

finished our course and fought our fight. For 'they without us cannot be made perfect.' They cannot be made complete. They cannot receive the completion of their risen body, and take their place in the new earth.

And it is something, after all, that their bones were laid in Canaan. What do we mean when we say that Livingstone's heart, buried under a great tree at Ilala, has taken possession of Africa for Christ? Surely more than the fact that Livingstone died in faith that Africa would yet receive the gospel. The heart of Livingstone took pos-

session of Africa as the bones of Joseph took possession of Canaan, in the sure hope of a joyful resurrection, in the confidence that that land would share in the glory of the time when Christ should come to reign upon the earth in everlasting peace.

They wait while we work. They watch us. We are surrounded with a great cloud of witnesses. Jacob is among them, and Joseph. And they cannot but wonder that we are doing so little to hasten the day of His coming, the day that they themselves are waiting for.

## The Fact of the Atonement.

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WITHOUT wasting words upon apologies for dealing with so great a truth—a truth so great that it is a constant challenge to our attention—I may say something regarding the form of the title which I have chosen. One could not undertake to speak on the fact of the Atonement unless he believed that there was a certain distinction to be drawn in that region between fact and theory, and that, while theories are tentative and changing, the fact may be certain and immovable. At the same time, I wish at the outset to repudiate the view urged by many great Englishmen, both in the past and in the present, that we can assert the fact without framing any theory of it at all, and that when we have done that we have done everything. Such is not the position which I am prepared to urge. I should prefer that we regarded this discussion as a process of search. What do we mean—what ought we to mean—when we speak of the *fact of the Atonement*? In the course of answering such a question, we may find many vistas opening before us; if God so wills, our investigation may be instructive and profitable.

### I.

If we are asked what we mean by the fact of the Atonement, the first answer which rises to our lips is surely this: We mean the fact that Jesus Christ

died. Other things may be theories, doctrines, assertions; this is part of the unchangeable record of human history—Jesus died as well as lived. If there is revelation anywhere, if there is redemptive power anywhere, we shall surely find it here; for here we are in contact not with opinions or doctrines, but with realities—with realities, too, of a peculiarly impressive and significant kind. We must not, however, go too fast. It might be asserted by way of criticism that though you have a fact of *Jesus' death*, you have no fact of *Christ's atoning death*, unless you are able to add something to so brief a statement of facts—this at least, Jesus died *for our sins*. But, if you say that, has not your fact altered its colour and character? Has it not taken up into itself an immense mass of theory, of doctrine, some will say of dogma? At any rate, has it not assumed such a significance that theories, doctrines, dogmas are the inevitable results of belief in it—of belief in the fact of the Atonement—in the fact that Christ died *for our sins*? Let us verify this statement by thinking of a contrast. It has been acutely remarked in regard to Professor Bruce's little summary of facts about our Lord at the beginning of his article 'Jesus,' in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, that the summary might well have been composed by an intelligent pagan. It is more like Tacitus' way of speaking on the

subject than anything that modern scholarship had ever yet produced. Now, the article—as has been further pointed out—is obviously written from a peculiarly constrained point of view. It is meant to be a summary of facts, such facts as science knows and verifies. Among these facts there is no Atonement—a death of Jesus certainly, but not an atoning death of Christ. We perceive, then, that there is one way of conceiving facts to which the fact of an Atonement is incommensurable; a way of writing on the Christian origins by a Christian which simply eliminates the fact of the Atonement from the facts that are to be dealt with. The gravest question is, whether, once we have committed ourselves to this artificial, sceptical, outsider's attitude, we can return undamaged to the Christian attitude, which knows Christ to be the light of the world and His death to be our life. Perhaps we can; perhaps the Tacitean or critical attitude—for this Taciteanism is implied in all the biblical criticism of the *Encyclopædia Biblica*—perhaps, I say, this critical attitude is provisional, tentative, a first rather than a last view of the facts. But not all critics will grant this. Many claim that theirs is the attitude of science; the fact, the whole fact, and nothing but fact, is supposed to be secured by their methods, and by no other. Let those to whom the Atonement of Jesus Christ is a *fact* think twice and thrice before they announce it as a fact to be held in isolation from all doctrine and theory.

