

## 'The Christian Doctrine of Salvation.'<sup>1</sup>

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PROFESSOR STEVENS deals in this new volume of the 'International Theological Library' with a momentous subject, and he does so with a vigour and ability which must arrest attention. His subject is the Christian Doctrine of Salvation. His treatment includes the biblical, ecclesiastical, and positive aspects of that doctrine. For the task he has undertaken Professor Stevens has an excellent equipment. He is an accomplished and conscientious scholar. He has already published important works on *The Pauline Theology*, *The Johannine Theology*, and *The Theology of the New Testament*. To the last-named work especially we would desire to express our indebtedness. We have often consulted it, and always with instruction and profit. The present volume necessarily goes over much of the same ground in different form, and we should have liked to be able to say in quite as satisfactory a manner. The present book falls in no way behind its predecessor in scholarship, in liveliness, in interest. The standpoint, however, unless we greatly mistake, has in certain respects very considerably changed. We may perhaps concisely express our criticism of the book by saying that when we differ from Professor Stevens in this new work, it is chiefly in points where he differs from himself in his earlier volume.

It is one of the criticisms which Dr. Stevens passes on Professor Denney that, in his *Atonement and the Modern Mind*, he shifts his ground from what Dr. Stevens had understood him to mean in his previous books on the atonement. Dr. Denney most likely will contest the charge; but we do not think that Dr. Stevens will dispute that since the publication of his former work in 1899, his own views on many things have, as he would probably say, grown and advanced—in any case have become considerably modified. We trace this change in subtler or more pronounced forms in his discussions and conclusions on nearly all the greater topics, as on sin, the person of Christ, the teaching of Jesus on His own death, the meaning

of the atonement, the person and work of the Spirit, the harmony of certain aspects of apostolic teaching, etc.; though it is to be acknowledged that in certain points, as in the tendency to an identification of righteousness with love, and the avoidance of the word 'penal' in connexion with the sufferings of Christ, there is a preparation in the earlier for the fully developed type of theology in the later work. So considerable a divergence as we thus assume points to some more deep-lying change in the author's general attitude to the problems of Christian faith, and Dr. Stevens would perhaps allow that we are not unwarranted in finding in that the real explanation. It is not difficult to trace in the general trend of the new work a decided movement of mind towards the school of thought best represented, perhaps, by Sabatier. It rests on the ideas of the immanence of God, of Jesus as 'the incarnation of the immanent God in our humanity,' of the repudiation of 'the philosophical dualism which is implied in the contrast commonly made between the natural and the supernatural' (pp. 487, 490). Its application may be seen in the section on Christian Character (pp. 487 ff.), and in remarks on the Personality of the Saviour (pp. 298 ff.). We do not at present criticise, but only state. The presuppositions, in any case, are different from those of the previous volume, and necessarily affect the whole exposition. We do not think Professor Stevens would now allow himself, e.g., to say, as he did six years ago, of the Holy Spirit, 'The conclusion which these facts justify is that our sources, with the utmost possible unanimity, refer to the Spirit in terms implying personality' (*Theol. of N.T.* p. 215); or to use the language he formerly did on the person of Christ (*ibid.* pp. 64, 212, 401, etc.); or to speak as he then did about Paul's 'miraculous' conversion ('no explanation tallies with all the facts which are known to us except that which Paul himself gives,' p. 329), or of the consistency of this apostle's doctrine ('I accordingly hold that Paul's teaching regarding the way of Salvation is not two, but one,' p. 128); or to make the strong statements he did about the sacrificial, atoning

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Doctrine of Salvation* ('International Theological Library'). By George Barker Stevens, Ph.D., D.D., LL.D. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905. Price 12s.

death of Christ, and the harmony of Christ's teaching with that of the apostles (pp. 132-134). There is undoubtedly development, and of a surprisingly rapid kind, in the new volume: the only question is—Is it in the right direction?

