on *The Poetry of Our Lord* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1925), pp. 64, 65, gives this passage (Mark x. 38 ff. = Matt. xx. 22 ff.) as "the most striking example of the continuous use of this form of parallelism . . . where we have four synonymous couplets combined with one (the third) antithetic and one (the sixth) synthetic."

the mother of Zebedee, and her ambition expressed in the desire that her sons should sit, one on the right hand, the other on the left in the future Messianic kingdom. This called forth the indignation of the other disciples, and then it was that our Lord pointed out the true conception of greatness as embodied in His life work and teaching. Mark x. 45 is in perfect harmony with this.

Accepting this saying as proceeding from our Lord's lips, let us now inquire what we are meant to understand by it. Its reference to His death is quite clear. And here let us note the intrinsic difference between the death of Christ, the ransom, and the death of His disciples. The Master gives His life, the disciples on the other hand must lose their lives. In the one case the Lord lays down His life of His own free will. In the other, when the time comes for the servant to die, no choice is given to him but to submit.

Dr. Wendt interprets the idea of the Lord's life being given "as being a ransom for many" as implying that the Messiah gives His own life in order to free many others from a state of servitude, and he would explain this on the analogy of Matthew xi. 28-30, that is the condition of oppression and servitude on account of earthly sufferings, and also specially on account of death. For as the Messiah He was called "to proclaim release to the captives, receiving of sight to the blind, and liberty to them that are bruised" (Luke iv. 18, 19). Thus did He procure for His people the inward deliverance from the pressure of sufferings by setting them the example of His own course of action. But Wendt obviously feels that he has not accounted for the nature of the service rendered by the Messiah, the how and the what, in other words the point of the expression "ransom." To whom was it given? He considers that this question should not be raised, and states that it is unnecessary to interpret in all relations such a figurative conception as that of ransom, in its application to an event bearing upon the establishment of the kingdom of God.¹ Now we believe that Wendt's view is an entirely inadequate explanation. It is quite true that Jesus by the grace of God did taste death for every man (Heb. ii. 9), and did deliver those who through death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (ii. 15). The fear of death before our Lord's life on earth, and in the immediate centuries succeeding, was very widespread in Palestine and the Roman Empire.² But our Lord distinctly says :

¹ *The Teaching of Jesus* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1896), E.T., vol ii, pp. 226 ff.

² Seneca (Ep. lxxxii) writes: "For we believe too throughout many of the stories about death. Many thinkers have striven hard to increase its ill repute: they have portrayed the prison in the world below, and the land overwhelmed by everlasting night, where

' Within his blood-stained cave Hell's warden huge
doth spread his mighty length on half-crunched bones,
and terrifies the disembodied ghosts with never-ceasing bark.'

Even if you win your point and prove that these are mere stories, and that nothing is left for the dead to fear, another fear steals upon you. For the fear of going to the underworld is equalled by the fear of going nowhere."

"Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. x. 28; Luke xii. 4, 5). Fear of judgment to come made men afraid of death, and they were afraid of the judgment because of sin. Wendt's view is a *ὕστερον πρότερον*. We may then say that the Son of Man gave His life as a *ransom from sin* which as a result freed men from the fear of death.

Can we content ourselves with saying, as many do, that our Lord was stating the purpose of His coming in order to free men from the thralldom of sin, and restore their broken fellowship with God? All this is true so far as it goes, but if we could forget the twentieth century and its preoccupations, and endeavour, if possible, to realize their full meaning, the words "as a ransom for many" would still obtrude themselves on our notice. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah must be in the background of our thoughts. Once more let us emphasize the fact how prominent the thought of guilt is in that chapter. We venture to say that if we are to be faithful to the leading ideas of the suffering servant of Isaiah, it is not only true to say that Jehovah wishes His people to draw near to Him, and longs to draw near to them, but also that on account of their guilt He could not draw nigh unto them. It was alone by virtue of the suffering servant bearing the transgression of His people that fellowship between Jehovah and His people could be restored.

The meaning of the word "ransom," *λύτρον*, is best explained not only by appealing to its usage in the Septuagint but even more to such a book as the Fourth Book of the Maccabees. In the martyrdom of Eleazar (4. Macc. vi. 27 ff.): "Thou knowest, O God, that though I might have saved myself, I die in fiery torments for Thy law's sake. Be merciful to the people and be content with our punishment on their behalf. Make my blood a purification for them and take my life as a ransom for their life." We may compare with this xvii. 22, which speaks of the Martyrs' heroism: "They became as it were a ransom for our nation's sin, and through the blood of these righteous ones and their propitiating death, the Divine Providence preserved Israel which before was evil entreated" (cf. i. 11, xviii. 4, and 2. Macc. vii. 33, 37). Hence in our opinion the ransom given by our Lord has a distinctly Godward significance.

We have still to ask ourselves the meaning of *ἀντί πολλῶν*. 'Αντί is used of set purpose and must be distinguished from *ὑπέρ* which St. Mark does use when he quotes the Lord's words after He had given the cup to His disciples at the Last Supper: "This is my blood of the covenant which is being shed for," or, "on behalf of (*ὑπέρ*) many" (Mark xiv. 24). 'Αντί cannot mean anything else but "instead of" or "in place of." So *ἀντί πολλῶν* must be translated "instead of many."