## II.

May we try now a *second* definition of the fact of the Atonement? It seems to consist—when we confine our glance to the region of external realities, accessible to sense—in something beyond the mere fact that Jesus, like every other son of man, died. He did not die of old age, or of disease, or of accident. Men killed Him; He died upon a cross, under circumstances of the extremest shame and pain. When looking forward to this death, He shrank from it with an agony of repugnance and horror; in the midst of it—unless we accept a not very probable operation of negative criticism upon the Gospel record—in the midst of it Christ cried, '*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*' These are facts; they go a long way towards drawing the transcendent fact of the Atonement into the region of those certainties which press upon the senses of all men. Or,

in other words, these facts—the agony, the death of Christ by crucifixion, the cry of desertion—constitute a problem for every thoughtful mind—one might say, indeed, for every mind that is not thoroughly thoughtless and thoroughly heartless. These are not the invention of 'Church Doctors,' or even 'Apostles.' There may have been subsequent borrowings in the Passion story from the Old Testament; but the cry of desertion is too strange, too grim a borrowing for human invention. How came it, then, that one like Jesus left the world by so tragic a passage? Of course, there may be different answers. There is the answer of cynicism: He rushed upon His fate like other beautiful and ineffectual spirits. There is the answer of a still more radical scepticism:—It was a deplorable accident—like in kind, if greater in degree, to the tragic accidents with which human life is filled. Against these we place the Christian interpretation: He died for our sins. The strange facts of Christ's history and the strange assertions of the Christian Scriptures meet together, interlock, and support each other. The plain historical facts of the Bible story, interpreted from the Bible point of view, are lifted up into a higher region. They are seen to constitute a fact of a higher order. They become the fact of an Atonement.

But here we seem to touch upon a new and very important element in this great subject. When we say that Christ died for our sins, we seem to imply that *it was necessary because of sin that Christ should die*. It was *necessary*. Fortunately we are able to appeal here again to a historical fact in the lower sense—once more, of course, an exaggerated criticism may challenge our evidence; but on the whole, if not in every detail, the evidence lies beyond all reasonable question. It was the belief of Jesus Himself—may I not say, it was the *consciousness* of Jesus our Lord?—that His death was inevitable. 'O My Father, if this cup may not pass from Me, Thy will be done.' The death of Christ, then, being necessary, is objective, real, *fact* indeed; what is not necessary or not objective is precarious, is mere reasoning about facts, or holds an uncertain place in the list of realities. If this be true, then by the fact of the Atonement we mean this fact, that it was necessary Christ should die. It was necessary, whether we can explain the necessity or not, that such a being as Jesus must leave

this life by such a passage as Gethsemane and Calvary.

### III.

Once again we may take a further step in advance. An Atonement which is a fact is an objective Atonement. Objective theories of the Atonement, as we all know, boast themselves strongly against subjective theories. We have perhaps now obtained some fresh light upon that claim. We see how strong it is. And yet there is a difference. To assert an Atonement which is a fact; which is a reality because a necessity; which is objective; is one thing. To claim that our theory of this tremendous spiritual reality is objective is very much like claiming that our whole doctrine is a divine oracle, equally tremendous, equally spiritual, equally unalterable, with the facts which it interprets.

The objective theory will press its point strongly. It believes that Christ died not merely on behalf of sinners, but as the sinner's substitute, suffering the just penalty of sin. Here once more we come in touch with an important word—'just.' Whatever other meanings justice has, whatever other antitheses are involved when it is used in contrast with other terms, justice means what Kant called *perfect obligation*. What is unjust is unconditionally wrong; out of the question; not to be thought of. What is—really or in seeming—ungenerous may be pardonable, or may even be forced upon us by the hard necessity of circumstances; but not what is unjust. Therefore, when the death of Christ is explained to us as demanded by the divine justice, we are offered a scientific gnosis of the meaning of the Atonement, and such a gnosis carried to the highest possible degree of scientific perfection.