There is one other distinction between the earlier and the newer volume which must here be signalized. The earlier volume is predominantly and dispassionately expository; it is not unfair to say that the newer volume is governed throughout by a strong polemical motive. Dr. Stevens's mind has become, one might say, 'obsessed' by the idea of the contrast between a 'penal' and a 'moral' view of the atonement, and he throws the whole force of his book into the effort to discredit the former as unchristian and 'morally intolerable' (pp. 245, 425-426), and to establish and commend the latter as the necessary alternative. He mercilessly hunts the representatives of the 'penal' view, as he conceives of it, through their supposed ambiguities, inconsistencies, self-contradictions, moral absurdities, and labours to make them out wrong on every ground, exegetical, historical, and rational. He comes back to this contrast at every turn, and leaves the unhappy victims of the supposed false theory no loophole of escape. As the result, 'I trust,' he says, 'it will be apparent that I repudiate the ideas of a propitiation or placation of God's wrath in the sufferings of Christ, the removal of hindrances to forgiveness by his sufferings, the substitution of his death for the penalty of sin, and the accomplishment of an objective satisfaction of any kind wrought upon him *ab extra*' (p. 432) . . . 'the studies which have resulted in the preparation of this volume have convinced me that the ultimate choice among theories of atonement reduces, at last, to the alternative between the penal satisfaction and the moral theory . . . Between these forever irreconcilable theories, based in radically different conceptions of God, lies the choice. . . . They [the penal theories] aim to graft the ethicism of Jesus upon Pharisaic deism and heathen anthropomorphism. This cannot be successfully done. The choice should be frankly made between them' (p. 531).

It is not denied, but is contended by Dr. Stevens, that Paul taught a view of Christ's death practically indistinguishable from what he calls the 'penal' theory. Paul teaches the 'theory of a

substitutionary expiation' (p. 121). 'Christ was "made sin" on man's account' (2 Co 5<sup>21</sup>), that is, He so came under the action of the divine wrath against sin, so experienced the consequences of sin, that God's justice is thereby vindicated and satisfied' (p. 60). 'It would not misrepresent Paul's thought to say that he regarded Christ's sufferings as representatively penal, or as involving penal consequences' (p. 65). But this doctrine of Paul's is held to be due to his Pharisaic training, and to have no real foundation in the teaching of Christ, or the facts of Christ's life and death. It is not found, Dr. Stevens thinks, in other New Testament writings—in Hebrews, or John, or Peter. 'The traditional doctrine of salvation has been constructed primarily out of survivals of Pharisaism in Paul's thought' (p. 75). For the 'modern mind,' accordingly, the Pauline scheme of thought is 'impossible.' 'The men of to-day can no more think in terms of late Jewish theology than they can think in terms of pre-Socratic philosophy. They can no more appropriate the outward forms of Paul's Jewish thought respecting expiation than they can adopt the cosmology or demonology which he derived from the same source' (p. 74). The moral view of Christ's atonement, on the other hand, deduced from Christ's doctrine of the Fatherhood and love of God—love and righteousness being held to be synonymous terms (pp. 283, 475)—satisfies alike the conscience and the heart. A concise expression is: 'Christ lived, laboured, suffered, and died, not to make God willing to save, but to show how willing he is, and to make his eternal willingness effective—really to accomplish what God in his holy love desires to do' (p. 534). 'Substitution by "strong sympathy" and satisfaction in self-sacrifice—that is a summary statement of my conclusion' (p. 426).

Professor Stevens speaks of his view half ironically as 'so daring an aberration from dogmatic tradition' (p. 426). His truer conviction, as he often indicates, is that the view he combats is already to all intents and purposes dead—'abolescent' (pp. 245, 251, 260, 375). It has, in fact, never been anything else but 'a provincialism in Christian theology' (p. 252). Reputable theological thought has left it behind. Was it then really necessary to spend so much energy and thought in its refutation? Or is there underlying the polemic an uneasy suspicion that its vitality is not yet after all

altogether gone? The present writer, after the manifold slaying of the slain in the 536 pages of this volume, feels that it requires some courage to confess that he belongs to the belated company that still thinks there is an essential element of truth in the so-called 'penal' theory which the theory of Professor Stevens misses. He even goes so far as to believe that there can be no adequate Christian doctrine of salvation which leaves this element out.

