

THE ATONEMENT AND THE MODERN MIND.

I.

IT will be admitted by most Christians that if the Atonement, quite apart from precise definitions of it, is anything to the mind, it is everything. It is the most profound of all truths, and the most recreative. It determines more than anything else our conceptions of God, of man, of history, and even of nature; it determines them, for we must bring them all in some way into accord with it. It is the inspiration of all thought, the impulse and the law of all action, the key, in the last resort, to all suffering. Whether we call it a fact or a truth, a power or a doctrine, it is that in which the *differentia* of Christianity, its peculiar and exclusive character, is specifically shown; it is the focus of revelation, the point at which we see deepest into the truth of God, and come most completely under its power. For those who recognize it at all it is Christianity in brief; it concentrates in itself, as in a germ of infinite potency, all that the wisdom, power and love of God mean in relation to sinful men.

Accordingly, when we speak of the Atonement and the modern mind, we are really speaking of the modern mind and the Christian religion. The relation between these two magnitudes may vary. The modern mind is no more than a modification of the human mind as it exists in all ages, and the relation of the modern mind to the Atonement is one phase—it may be a specially interesting or a specially well defined phase—of the perennial relation of the mind of man to the truth of God. There is always an affinity between the two, for God made man in His own image, and the mind can only rest in truth; but there is always at the same time an antipathy, for man is somehow

estranged from God, and resents Divine intrusion into his life. This is the situation at all times, and therefore in modern times; we only need to remark that when the Atonement is in question, the situation, so to speak, becomes acute. All the elements in it define themselves more sharply. If there is sympathy between the mind and the truth, it is a profound sympathy, which will carry the mind far; if there are lines of approach, through which the truth can find access to the mind, they are lines laid deep in the nature of things and of men, and the access which the truth finds by them is one from which it will not easily be dislodged. On the other hand, if it is antagonism which is roused in the mind by the Atonement, it is an antagonism which feels that everything is at stake. The Atonement is a reality of such a sort that it can make no compromise. The man who fights it knows that he is fighting for his life, and puts all his strength into the battle. To surrender is literally to give up himself, to cease to be the man he is, and to become another man. For the modern mind, therefore, as for the ancient, the attraction and the repulsion of Christianity are concentrated at the same point; the cross of Christ is man's only glory, or it is his final stumbling-block.

What I wish to do in these papers is so to present the facts as to mediate, if possible, between the mind of our time and the Atonement—so to exhibit the specific truth of Christianity as to bring out its affinity for what is deepest in the nature of man and in human experience—so to appreciate the modern mind itself, and the influences which have given it its constitution and temper, as to discredit what is false in it, and enlist on the side of the Atonement that which is profound and true. And if any one is disposed to marvel at the ambition or the conceit of such a programme, I would ask him to consider if it is not the programme prescribed to every Christian, or at least to every

Christian minister, who would do the work of an evangelist. To commend the eternal truth of God, as it is finally revealed in the Atonement, to the mind in which men around us live and move and have their being, is no doubt a difficult and perilous task; but if we approach it in a right spirit, it need not tempt us to any presumption; it cannot tempt us, as long as we feel that it is our duty. "*Who is sufficient for these things? . . . Our sufficiency is of God.*"

The Christian religion is a historical religion, and whatever we say about it must rest upon historical ground. We cannot define it from within, by reference merely to our individual experience. Of course it is equally impossible to define it apart from experience; the point is that such experience itself must be historically derived; it must come through something outside of our individual selves. What is true of the Christian religion as a whole is pre-eminently true of the Atonement in which it is concentrated. The experience which it brings to us, and the truth which we teach on the basis of it, are historically mediated. They rest ultimately on that testimony to Christ which we find in the Scriptures and especially in the New Testament. No one can tell what the Atonement is except on this basis. No one can consciously approach it—no one can be influenced by it to the full extent to which it is capable of influencing human nature—except through this medium. We may hold that just because it is Divine, it must be eternally true, omnipresent in its gracious power; but even granting this, it is not known as an abstract or eternal somewhat; it is historically, and not otherwise than historically, revealed. It is achieved by Christ, and the testimony to Christ, on the strength of which we accept it, is in the last resort the testimony of Scripture.