And yet this must be qualified. If it were proposed to construe the Atonement as *absolutely necessary behaviour on the part of God*, that would be a gnosis indeed. In point of fact, however, doctrinal orthodoxy is far removed from such a position. The Atonement is absolutely necessary for us, not for God. Or the Atonement is hypothetically necessary in the divine administration; it is necessary on the hypothesis that man is to be saved. Or the absolute law of justice traces out an area within which the divine action must fall, but determines nothing as to the course to be taken within that area. Either the damnation of all

mankind, or the ingenious expedient of substitution, will satisfy justice—that is the theory.

What is to be said in praise of this theory may readily be understood. It is a means of asserting and of explaining the necessity of Christ's Atonement; and it takes necessity, as I believe, in the right sense—the humbler sense, from a philosophical point of view, but the only relevant sense from the point of view of the devout soul—Christ's death is necessary to our salvation. Of course, it likewise affirms that Christ's death is all-sufficient to secure our salvation. He who says these two things, in however vague outline, is, I believe, intellectually a Christian—if he affirm, *i.e.* the necessity of Christ and Christ's *sufficiency*. Different types of mind or experience may interpret that necessity and that sufficiency from different points of view, and yet be Christian. There are, no doubt, limits. If anyone were to establish the necessity of Christ for a mere mindless and heartless emotional enjoyment, or say that Christ had died

Only to give our joys a zest,  
And prove our sorrows for the best,

he would, no doubt, be false to the Christian name; though some Christians have come very near to such views. There must be something worthy in the functions ascribed to Christ. However, when we speak of the Atonement, we narrow the circle. The Atonement means salvation from sin; it affirms that Christ's sufferings were necessary in order that we might be saved—not from this or that possible evil, nor yet that we might be enriched with this or that desirable good, but—to save us from sin. The theory which says that Christ was punished to save us from the punishment of sin will hold its ground, because it seems to establish in very definite fashion that the Atonement was necessary, and therefore a fact. Perhaps we may say that it will hold its ground until some other theory, equally clear and equally effectual for that purpose, is put alongside it.

The weakness of the orthodox doctrine is not less manifest than its strength. If it affirms justice—inexorable, absolute justice—yet the justice it speaks of is of such a type as never was known outside of a fairy tale. This criticism has been put in a thousand different forms—fair and unfair, effective and ineffective, carrying conviction or merely provoking an angry reaction. Let it be

enough to say here just this—that it seems hard to believe that, in the central act of our redemption, the Father of Mercies showed Himself a pedant, resolved to keep the letter of the law at all hazards, but quite willing that its spirit should be treated with contempt.

Or perhaps there is one thing more that may be said. Have we not cause to fear that the orthodox theory claims too much? There are some lines, by Faber I think, which strike a deep note in the Christian heart—

How Thou canst think so well of us,  
Yet be the God Thou art,  
Is darkness to my intellect,  
But sunshine to my heart.

That is surely how Christians feel towards God and Christ. This is a holy thing, a mystery. It is hardly conceivable that this holy mystery should be made intelligible by the use of the methods of the market or the law court. One has a painful feeling that Christianity presents no darkness to the intellect of Quendstedt, or Calixtus, or Owen, or Jonathan Edwards. Whisper the word imputation in the scholastic sense, the darkness of the intellect is dispersed as by magic. That the sunshine of the heart is dispersed at the same time I dare not affirm; yet I think the sky must be a good deal overcast when the divine procedure has been exposed to so vulgarizing an interpretation. In other words, from this most ambitious and most self-confident of all theories of the Atonement we turn thankfully back to the great fact, and rejoice to grasp again the assurance that the fact is something higher and more certain than the theories devoted to it. The sun is still in the sky, intolerable in his glory. Even after the dogmatists have spoken their last and worst word, God remains wonderful.