It need not be said that no fault at all is found with Professor Stevens' strenuous and capable attempt to show that his view of Christ's atonement—if the word does not become a superfluity—is the only and all-embracing Christian one. It is refreshing in these times to find a writer who thinks that one view of the Christian salvation rather than another is worth fighting for so earnestly. The author's intensity of conviction, and the strong ethical motive underlying it, are not to be mistaken. As against hard, mechanical, and purely legal ways of representing Christ's redemption, his polemic has its positive uses. As little need his desire to be perfectly fair in his representations be questioned, though his success here, perhaps, is not always quite in proportion to his intentions. As with everybody involved in controversy, his bias unconsciously leads him occasionally into mistakes, and partially warps his views of the positions he is combating. As a very minor example, He represents the present writer as characterizing Dr. McLeod Campbell's theory as 'artificial and indefensible,' 'because he repudiates the idea of a "vicarious endurance of the penalties of transgression"' (p. 191). That is ungrounded. What is really so characterized is not Dr. Campbell's repudiation of the idea of vicarious endurance of penalty, but the theory he substitutes for this—a 'vicarious repentance.' Of more consequence is it to remark that Dr. Stevens mistakes in suggesting—as his words must do to a reader (pp. 270, 271)—that Professor Skinner and Dr. Dillmann are in agreement with him in his one-sided representation of righteousness and grace or love as 'synonyms.' This, as any one will see who reads Dr. Skinner's admirably balanced article in the *Dictionary of the Bible*, or Dillmann's sections in his *Altest. Theologie*, is by no means the case. It is one thing to say that righteousness and love are not opposed or conflicting attributes, and another to say that the two ideas can be everywhere and

completely interchanged. Neither Dr. Skinner nor Dr. Dillmann falls into such error; on the contrary, each carefully guards against it. To the former righteousness is still 'pre-eminently the *judicial* attribute of God'; the parallelisms 'are not to be pressed so far as to identify righteousness with grace or faithfulness'; 'that the divine righteousness was conceived by them mainly as a judicial attribute is beyond dispute,' etc. Even in the continual use of the term 'penal theory' there is a misleading ambiguity, as if every one professing such a view must, in consistency, be held down to the particular phrases and modes of thought of, e.g., Drs. Shedd, or Strong, or Hodge, or of Jonathan Edwards—the former assumed to be the pure types of this theory,—or as if the theory was equivalent to saying that Christ's death 'appeased God's appetite for punishment' (p. 416). We respectfully decline to be driven into any such dilemma, or to accept such representations. We can appeal to Dr. Stevens' own list of testimonies that all down the long line of Christian witnesses—Paul, Augustine, Anselm, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, etc.—Christ's satisfaction to divine law was never viewed as the cause or motive of God's love, but always as the fruit of that love (cf. pp. 74, 139, 153-154, 275-276, 429, etc.).<sup>1</sup> We may quote one or two additional sentences from Calvin, which may throw a new light to some on the views of that much-misunderstood Reformer. 'As the Lord,' he says, 'wills not to destroy in us that which is his own, he can still find something in us which in kindness he can love. For though it is by our own fault that we are sinners, we are still his creatures; though we have brought death upon ourselves, he had created us for life. Thus mere gratuitous love prompts him to receive us into favour. . . . Accordingly, God the Father, by his love, prevents and anticipates our reconciliation in Christ. Nay, it is because he first loves us that he afterwards reconciles us to himself' (*Instit.* ii. chap. 16. 3). It may help even, perhaps, to mitigate Dr. Stevens' severe judgment on Anselm, with his 'parade of syllogisms and logical puzzles' (p. 241), and 'masterly juggling with abstractions' (p. 416), if he observes how extraordinarily high an estimate Dr. Bushnell puts on Anselm, whose 'simple and beautiful' account of satisfaction, in *his* view, 'shocks no moral sentiment, and vio-

<sup>1</sup> Even the ancient sacrificial system is allowed to have grace behind it.

lates no principle of natural reason!' (Intro. to *Vicarious Sacrifice*).