In saying so, I do not mean that the Atonement is merely a problem of exegesis, or that we have simply to

accept as authoritative the conclusions of scholars as to the meaning of New Testament texts. The modern mind here is ready with a radical objection. The writers of the New Testament, it argues, were men like ourselves; they had personal limitations and historical limitations; their forms of thought were those of a particular age and upbringing; the doctrines they preached may have had a relative validity, but we cannot benumb our minds to accept them without question. The intelligence which has learned to be a law to itself, criticizing, rejecting, appropriating, assimilating, cannot deny its nature and suspend its functions when it opens the New Testament. It cannot make itself the slave of men, not even though the men are Peter and Paul and John; no, not even though it were the Son of Man Himself. It resents dictation, not wilfully nor wantonly, but because it must; and it resents it all the more when it claims to be inspired. If, therefore, the Atonement can only be received by those who are prepared from the threshold to acknowledge the inspiration and the consequent authority of Scripture, it can never be received by modern men at all.

This line of remark is familiar inside the Church as well as outside. Often it is expressed in the demand for a historical as opposed to a dogmatic interpretation of the New Testament, a historical interpretation being one to which we can sit freely, because the result to which it leads us is the mind of a time which we have survived and presumably transcended; a dogmatic interpretation, on the other hand, being one which claims to reach an abiding truth, and therefore to have a present authority. A more popular and inconsistent expression of the same mood may be found among those who say petulant things about the rabbinizing of Paul, but profess the utmost devotion to the words of Jesus. Even in a day of overdone distinctions, one might point out that interpretations

are not properly to be classified as historical or dogmatic, but as true or false. If they are false, it does not matter whether they are called dogmatic or historical; and if they are true, they may quite well be both. But this by the way. For my own part, I prefer the objection in its most radical form, and indeed find nothing in it to which any Christian, however sincere or profound his reverence for the Bible, should hesitate to assent. Once the mind has come to know itself, there can be no such thing for it as blank authority. It cannot believe things—the things by which it has to live—simply on the word of Paul or John. It is not irreverent, it is simply the recognition of a fact, if we add that it can just as little believe them simply on the word of Jesus.¹ This is not the sin of the mind, but the nature and essence of mind, the being which it owes to God. If we are to speak of authority at all in this connexion, the authority must be conceived as belonging not to the speaker but to that which he says, not to the witness but to the truth. Truth, in short, is the only thing which has authority for the mind, and the only way in which truth finally evinces its authority is by taking possession of the mind for itself. It may be that any given truth can only be reached by testimony—that is, can only come to us by some historical channel; but if it is a truth of eternal import, if it is part of a revelation of God the reception of which is eternal life, then its authority lies in itself and in its power to win the mind, and not in any witness however trustworthy. Hence in speaking of the Atonement, whether in preaching or in theologizing, it is quite unnecessary to raise any question about the inspiration of Scripture, or to make any claim of “authority” either for the Apostles

¹ Of course this does not touch the fact that the whole “authority” of the Christian religion is in Jesus Himself—in His historical presence in the world, His words and works, His life and death and resurrection. He is the truth, the acceptance of which by man is life eternal.

or for the Lord. Belief in the inspiration of Scripture is neither the beginning of the Christian life nor the foundation of Christian theology; it is the last conclusion—a conclusion which becomes every day more sure—to which experience of the truth of Scripture leads. When we tell, therefore, what the Atonement is, we are telling it not on the authority of any person or persons whatever, but on the authority of the truth in it by which it has won its place in our minds and hearts. We find this truth in the Christian Scriptures undoubtedly, and therefore we prize them; but the truth does not derive its authority from the Scriptures, or from those who penned them. On the contrary, the Scriptures are prized by the Church because through them the soul is brought into contact with this truth. No doubt this leaves it open to any one who does not see in Scripture what we see, or who is not convinced as we are of its truth, to accuse us here of subjectivity, of having no standard of truth but what appeals to us individually, but I could never feel the charge a serious one. It is like urging that a man does not see at all, or does not see truly, because he only sees with his own eyes. This is the only authentic kind of seeing yet known to mankind. We do not judge at all those who do not see what we do. We do not know what hinders them, or whether they are at all to blame for it; we do not know how soon the hindrance is going to be put out of the way. To-day, as at the beginning, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehends it not. But that is the situation which calls for evangelists; not a situation in which the evangelist is called to renounce his experience and his vocation.

What, then, is the Atonement, as it is presented to us in the Scriptures, and vindicates for itself in our minds the character of truth, and indeed, as I have said already, the character of the ultimate truth of God?