#### IV.

In contrast with objective theories of the Atonement we have subjective theories; and the praise given to the former, however limited it has been, is the condemnation of the latter. At least, subjective theories fail if they are subjective in the sense of not making the Atonement necessary—*i.e.* necessary for our salvation. The merely subjective theory tells us how Christ enlightens us; how He touches us; how He moves us towards repentance; how He inspires us with fresh moral impulses. All very true; and all very

good, so far as it goes; but miserably inadequate to interpret the Christian's assurance, that God has given us eternal life in His Son. Enlightenment, emotion, impulse are natural psychological events which any one man may happen to produce in another man's mind. Such events do not need for their origination a Son of God humbling Himself and becoming obedient to death on the cross. If such events are the whole of what Christianity means, the Apostle Paul's *reductio ad absurdum* is the last word in the matter; *then Christ died gratuitously*. It is with these theories as with much apologetic preaching. In vain shall we talk to men from the pulpit about the refinement of manners, about the growth of philanthropic organisations. These are not the characteristic work of Christ. Others have been reformers and social pioneers; they have their reward and their due honour. There is nothing of Gethsemane and Calvary in their work. To praise Christianity for the wrong things is not to support it, but to undermine it. That is the error too often committed by apologists: they preach another gospel which is not a gospel. Historical efforts point to an historical source; not to a Son of God incarnate; not to a fact of the transcendent order, like the Atonement. In that region we may grant the truth of the position taken up in *Essays and Reviews*—such testimony cannot 'reach to the supernatural.' He who has only subjective views of the Atonement (in the above sense at least) is intellectually not a Christian; and though his heart may be better than his head, or his meaning than his interpretation of it, he will act as a pulverising or solvent force on Christian belief; and those he forms, if they have nothing else to go upon, will be likely to drop that objective Christianity to which he may have been personally faithful. If you are to preach Christ with effect, you must preach salvation. A Christ who has no functions except Addisonian essays and gentle moral suasion, is not a Christ. The death of such a Christ has no appreciable meaning, and He will have no appreciable meaning to us when we are on our deathbeds.

On the other hand, there is good to be said of subjective theories. They are all true so far as they go—that is no mean praise. They are certain; they are solid; if they are among the secondary certainties and the minor facts. Nay, if they point us on to something more—even

though we conceive that something more as a vague *plus*—then they will be loyal to the fact of the Atonement; and if they cannot elucidate it with appropriate theory, at least they do not disguise it with irrelevancies. When one was younger, and moved in more orthodox circles, one heard a great deal about the evils of 'defective theology.' They are indeed grave and deadly evils; yet we must not forget the opposite danger of a redundant theology. If it is bad to mutilate God's message, it is little better to gloss it presumptuously, and needlessly to bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders, and to say, 'Except you bear these, you shall not, you cannot, come at Christ.' Those who make their theory of Atonement part of the reconciling message must beware lest they incur that condemnation.

## V.

If the effort (in a certain sense) to show the *absolute necessity* of the Atoning Death seems to repel us, and yet the ideas of subjective influence, so far as yet considered, do not seem to touch the kernel of the matter at all, it may be well to turn to another possibility. Have we insisted too much on necessity? In these higher regions, where the sharp black and white rule of justice can scarcely be made to apply, ought we not to confine ourselves to saying, *it is seemly* or *it is fitting*? After all, a high degree of moral expediency is not very far separated from necessity, yet it may suit our limitations better to affirm the former rather than the latter. Nor is it without its scriptural warrant. 'It was comely;' 'it was fitting;' 'it behoved God'—such is the language in which the Epistle to the Hebrews approaches the great mystery of the work of Christ. If we follow this precedent as the appropriate theological method, we are giving up the hope of a truly scientific definition of the mystery. We are surrendering the claim to produce a gnosis of the things of God. On these lines we could say no more than that the death of Christ was ordained by God's wise will—wise with an unsearchable, inexplicable, unfathomable wisdom. There seem to be moments in the tragic period of our Lord's sufferings when this was the one certainty—I would speak with all reverence—when this was the one certainty He had to hold by; '*the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?*' In

the lesser tragedies of our own lives it is often thus. There is an end of all controversy and reluctance when we recognize any hard necessity as *God's will*. We bow because we must; yet so to bow to the inevitable is not degradation, but rather spiritual exaltation; though it may crush us, it does not merely crush; it also heals. It is an inspiring belief that here, as everywhere else, Christ has passed on before us; that in hours of mortal weakness, when His matchless insight was dimmed by pain—when even He could see nothing—He trusted God in the dark, and gained the victory. The least we can say of such a view of the Atonement is that it has a place in the circle of Christian truths. Further, perhaps; those who can say nothing about the atoning sufferings of Christ beyond this, that God appointed them, are surely upon Christian ground. Yet I cannot think it a probable view that we ought to stop here. We may take with us a warning against undue dogmatisms; but it seems certain that normally Christ Jesus saw something more in His death than an inexplicable decree of the divine will; and we ought, if possible, to learn something more from Him.