To come nearer the essence of the matter, we would take entire exception, first, to Professor Stevens' way of contrasting the so-called 'penal' and 'moral' views of Christ's atoning work as necessarily opposed and mutually exclusive conceptions. The antithesis so strongly pressed here seems to us wholly fallacious and misleading. This is seen most clearly in the fact that there is hardly anything in Professor Stevens' expression of the ethical side of Christ's work to which the advocate of the other view would not also most heartily say Amen. What, one would like to know, is the opponent supposed to deny of all that is said of Christ's holy love and sympathy, of His voluntary giving of Himself up for men, of the burden of sorrow which human sin laid upon His soul, of His revelation of the evil and hatefulness ('the black enormity') of sin, and of the willingness of the Father, in holy love, to save men from sin? But if the whole of the second—or 'moral'—view is gladly accepted, how can it be represented as a necessary antithesis of the first—except in the sense that one party says, This is all there is in Christ's saving work, and the other party says, No, there is still something more; a vital element of Christ's redeeming activity is still left out. On the other hand, the advocate of the so-called 'penal' view will deny that his view, rightly understood, is not also 'ethical.' It is, he will say, an ethical law which connects sin with penalty, and an ethical act which, in Christ's sacrifice, does honour to this divinely established connexion. Professor Stevens himself says of the theology of the Reformers: 'The Reformers deepened and ethicised the conception of God which underlies Anselm's reasoning. For them the work of Christ was grounded in the ethical nature of God, and was required by the supreme and absolute law of his being. . . . The whole subject was brought into the field of ethics' (p. 244). Only he denies that 'the ethics which was applied to it was sound and tenable' (we should conclude, therefore, was not really ethics at all). Here we come to the kernel of the subject.

What, in effect, those who are dissatisfied with Professor Stevens' so-called purely 'moral' view of Christ's redeeming work—discarding details of theories—would say, would, we suppose, be something like this. It pertains to the conception of

the divine holiness that it cannot but eternally declare itself against sin—a breach of the moral order of the universe—in condemnation and punishment. There is, to use a phrase of Dr. Stevens about God (p. 248), an 'obligation' arising from holiness so to react against sin (cf. p. 267). Among the other relations which sin sustains to God is this relation to His condemning and punishing will. Christ, therefore, in His union with us, and in His reconciling work as Mediator between God and man—our holy and perfect Representative—cannot be conceived of as having had nothing to say to this tremendous reality of God's holy condemnation of the sin of the world. His work, like sin itself, must, among its other relations, embrace a relation to God's condemning and punishing will. Honour must be done to this as to other aspects of the divine holiness. That this element *did* enter into Christ's bearing of human sin in its relation to God—this, not in mental recognition only, but under actual experience of the penal evils which sin, in the ordinance of God, had brought upon our race, and supremely in holy submission to the last evil of all, death—they believe to be the implication of the whole apostolic gospel (Paul, Peter, John, Hebrews, Revelation), and to be in harmony alike with the preludings of Old Testament law and prophecy, and with the words and acts of Jesus Himself, as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels and in John. All this, on the other hand, Professor Stevens energetically rejects as resting on an unbiblical view of the divine righteousness and false idea of the relation of sin and punishment, and as contradicted by the real tenor of Christ's teaching and work.

The point of righteousness has already been alluded to. Enough for our present purpose to have it recognized 'that God is inviolably holy and must for ever repudiate and condemn all moral evil' (p. 267), while, as we are elsewhere told, 'his favour is free and undeserved' (p. 30); repentance establishes no claim on it. For Dr. Stevens also, therefore, it would appear, there is for God a 'must' in the condemnation of sin, and a 'may' in the exercise of mercy (cf. p. 178 ff.). The question of sin and its punishment requires more attention. Professor Stevens contends stoutly that punishment cannot be at once 'retributive' and 'disciplinary'; the latter conception at least is primary, the former subordinate (p. 338). Here