The simplest expression that can be given to it in words

is: Christ died for our sins. Taken by itself, this is too brief to be intelligible; it implies many things which need to be made explicit both about Christ's relation to us and about the relation of sin and death. But the important thing, to begin with, is not to define those relations, but to look through the words to the broad reality which is interpreted in them. What they tell us, and tell us on the basis of an incontrovertible experience, is that the forgiveness of sins is for the Christian mediated through the death of Christ. In one respect, therefore, there is nothing singular in the forgiveness of sins: it is in the same position as every other blessing of which the New Testament speaks. It is the presence of a Mediator, as Westcott says in one of his letters, which makes the Christian religion what it is; and the forgiveness of sins is mediated to us through Christ, just as the knowledge of God as the Father is mediated, or the assurance of a life beyond death. But there is something *specific* about the mediation of forgiveness; the gift and the certainty of it come to us, not simply through Christ, but through the blood of His Cross. The sum of His relation to sin is that He died for it. God forgives, but this is the way in which His forgiveness comes. He forgives freely, but it is at this cost to Himself and to the Son of His love.

This, it seems to me, is the simplest possible statement of what the New Testament means by the Atonement, and probably there are few who would dispute its correctness. But it is possible to argue that there is a deep cleft in the New Testament itself, and that the teaching of Jesus on the subject of forgiveness is completely at variance with that which we find in the Epistles, and which is implied in this description of the Atonement. Indeed there are many who do so argue. But to follow them would be to forget the place which Jesus has in His own teaching. Even if we grant that the main subject of that teaching is the Kingdom of God, it is as clear as anything can be that the Kingdom

depends for its establishment on Jesus, or rather that in Him it is already established in principle; and that all participation in its blessings depends on some kind of relation to Him. All things have been delivered to Him by the Father, and it is by coming under obligation to Him, and by that alone, that men know the Father. It is by coming under obligation to Him that they know the pardoning love of the Father, as well as everything else that enters into Christian experience and constitutes the blessedness of life in the Kingdom of God. Nor is it open to any one to say that he knows this simply because Christ has told it. We are dealing here with things too great to be simply told. If they are ever to be known in their reality, they must be revealed by God, they must rise upon the mind of man in their awful and glorious truth, in ways more wonderful than words. They can be spoken about afterwards, but hardly beforehand. They can be celebrated and preached—that is, declared as the speaker's experience, delivered as his testimony—but not simply told. It was enough if Jesus made His disciples feel, as surely He did make them feel, not only in every word He spoke, but more emphatically still in His whole attitude toward them, that He was Himself the Mediator of the new covenant, and that all the blessings of the relation between God and man which we call Christianity were blessings due to Him. If men knew the Father, it was through Him. If they knew the Father's heart to the lost, it was through Him. Through Him, be it remembered, not merely through the words that He spoke. There was more in Christ than even His own wonderful words expressed, and all that He was and did and suffered, as well as what He said, entered into the convictions He inspired. But He knew this as well as His disciples, and for this very reason it is beside the mark to point to what He said, or rather to what He did not say, in confutation of their experience. For it is their experience

—the experience that the forgiveness of sins was mediated to them through His cross—that is expressed in the doctrine of Atonement : He died for our sins.

The objection which is here in view is most frequently pointed by reference to the parable of the prodigal son. There is no Atonement here, we are told, no mediation of forgiveness at all. There is love on the one side and penitence on the other, and it is treason to the pure truth of this teaching to cloud and confuse it with the thoughts of men whose Master was over their heads often, but most of all here. Such a statement of the case is plausible, and judging from the frequency with which it occurs must to some minds be very convincing, but nothing could be more superficial or unjust both to Jesus and the apostles. A parable is a comparison, and there is a point of comparison in it on which everything turns. The more perfect the parable is, the more conspicuous and dominating will the point of comparison be. The parable of the prodigal illustrates this. It brings out, through a human parallel, with incomparable force and beauty, the one truth of the freeness of forgiveness. God waits to be gracious. His pardoning love rushes out to welcome the penitent. But no one who speaks of the Atonement ever dreams of questioning this. The Atonement is concerned with a different point—not the freeness of pardon, about which all are agreed, but the cost of it ; not the spontaneity of God's love, which no one questions, but the necessity under which it lay to manifest itself in a particular way if God was to be true to Himself, and to win the heart of sinners for the holiness which they had offended. The Atonement is not the denial that God's love is free ; it is that specific manifestation or demonstration of God's free love which is demanded by the situation of men. One can hardly help wondering whether those who tell us so confidently that there is no Atonement in the parable of the prodigal have ever noticed that there