## VI.

In the facts of Christ's death we see at least the natural reaction of sin against the Sinless One. It is impossible to say that sin necessarily slew Jesus by a violent death. In the region of character there is no calculable physical necessity. But at least sin behaves characteristically when it crucifies Christ—'now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father.' The death of Christ, then, is seen to be the natural, if not strictly the necessary, consequence of His life amongst sinners. To make it an Atonement, it must be recognized as the necessary precondition of man's salvation. Along the line which we are now taking we can say no more than this, that God willed to expose His Son to this lot of suffering, shame, and death. We may urge that it was worthy of God to allow Christ to encounter that which was the natural and characteristic result of His loving ministries on behalf of sinners. We may urge still further that the crucifixion was not only the supreme manifestation of sin in history upon man's part, or of suffering in history on the part of Jesus, but of virtue or moral heroism on the part of Jesus in the willing endurance of

suffering. All these statements we may say are facts; they are expositions in various aspects of the fact of the Atonement. And here our theology must stop, unless it can move upon other lines. Speaking as spectators, looking from the outside upon the experiences of Jesus or the destinies of mankind, and refusing to eke out the facts by any assertions which rest upon bare authority, however lofty, we can say nothing more. On the other hand, we can say nothing less. This is, or enters into, the minimum truth, from a Christian point of view, about the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

If, now, we attempt to go further still, I desire that we should frankly mark the character of the transition we now make. We are leaving certainties for hypotheses, faith for theology. At the same time we are leaving the position of spectators, looking at the drama of the Christian salvation from the outside. We are to adopt the position of those who live by that salvation. We assert, therefore, that Christ has removed a barrier which made salvation impossible for us. The widely-spread theory which finds that barrier constituted by God's absolute justice we have already given reasons for distrusting. We look for this barrier, then, in another direction. And if our non-Christian or semi-Christian enemies taunt us with postulating an unreal barrier, in order that we may go on to assert its removal by unverifiable machinery, they must be allowed to take all possible pleasure from their taunt. We stick to the old confession of our faith—

Thy love unknown  
Has broken every barrier down.

The barriers were no dream, no hallucination. Their removal also, thank God, is no hallucination, but the very life by which we live. Whether we can fully explain either the barriers or their removal is another question. For my part, I am thankful to believe that in the removal of these barriers there is something of mystery: something radically higher than ourselves: a love *unknown*—unknown in its fulness, because passing knowledge, yet well enough known to live by, and to die for. Outside (in some sense) of man's permanent moral needs there is a spiritual barrier due to sin. Above and beyond all moral helps, grateful in themselves, but never absolutely indispensable, there is in Christ—salvation.

## VII.

Let us try to name some of the more supernatural claims and promises of Christ.

*First*, Christ promises to His followers ultimately an absolutely sinless perfection. The moral struggle points toward this, but has no clear promise in itself of reaching it. The transcendent machinery of the Christian redemption may be vindicated as being the machinery needed to work upon sinful men if they are to be clothed at last with God-like purity.

Or, again, *secondly*, Christ promises immortality. That is another supernatural gift held out to us in the message of the gospel. Though one may feel little confidence in the theology of conditional immortality, as commonly worked out, it is difficult to feel any more confidence in the ordinary assertions of man's native and indestructible immortality. St. Paul very manifestly, and other New Testament writers also, put our confidence in the face of death upon the truth that God has given us eternal life in Christ. The machinery of redemption may be further interpreted, then, as that which is required to make men partakers of God's immortality.