again, we cannot but think, he is the victim of a false antithesis. If, as he also allows, 'sin is blameworthy and deserves punishment' (p. 337), and if God in His inviolable holiness 'must' eternally condemn all moral evil, how can it be denied that there is a retributive aspect in God's treatment of sin? How, indeed, can the disciplinary benefit be reaped, unless the sinner is brought to see that what he receives at the hand of God is his *due* (cf. Lk 23<sup>41</sup>)? To speak of God's wrath as 'holy love' is to leave much unsaid (p. 275).<sup>1</sup> It is pointed out that the word 'wrath' is but once put into the mouth of Jesus (p. 266). Has Professor Stevens ever noticed that the word 'love' never occurs even once in the Synoptic Gospels (or Acts) as applied to God? Yet Jesus, as we are rightly told, was the revelation of the love of God. If 'love' is not there, the synonyms are there; and so it is in relation to 'wrath' (cf. p. 268). What, indeed, strikes, and even startles, us in Christ's teaching often is the terrible severity of His language about punishment (cf. e.g. Mt 18<sup>34</sup> 22<sup>7</sup>.<sup>13</sup> 23<sup>33</sup> 25<sup>30</sup>.<sup>41</sup> etc.). The most terrible of all wrath is 'the wrath of the Lamb,' when it flames out against wilful and presumptuous evil-doers. But this is not to deny, but to assert, its retributive character. To measure the awfulness of the divine condemnation of sin, we must set 'the evil and hateful-ness of sin,' its 'black enormity,' against 'the white background of Christ's own conscious holiness, in the perfect light of the divine perfection' (p. 269). We must see in it that which, in the will of God, ought never to have been. Speaking of the view which regards sin as 'a real part of the world-plan' (which, in one point of view, it no doubt is), Dr. Stevens says: 'It seems to me quite evident that the Christian view of God and the world does not include the opinion that sin was a part of the original divine plan of the system' (p. 360). Perhaps, if Dr. Stevens would think this out a little, it would suggest to him that the Christian view of sin is not quite indifferent, as he supposes, to questions of origin. For with

<sup>1</sup> The use of such an expression does not relieve from the apparent (though *only* apparent) 'conflict of attributes' of which so much is said. Dr. Stevens would allow that even 'holy love' cannot save except under certain conditions which are not always fulfilled. Yet love desires not the death of any sinner, and would willingly save if it could. The love has its limits set to it by holiness.

modern views of man's origin, sin is unquestionably an unavoidable incident in man's development. But if so real a condemnation is due to sin in its essential nature, the question recurs—Is nothing due from Christ, as the world's Redeemer, in recognition of this attitude of the divine holiness to sin? When it is replied that no evils can be 'penal' which are not the result of personal transgression, we take leave to demur. This is one individualistic point of view which ignores the patent fact of corporate responsibility. The penalties of transgression, as well as the rewards of goodness, are seldom confined to the individual agent, but overflow for evil or for good on others. When Jesus says that the righteous blood shed in all past time will come upon His own doomed generation (Mt 23<sup>35</sup>.<sup>36</sup>), does He not mean us to regard the accumulated misery as 'penal'? Even a Bushnell can speak of Christ being 'incarnated into our curse,' and M'Leod Campbell can declare that in Christ's atonement 'it was not simply sin that had to be dealt with, but an existing law with its penalty of death, and that death as already incurred.' The mystery of Christ's sacrifice is not that, sinless Himself, He suffered penal evils brought upon Him by the world's sin, but that, in the Spirit in which He met them, and the honour done to God's righteousness in enduring them, He made them expiating. The 'penal' is also 'ethical.'

Is it not, however, a conclusive reply to such statements to say, with Dr. Stevens, that nothing of all this, or hardly anything, is met with in the teaching of Jesus Himself? Two passages only (Mk 10<sup>45</sup>, Mt 26<sup>28</sup>, with parallels) 'explicitly connect his death with his saving work' (p. 43); and these, with the cry upon the Cross ('My God, my God,' etc.), form, in Dr. Stevens' view, the whole material on which to base the theory of Christ's substitutionary death for the remission of sins (p. 52). The phrases, he seeks to show, that in Matthew being doubtful—do not necessarily, or naturally, bear the interpretation put upon them. In His ordinary teaching Christ said nothing of His death as a sacrifice for sin, or as necessary to its forgiveness. Nothing comes between the returning Prodigal and his Father's love. To which, in the first place, it may be replied, that as little is anything said of *any* connexion between Christ's person and His loving sacrifice for men, and the forgiveness of sins. If there is *any* sense in which