is no Christ in it either—no elder brother who goes out to seek and to save the lost son, and to give his life a ransom for him. Surely we are not to put the Good Shepherd out of the Christian religion. Yet if we leave Him His place, we cannot make the parable of the prodigal the measure of Christ's mind about the forgiveness of sins. One part of His teaching it certainly contains—one part of the truth about the relation of God the Father to His sinful children; but another part of the truth was present, though not on that occasion rendered in words, in the presence of the Speaker, when "all the publicans and sinners drew near to Him for to hear Him." The love of God to the sinful was apprehended in Christ Himself, and not in what He said as something apart from Himself; on the contrary, it was in the identity of the speaker and the word that the power of the word lay; God's love evinced itself to men as a reality in Him, in His presence in the world, and in His attitude to its sin; it so evinced itself, finally and supremely, in His death. It is not the idiosyncrasy of one apostle, it is the testimony of the Church, a testimony in keeping with the whole claim made by Christ in His teaching and life and death: "*in Him* we have our redemption, *through His blood*, even the forgiveness of our trespasses." And this is what the Atonement means: it means the mediation of forgiveness through Christ, and specifically through His death. Forgiveness, in the Christian sense of the term, is only realized as we believe in the Atonement: in other words, as we come to feel the cost at which alone the love of God could assert itself as Divine and holy love in the souls of sinful men. We may say, if we please, that forgiveness is bestowed freely upon repentance; but we must add, if we would do justice to the Christian position, that repentance in its ultimate character is the fruit of the Atonement. Repentance is not possible apart from the apprehension of the mercy of God *in Christ*. It is the experience of the

regenerate — *pœnitentiam interpretor regenerationem*, as Calvin says—and it is the atonement which regenerates.

This, then, in the broadest sense, is the truth which we wish to commend to the modern mind : the truth that there is forgiveness with God, and that this forgiveness comes to us only through Christ, and signally or specifically through His death. Unless it becomes true to us that *Christ died for our sins* we cannot appreciate forgiveness at its specifically Christian value. It cannot be for us that kind of reality, it cannot have for us that kind of inspiration, which it unquestionably is and has in the New Testament.

But what, we must now ask, is the modern mind to which this primary truth of Christianity has to be commended? Can we diagnose it in any general yet recognizable fashion, so as to find guidance in seeking access to it for the gospel of the Atonement? There may seem to be something presumptuous in the very idea, as though any one making the attempt assumed a superiority to the mind of his time, an exemption from its limitations and prejudices, a power to see over it and round about it. I hope it is not necessary to disclaim such assumption. Whoever has tried to preach the gospel, and to persuade men of truth as truth is in Jesus, and especially of the truth of God's forgiveness as it is in the death of Jesus for sin, knows that there is a state of mind which is somehow inaccessible to this truth, and to which the truth consequently appeals in vain. I do not speak of unambiguous moral antipathy to the ideas of forgiveness and atonement, although antipathy to these ideas in general, as distinct from any given presentation of them, cannot but have a moral character, just as a moral character always attaches to the refusal to acknowledge Christ or to become His debtor; but of something which, though vaguer and less determinate, puts the mind wrong, so to speak, with Christianity from the start. It is clear in all that has

been said about forgiveness, that certain relations are presupposed as subsisting between God and man, relations which make it possible for man to sin, and possible for God, not indeed to ignore his sin, but in the very act of recognizing it as all that it is to forgive it, to liberate man from it, and to restore him to Himself and righteousness. Now if the latent presuppositions of the modern mind are to any extent inconsistent with such relations, there will be something to overcome before the conceptions of forgiveness or atonement can get a hearing. These conceptions have their place in a certain view of the world as a whole, and if the mind is preoccupied with a different view, it will have an instinctive consciousness that it cannot accommodate them, and a disposition therefore to reject them *ab initio*. This is, in point of fact, the difficulty with which we have to deal. And let no one say that it is transparently absurd to suggest that we must get men to accept a true philosophy before we can begin to preach the gospel to them, as though that settled the matter or got over the difficulty. We have to take men as we find them; we have to preach the gospel to the mind which is around us; and if that mind is rooted in a view of the world which leaves no room for Christ and His work as Christian experience has realized them, then that view of the world must be recognized by the evangelist, it must be undermined at its weak places, its inadequacy to interpret all that is present even in the mind which has accepted it must be demonstrated; the attempt must be made to liberate the mind, so that it may be open to the impression of realities which under the conditions supposed it could only encounter with instinctive antipathy. It is necessary, therefore, at this point to advert to the various influences which have contributed to form the mind of our time, and to give it its instinctive bias in one direction or another. Powerful and legitimate as these influences have been,

they have nevertheless been in various ways partial, and because of their very partiality they have, when they absorbed the mind, as new modes of thought are apt to do, prejudiced it against the consideration of other, possibly of deeper and more far-reaching, truths.