"Many" is an echo of Isaiah liii. 11, 12. The contrast being between Jesus, the Son of Man, as distinct from the others, the community. Thus did the Son of Man give His life a ransom in

the place of the members of His Messianic Kingdom. What they could not do He did in their stead.

Here it is advisable to mention a difficulty which has been urged with particular sharpness by the late Dr. Rashdall.

“ In the two parables of the prodigal son, and of the Pharisee and the Publican, we have the fullest expression of this fundamental idea that God forgives the truly penitent freely and without any other condition than that of true repentance. . . . There is not the slightest suggestion that anything else is necessary . . . the actual death of a Saviour, belief in the atoning efficacy of that death or any other article of faith . . . the truly penitent man who confesses his sins to God receives instant forgiveness.”¹

We must demur to this usage of our Lord's parabolic teaching. No one parable was ever intended to convey the sum and substance of Christ's teaching concerning His Heavenly Father and His dealings with mankind. Each parable is intended to embody one leading thought to which everything else is subsidiary. The details should not be pressed but used only in so far as they throw light on the main idea or truth which the parable was meant to enforce. In the story of the prodigal son we have portrayed God's gracious love towards the repentant sinner. None the less it is on the passive side not on the active side of the Divine Love that the stress is laid. Not for one moment would we minimize the beauty of this “ exquisite parable,”² but the uniqueness of Christ's revelation, the core of the Gospel, does not lie here but in the truth that it is God Who always takes the first step. “ If a man moves an inch God moves an ell to meet him ” was a saying current amongst the Rabbis, but the wonder of Christ's Gospel is that the conditional clause is abolished. God did not even wait for men to move an inch. God in the Person of His Son has Himself taken the initial step and gone into the far country, and at infinite cost to Himself made the misery and wretchedness of His prodigal child all His own, and thus brought Him back to Himself. This is in part suggested by the two parables which precede the parable of the prodigal son, the shepherd seeking the lost sheep, and the woman hunting for the missing coin, and also in part by the parable or allegory of the wicked husbandmen :— “ He had yet One, a beloved Son : He sent Him last unto them, saying, they will reverence My Son ” (Mark xii. 1-12 ; Matt. xxi. 33-46 ; Luke xx. 9-16). The famous saying of St. John iii. 16, “ God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,” is only another way of expressing the greatness and costliness of the Divine gift of salvation, and is not a truth superimposed upon the original Gospel ; these words contain the Gospel.

We must linger for a few moments on the words of the Last Supper, which has ever been the central rite of the Christian Church. Fortunately for our purpose we need not enter into the many controversies which have gathered round it. Our chief concern is with St. Mark's account of the words spoken by our Lord after the giving of the cup, “ This is my blood of the covenant which is being shed

¹ *op cit.*, p. 26. ² This is what Montefiori calls it, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

for many" (xiv. 24). The phrase "blood of the covenant" is taken from Exodus xxiv. 8: "And Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words" (cf. Zech. ix. 11). And although the word "new" read by some ancient authorities before "covenant" (cf. R.V. margin) was not actually uttered by our Lord, yet the words of Jeremiah xxxi. 33-4 were probably also in His mind. A new relationship between God and man was entered upon by the Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ—on the manward side forgiveness, sin being blotted out and remembered no more, perfect communion and fellowship with God, and on the Godward side this is rendered possible by the perfect surrender of Christ's life sacrificed for us men and for our salvation, in other words, "His blood which is being shed for many." Again in these last words we are reminded of Isaiah liii. 11, 12, which connects them with the famous ransom passage; thus on the eve of His Passion our Lord knew that, in the words of the Consecration Prayer of our Communion Service, He was about to offer up "a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world."¹

We must now conclude with the cry of dereliction from the Cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Mark xv. 34), which is a quotation from the twenty-second Psalm. Here is the climax of the Atonement, and on Him was laid the iniquity of us all. No theology can plumb the depths of these words. Speaking in human language, here was the heart of God broken, the meeting-place between time and eternity was found, and the sacrifice for sin was made. We are irresistibly reminded of St. Paul's words, which are the best commentary on this subject, "Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. v. 21).

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.

(To be continued)

¹ Both Feine (*Theologie des neuen Testaments*, S. 153) and Holtzmann (*Neutestamentliche Theologie*, Erster. Band, S. 369) consider that the words cannot be explained apart from Isaiah liii. 11, 12, though the latter holds that they are an editorial addition in a Pauline sense to the original words of Jesus. But we see no reason to deny their genuineness any more than do Rawlinson and Dalman, and we gather also B. W. Bacon (cf. Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 205, 206).

The Rev. S. Richard Cripps, M.A., B.D., has issued as a booklet his chapter on "The Prophets and the Atonement," which appeared in *The Atonement in History and in Life* (S.P.C.K., 1s. net). A critical examination is made of Isaiah lii. 13 and liii., and other relevant prophetic literature. This scholarly study of a portion of a most important subject should be useful to those who wish to understand how far a vicarious or substitutionary Atonement is found in the prophetic writings.