Christ's appearance, life, and death, condition or mediate salvation to the world, the Gospels, on His showing, contain no clear mention of it. They say as little about 'eternal atonement,' to which Professor Stevens devotes a chapter, as about 'penal' atonement. If 'the notion of the sacrifice as an atonement or covering of the sins of the offerer supplied an analogue to the work of Jesus in doing for men what they could not do for themselves' (p. 115), this does not appear in the Gospels either. But the whole basis of argument seems to us narrow and fallacious. Christ's sayings and doings must be studied in a wider context than Professor Stevens supplies. Christ's consciousness was rooted in Old Testament revelation, and His mind moved in the circle of Old Testament conceptions, even while, in many ways, transcending them. Numerous examples show how He drew the profoundest principles from words and incidents even in the oldest parts of Scripture (cf. *e.g.* Mt 19<sup>4ff.</sup> 22<sup>31, 32</sup>). He could not but think of the Messianic salvation as connected with His own person as Messiah. We know how deeply His mind was steeped in the prophecies, and especially in the prophecies of the Servant of Jehovah. In accepting the Messianic calling, He could scarcely but foresee from the first the path of suffering and rejection it opened out before Him. If, again, when His death became clear, He could not but read it, as Professor Stevens says, in the light of a divine ordainment for the ends of His mission, we may believe that He would connect it with what is said of the Suffering Servant in Is 53. This, indeed, it is declared He did (Lk 22<sup>37</sup>). If the Jews had not the conception of a suffering Messiah (p. 56), it is certain that Jesus and His disciples, taught by Him, had. The idea of vicarious suffering for the redemption of the world lay, therefore, we may well believe, very deeply in Christ's own thought; and to His own mind, if not always in expressed words, it lay behind His preaching of salvation. This, accordingly, forms the simplest, as it is the most natural, key to His various recorded utterances—and they are not few—in John and the Synoptics, as to the necessity of His sufferings and death, and their connexion with human salvation. It explains the emphasis laid upon His death, the mysterious elements in His sufferings in Gethsemane and on the Cross, the changed

relation to His disciples after the resurrection, the commission to preach remission of sins in His name (His death and resurrection being evidently the turning-points), the form of the apostolic gospel.

On this last point, the relation of Christ's teaching to the apostolic gospel, we have but one word to say. We have no faith whatever in the account given of Paul's derivation of his gospel from current Rabbinical notions of the virtue attaching to the vicarious sufferings of the righteous. We doubt whether such notions really had much currency; in any case, Paul knows nothing of such general vicarious suffering of righteous men; and his doctrine of Christ's propitiatory sacrifice had far other and more scriptural roots. We fail to see that his doctrine, while more elaborately wrought out, is essentially different from that of other New Testament writers, and, on the whole subject, may be permitted to fall back once more, in closing, on words of Professor Stevens himself in his earlier work, which express our conviction now. 'His [Christ's] death is a testimony to the heinousness of sin in God's sight and to God's holy displeasure against it. It thus fulfils a condition of sin's forgiveness, namely, the assertion of its desert of penalty and the vindication of the divine righteousness in its condemnation. Was this a product of the "reminiscent phantasies" of his disciples, or had it a place in the mind of Jesus himself? . . . Is it credible that the first disciples, after hearing his instruction on the subject, should proceed to build up a subjective theory of his death which had no warrant in his own teaching? Which persons are more likely to have correctly apprehended the significance which Jesus attached to his death, men like John and Peter, and, I may add Paul (who passed two weeks with Peter when this subject was uppermost in his thoughts (Gal 1<sup>18</sup>), or an equal number of scholars in our time, however discerning and candid, who undertake to reconstruct the thought of Jesus, and to disentangle it from the supposed subjective reflections of his disciples? Where is the subjectivity likely to be greatest—in the interpretations of the eye and ear witness or in the reconstructions of the moderns? Many adopt the former supposition. I cannot help preferring the latter' (*Theol. of New Test.* pp. 132-133).