First, there is the enormous development of physical science. This has engrossed human intelligence in our own times to an extent which can hardly be over-estimated. Far more mind has been employed in constructing the great fabric of knowledge, which we call science, than in any other pursuit of men. Far more mind has had its characteristic qualities and temper imparted to it by scientific study than by study in any other field. It is of science—which to all intents and purposes means physical science—of science and its methods and results that the modern mind is most confident, and speaks with the most natural and legitimate pride. Now science, even in this restricted sense, covers a great range of subjects; it may be physics in the narrowest meaning of the word, or chemistry, or biological science. The characteristic of our own age has been the development of the last, and in particular its extension to man. It is impossible to dispute the legitimacy of this extension. Man has his place in nature; the phenomena of life have one of their signal illustrations in him, and he is as proper a subject of biological study as any other living being. But the intense preoccupation of much of the most vigorous intelligence of our time with the biological study of man is not without effects upon the mind itself, which we need to consider. It tends to produce a habit of mind to which certain assumptions are natural and inevitable, certain other assumptions incredible from the first. This habit of mind is in some ways favourable to the acceptance of the Atonement. For example, the biologist's invincible conviction of the unity of life, and of the certainty and power with

which whatever touches it at one point touches it through and through, is in one way entirely favourable. Many of the most telling popular objections to the idea of atonement rest on an atomic conception of personality—a conception according to which every human being is a closed system, incapable in the last resort of helping or being helped, of injuring or being injured, by another. This conception has been finally discredited by biology, and so far the evangelist must be grateful. The Atonement presupposes the unity of human life, and its solidarity; it presupposes a common and universal responsibility. I believe it presupposes also such a conception of the unity of man and nature as biology proceeds upon; and in all these respects its physical presuppositions, if we may so express ourselves, are present to the mind of to-day, thanks to biology, as they were not even so lately as a hundred years ago.

But this is not all that we have to consider. The mind has been influenced by the movement of physical and even of biological science, not only in a way which is favourable, but in ways which are prejudicial to the acceptance of the Atonement. Every physical science seems to have a boundless ambition; it wants to reduce everything to its own level, to explain everything in the terms and by the categories with which it itself works. The higher has always to fight for its life against the lower. The physicist would like to reduce chemistry to physics; the chemist has an ambition to simplify biology into chemistry; the biologist in turn looks with suspicion on anything in man which cannot be interpreted biologically. He would like to give, and is sometimes ready to offer, a biological explanation of self-consciousness, of freedom, of religion, morality, sin. Now a biological explanation, when all is done, is a physical explanation, and a physical explanation of self-consciousness or the moral life is one in which

the very essence of the thing to be explained is either ignored or explained away. Man's life is certainly rooted in nature, and therefore a proper subject for biological study; but unless it somehow transcended nature, and so demanded other than physical categories for its complete interpretation, there could not be any study or any science at all. If there were nothing but matter, as M. Naville has said, there would be no materialism; and if there were nothing but life, there would be no biology. Now it is in the higher region of human experience, to which all physical categories are unequal, that we encounter those realities to which the Atonement is related, and in relation to which it is real; and we must insist upon these *higher* realities in their specific character, against a strong tendency in the scientifically trained modern mind, and still more in the general mind as influenced by it, to reduce them to the merely physical level.

Take, for instance, the consciousness of sin. Evidently the Atonement becomes incredible if the consciousness of sin is extinguished or explained away. There is nothing for the Atonement to do; there is nothing to relate it to; it is as unreal as a rock in the sky. But many minds at the present time, under the influence of current conceptions in biology, do explain it away. All life is one, they argue. It rises from the same spring, it runs the same course, it comes to the same end. The life of man is rooted in nature, and that which beats in my veins is an inheritance from an immeasurable past. It is absurd to speak of my responsibility for it, or of my guilt because it manifests itself in me, as it inevitably does, in such and such forms. There is no doubt that this mode of thought is widely prevalent, and that it is one of the most serious hindrances to the acceptance of the gospel, and especially of the Atonement. How are we to appreciate it? We must point out, I think, the consequence to which