*Thirdly*, we may follow the suggestions of the author of *The Spirit and the Incarnation*, and assert *the gift of the Holy Spirit* as the central feature of the Christian redemption—not without a bearing on immortality. And, once again, in framing our theory of the Atonement, we should expound the work of Christ as being the means by which the spiritual conditions were fulfilled which made the Holy Spirit master of human hearts and lives.

*Fourthly*, and finally—again following suggestions from others—we may try to make use of the growing doctrine of the subconscious self. I cannot doubt that that doctrine will offer most important contributions to Christian theology. The old theological conceptions—a corrupt nature, renewing grace, revelation, inspiration—conceptions which baffle us when we try to apply them to the narrow section of our mental life, where the full daylight of consciousness reigns—take on quite a new aspect when we think of the subconscious self, and, I should perhaps add, when we call to help the analogies of hypnotism. Of course, it is a further assertion that the Atonement can be in any way elucidated by the new

psychology. When we surrender ourselves to God—or to evil—by consent of our will, we do not merely admit certain beliefs or certain definite impressions; we give over our whole subconscious nature to be moulded and controlled. It is, no doubt, difficult to connect this self-surrender in any other fashion with the atoning work of Christ, though I do not admit that it is impossible. We must be carefully on our guard against purely magical and sacramentarian conceptions. What brings grist to our mill as theologians may also bring grist to the priests. Consciousness is the garrison; will is the sentinel before the castle door; there is neither true morality nor true Christianity in any teaching which does not give will and consciousness the decisive voice at the decisive moment. Yet these do no more than initiate processes of a very far-reaching character.

Here, then, is the hypothesis suggested. Man's nature is infected by sin, and the distinctive work of Jesus Christ is to heal that infection by purifying the springs of our being; this He has done by living His way into fellowship with the human race, the supremest act of His life being, of course, His surrender to death. And in that absolutely perfected divine-human goodness, diffusing itself by means of historical channels, with constant appeal to man's consciousness and will, yet continually producing effects which go far deeper than consciousness and reach far farther than individual will, we have the pledge and real potentiality of

sinless purity, of life beyond the power of death, of perfected union with God.

This, then, I say, is an hypothesis. It is a supposed view of facts; but some of the facts are questionable, and the articulation of all of them is but a speculative possibility. So far as I know, some such theory might meet the requirements of a Christian doctrine of the Atonement. But, for my part, I wish to be perfectly clear about the distinction between a theory of the facts, even if it should be the true theory, and the great central certainty itself. A Romanist or a High Churchman speaks all his words in deference to the authority of the Church. As far as mere theological speculations go, I wish to do the same; only the Church to which an Evangelical Christian appeals is a spiritual communion, not an external institution; and in the deepest matters an Evangelical Christian must be loyal to his own conscience, and take all risks. Some may think it despicable that theological positions should be affirmed in so very gingerly a fashion. To myself it is the only possible hope of advance, that we should be able to distinguish between the unshakable truths and the imperfect accessories. The Christ who made Atonement is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; no view taken of His atoning work can be much more than a glimpse. We know in part; we see here and now in a glass, darkly; yet He whom we see is God our Saviour.

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## Point and Illustration.

### The Countenance of the Holy Ghost.

THE doctrine of the Holy Spirit still suffers neglect among us. Spasmodically we beat our breasts and say, 'Go to, we must preach the Holy Ghost.' But the people do not understand. We ourselves do not understand. Some one says impatiently, 'Sir, we would see Jesus.' And we pass from the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Some of us seem to fear, besides, that if we get altogether smitten with love for the Holy Ghost we may cease to love the Lord Jesus Christ. Are we able to love more than one Person of the Godhead at a time? Dr. Martineau

says that we are no more trinitarians than he himself. We have simply dethroned God the Father and adore Jesus Christ instead. And he thinks that this is a 'way out of the trinitarian controversy': let us simply agree as to *which Person* we are all to worship!

Perhaps there is something in both these dangers. Let them be looked at. In the first place, is it necessary that our people or we ourselves should understand all about the doctrine of the Holy Ghost? Does not the truth reach the heart rather in the *effort* to understand? Is it not always unseen, unfelt, as it visits the heart? And in the second place, is it not in our power