it leads. If a man denies that he is responsible for the nature which he has inherited—denies responsibility for it on the ground that it *is* inherited—it is a fair question to ask him for what he *does* accept responsibility. When he has divested himself of the inherited nature, what is left? The real meaning of such disowning of responsibility is that a man asserts that his life is a part of the physical phenomena of the universe, and nothing else; and he forgets, in the very act of making the assertion, that if it were true, it could not be so much as made. The merely physical is transcended in every such assertion; and the man who has transcended it, rooted though his life be in nature, and one with the life of the whole and of all the past, must take the responsibility of living that life out on the high level of self-consciousness and morality which his very disclaimer involves. The sense of sin which wakes spontaneously with the perception that he is not what he ought to have been must not be explained away; at the level which life has reached in him, this is unscientific as well as immoral; his sin—for I do not know another word for it—must be realized as all that it is in the moral world if he is ever to be true to himself, not to say if he is ever to welcome the Atonement, and leave his sin behind. We have no need of words like sin and atonement—we could not have the experiences which they designate—unless we had a higher than merely natural life; and one of the tendencies of the modern mind which has to be counteracted by the evangelist is the tendency induced by physical and especially by biological science to explain the realities of personal experience by sub-personal categories. In conscience, in this sense of personal dignity, in the ultimate inability of man to deny the self which he is, we have always an appeal against such tendencies, which cannot fail; but it needs to be made resolutely when conscience

is lethargic and the whole bias of the mind is to the other side.

Passing from physical science, the modern mind has perhaps been influenced most by the great idealist movement in philosophy—the movement which in Germany began with Kant and culminated in Hegel. This idealism, just like physical science, gives a certain stamp to the mind; when it takes possession of intelligence it casts it, so to speak, into a certain mould; even more than physical science it dominates it so that it becomes incapable of self-criticism, and very difficult to teach. Its importance to the preacher of Christianity is that it assumes certain relations between the human and the divine, relations which foreclose the very questions which the Atonement compels us to raise. To be brief, it teaches the essential unity of God and man. God and man, to speak of them as distinct, are necessary to each other, but man is as necessary to God as God is to man. God is the truth of man, but man is the reality of God. God comes to consciousness of Himself in man, and man in being conscious of himself is at the same time conscious of God. Though many writers of this school make a copious use of Christian phraseology it seems to me obvious that it is not in an adequate Christian sense. Sin is not regarded as that which ought not to be, it is that which is to be transcended. It is as inevitable as anything in nature, and the sense of it, the bad conscience which accompanies it, is no more than the growing pains of the soul. On such a system there is no room for atonement in the sense of the mediation of God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ. We may consistently speak in it of a man being reconciled to himself, or even reconciled to his sins, but not, so far as I can understand, of his being reconciled to God, and still less, reconciled to God through the death of His Son. The penetration of Kant saw from the first all that could

be made of atonement on the basis of any such system. What it means to the speculative mind is that the new man bears the sin of the old. When the sinner repents and is converted, the weight of what he has done comes home to him; the new man in him—the Son of God in him—accepts the responsibility of the old man, and so he has peace with God. Many whose minds are under the influence of this mode of thought do not see clearly to what it leads, and resent criticism of it as if it were a sort of impiety. Their philosophy is to them a surrogate for religion, but they should not be allowed to suppose (if they do suppose) that it is the equivalent of Christianity. There can be no Christianity without Christ; it is the presence of the Mediator which makes Christianity what it is. But a unique Christ, without Whom our religion disappears, is frankly disavowed by the more candid and outspoken of our idealist philosophers. Christ, they tell us, was certainly a man who had an early and a magnificently strong faith in the unity of the human and the Divine; but it was faith in a fact which enters into the constitution of every human consciousness, and it is absurd to suppose that the recognition of the fact, or the realization of it, is essentially dependent on Him. He was not sinless—which is an expression without meaning, when we think of a human being which has to rise by conflict and self-suppression out of nature into the world of self-consciousness and right and wrong; He was not in any sense unique or exceptional; He was only what we all are in our degree; at best, He was only one among many great men who have contributed in their place and time to the spiritual elevation of the race. Such, I say, is the issue of this mode of thought as it is frankly avowed by some of its representative men; but the peculiarity of it, when it is obscurely fermenting as a leaven in the mind, is that it appeals to men as having special affinities

to Christianity. In our own country it is widely prevalent among those who have had a university education, and indeed in a much wider circle, and it is a serious question how we are to address our gospel to those who confront it in such a mental mood.

I have no wish to be unsympathetic, but I must frankly express my conviction that this philosophy only lives by ignoring the greatest reality of the spiritual world. There is something in that world—something with which we can come into intelligible and vital relations—something which can evince to our minds its truth and reality, for which this philosophy can make no room: Christ's consciousness of Himself. It is a theory of the universe which (on principle) cannot allow Christ to be anything else than an additional unit in the world's population; but if this were the truth about Him, no language could be strong enough to express the self-delusion in which He lived and died. That He was thus self-deluded is a hypothesis I do not feel called to discuss. One may be accused of subjectivity again, of course, though a subjective opinion which has the consent of the Christian centuries behind it need not tremble at hard names; but I venture to say that there is no reality in the world which more inevitably and uncompromisingly takes hold of the mind as a reality than our Lord's consciousness of Himself as it is attested to us in the Gospels. But when we have taken this reality for all that it is worth, the current idealism is shaken to the foundation. What seemed to us so profound a truth—the essential unity of the human and the divine—may even seem to us a formal and delusive platitude; in what we once regarded as the formula of the perfect religion—the divinity of man and the humanity of God—we may find quite as truly the formula of the first, not to say the final, sin. To see Christ not in the light of this speculative theorem, but in the light of His own words, is to realize not only our kinship to God, but

our remoteness from Him; it is to realize our incapacity for self-realization when we are left to ourselves; it is to realize the need of the Mediator if we would come to the Father; it is to realize, in principle, the need of the Atonement, the need, and eventually the fact. When the modern mind therefore presents itself to us in this mood of philosophical competence, judging Christ from the point of view of the whole, and showing Him His place, we can only insist that the place is unequal to His greatness, and that His greatness cannot be explained away. The mind which is closed to the fact of His unique claims, and the unique relation to God on which they rest, is closed inevitably to the mediation of God's forgiveness through His death.

There is one other modification of mind, characteristic of modern times, of which we have yet to take account—I mean that which is produced by devotion to historical study. History is, as much as science, one of the achievements of our age; and the historical temper is as characteristic of the men we meet as the philosophical or the scientific. The historical temper, too, is just as apt as these others, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps quite consciously, but under the engaging plea of modesty, to pronounce absolute sentences which strike at the life of the Christian religion, and especially, therefore, at the idea of the Atonement. Sometimes this is done broadly, so that every one sees what it means. If we are told, for example, that everything historical is relative, that it belongs of necessity to a time, and is conditioned in ways so intricate that no knowledge can ever completely trace them; if we are told further that for this very reason nothing historical can have absolute significance, or can condition the eternal life of man, it is obvious that the Christian religion is being cut at the root. It is no use speaking about the Atonement—about the mediation of God's forgiveness to the soul through a historical person and work—if this is true.

The only thing to be done is to raise the question whether it *is* true. It is no more for historical than for physical science to exalt itself into a theory of the universe, or to lay down the law with speculative absoluteness as to the significance and value which shall attach to facts. When we face the fact with which we are here concerned—the fact of Christ's consciousness of Himself and His vocation to which reference has already been made—are we not forced to the conclusion that here a new spiritual magnitude has appeared in history, the very *differentia* of which is that it *has* eternal significance, and that it is eternal life to know it? If we are to preach the Atonement, we cannot allow either history or philosophy to proceed on assumptions which ignore or degrade the fact of Christ. Only a person in whom the eternal has become historical can be the bearer of the Atonement, and it must be our first concern to show, against all assumptions whether made in the name of history or philosophy, that in point of fact there is such a person here.

This consideration requires to be kept in view even when we are dealing with the modern mind inside the Church. Nothing is commoner than to hear those who dissent from any given construction of the Atonement plead for a historical as opposed to a dogmatic interpretation of Christ. It is not always clear what is meant by this distinction, nor is it clear that those who use it are always conscious of what it would lead to if it were made absolute. Sometimes a dogmatic interpretation of the New Testament means an interpretation vitiated by dogmatic prejudice, an interpretation in which the sense of the writers is missed because the mind is blinded by prepossessions of its own: in this sense a dogmatic interpretation is a thing which no one would defend. Sometimes, however, a dogmatic interpretation is one which reveals or discovers in the New Testament truths of eternal and divine sig-

nificance, and to discredit such interpretation in the name of the historical is another matter. The distinction in this case, as has been already pointed out, is not absolute. It is analogous to the distinction between fact and theory, or between thing and meaning, or between efficient cause and final cause. None of these distinctions is absolute, and no intelligent mind would urge either side in them to the disparagement of the other. If we are to apprehend the whole reality presented to us, we must apprehend the theory as well as the fact, the meaning as well as the thing, the final as well as the efficient cause. This truth is frequently ignored. It is assumed, for example, that because Christ was put to death by His enemies, or because He died in the faithful discharge of His calling, therefore He did not die, in the sense of the Atonement, for our sins: the historical causes which brought about His death are supposed to preclude that interpretation of it according to which it mediates to us the divine forgiveness. But there is no incompatibility between the two things. To set aside an interpretation of Christ's death as dogmatic on the ground that there is another which is historical, is like setting aside the idea that a watch is made to measure time because you know it was made by a watchmaker. It was both made by a watchmaker and made to measure time. Similarly it may be quite true both that Christ was crucified and slain by wicked men, and that He died for our sins. But without entering into the questions which this raises as to the relation between the wisdom of God and the course of human history, it is enough to be conscious of the prejudice which the historical temper is apt to generate against the recognition of the eternal in time. Surely it is a significant fact that the New Testament contains a whole series of books—the Johannine books—which have as their very burden the eternal significance of the historical: eternal life in Jesus Christ, come in flesh, the

propitiation for the whole world. Surely also it is a significant fact of a different and even an ominous kind that we have at present a whole school of critics which is so far from appreciating the truth in this that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that it has devoted itself to a paltry and peddling criticism of these books in which the impression of the eternal is lost. But whether we are indebted to John's eyes, or to none but our own, if the eternal is not to be seen in Jesus, He can have no place in our religion; if the historical has no dogmatic content, it cannot be essential to eternal life. Hence if we believe and know that we have eternal life in Jesus, we must assert the truth which is implied in this against any conception of history which denies it. Nor is it really difficult to do so. With the experience of nineteen centuries behind us, we have only to confront this particular historical reality, Jesus Christ, without prejudice; in evangelizing we have only to confront others with Him; and we shall find it still possible to see God in Him, the Holy Father who through the Passion of His Son ministers to sinners the forgiveness of their sins.

In what has been said thus far by way of explaining the modern mind, emphasis may seem to have fallen mainly on those characteristics which make it less accessible than it might be to Christian truth, and especially to the Atonement. I have tried to point out the assailable side of its prepossessions, and to indicate the fundamental truths which must be asserted if our intellectual world is to be one in which the Gospel may find room. But the modern mind has other characteristics. Some of these may have been exhibited hitherto mainly in criticizing current representations of the Atonement; but in themselves they are entirely legitimate, and the claims they put forward are such as we cannot disown. Before proceeding to a further statement of the Atonement, I shall briefly refer to

one or two of them: a doctrine of Atonement which did not satisfy them would undoubtedly stand condemned.

(1) The modern mind requires that everything shall be based on experience. Nothing is true or real to it which cannot be experimentally verified. This we shall all concede. But there is an inference sometimes drawn from it at which we may look with caution. It is this, that because everything must be based on experience therefore no appeal to Scripture has any authority. I have already explained in what sense it is possible to speak of the authority of Scripture, and here it is only necessary to make the simple remark that there is no proper contrast between Scripture and experience. Scripture, so far as it concerns us here, is a record of experience or an interpretation of it. It was the Church's experience that it had its redemption in Christ; it was the interpretation of that experience that Christ died for our sins. Yet in emphasizing experience the modern mind is right, and Scripture would lose its authority if the experience it describes were not perpetually verified anew.

(2) The modern mind desires to have everything in religion ethically construed. As a general principle this must command our unreserved assent. Anything which violates ethical standards, anything which is immoral or less than moral, must be excluded from religion. It may be, indeed, that ethical has sometimes been too narrowly defined. Ideas have been objected to as unethical which are really at variance not with a true perception of the constitution of humanity, and of the laws which regulate moral life, but with an atomic theory of personality under which moral life would be impossible. Persons are not atoms; in a sense they interpenetrate, though individuality has been called the true impenetrability. The world has been so constituted that we do not stand absolutely outside

of each other; we can do things for each other. We can bear each other's burdens, and it is not unethical to say so, but the reverse. And again, it need not be unethical, though it transcends the ordinary sphere and range of ethical action, if we say that God in Christ is able to do for us what we cannot do for one another. With reference to the Atonement, the demand for ethical treatment is usually expressed in two ways. (a) There is the demand for analogies to it in human life. The demand is justifiable, in so far as God has made man in His own image; but, as has just been suggested, it has a limit, in so far as God is God and not man, and must have relations to the human race which its members do not and cannot have to each other. (b) There is the demand that the Atonement shall be exhibited in vital relation to a new life in which sin is overcome. This demand also is entirely legitimate, and it touches a weak point in the traditional Protestant doctrine. Dr. Chalmers tells us that he was brought up—such was the effect of the current orthodoxy upon him—in a certain distrust of good works. Some were certainly wanted, but not as being themselves salvation; only, as he puts it, as tokens of justification. It was a distinct stage in his religious progress when he realized that true justification sanctifies, and that the soul can and ought to abandon itself spontaneously and joyfully to do the good that it delights in. The modern mind assumes what Dr. Chalmers painfully discovered. An Atonement that does not regenerate, it truly holds, is not an atonement in which men can be asked to believe. Such then, in its prejudices good and bad, is the mind to which the great truth of the Christian religion has to be presented.

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