

*THE ATONEMENT IN MODERN LIFE.*

THE title of this paper may be read in two senses. It may be read as referring to a theory, or as concerned with a fact. If it has reference to a theory, it raises this question : Is any theory of Atonement possible in modern life, and if so, what theory ? If it is concerned with a fact, it impels us to ask : Is there anything in the real structure of modern life which may rightly be described as Atonement ? Is there anything in the actual experience of men to-day which can be isolated and recognised as Atonement, in the same way that there are things which we can isolate and recognise as gravitation, or civilisation ?

Now it is with the second of these two things that I am really anxious to deal. To me—to all of us surely—the fact of Atonement is vastly more important than the theory of Atonement. Nevertheless, in order to be free to deal with the fact it is necessary first of all to say something about the theory. For if one thing is certain as to the relation between fact and theory it is this : the mind on the look out for facts sees largely what it is prepared to see, and if a man is already convinced that no reasonable theory of the Atonement is possible in modern times, he will, like Nelson at Copenhagen, clap his telescope to his blind eye and swear he sees nothing that gives any evidence of Atonement in modern life. Lecky has elaborately displayed for us in his *Rise of Rationalism* how magic and witchcraft disappeared from Europe. People saw that the theory of magic was untenable, and in a very few years the facts on which that theory rested, vanished. It was not that witches were all killed off. So long as people kept killing witches, witches abounded. Witches disappeared when the new science killed the theory of magic.

## I.

So, then, we shall look first at this problem: Can we men of the twentieth century, heirs of nineteenth-century science, eager to lay aside all useless lumber and mere whimsies in order to do our fair share of the hard work of the new time, can we who must be, and shall be with all our might, men of our own time, treat seriously any doctrine of the Atonement? Does not modern thought tend to exclude it? There are certain elements of modern thought which seem to make any doctrine of the Atonement questionable, namely, the nineteenth century philosophy and the modern high sense of ethical responsibility. Each of these seems to veto any theory of Atonement even before it is stated. We will look at each of these in turn and see how far it is justified in prejudicing us against any belief in Atonement. But before doing this it will be necessary to make some brief and rough provisional statement as to what is meant by atonement. There are many theories of the Atonement, and to these individually we must in this paper be indifferent. All that we can attempt is some general statement which will include them all. And the best way to put the matter seems to be this: By Atonement we mean a transaction by which the estrangement between God and man, due to sin, is overcome. The crucial element in this transaction is Jesus Christ and His death on Calvary.

Coming then to our problem, we notice in the first place that the nineteenth-century philosophers enter a *non possumus* at once, and refuse to consider such an Atonement. And let us not depreciate the importance and influence of the philosophers. It is easy to sneer at them as unpractical persons, bookworms aloof from life who write incomprehensible volumes which the would-be cultured praise though they do not read them. We all of us live in the intellectual atmosphere created by the philosophers. Agnosticism and

materialism are prevalent to-day, not because the man in the street has read agnostic and materialist philosophies, but because those philosophies have set a fashion in thinking. Your suburban maid-servant has never been to Paris, but she wears her hobble skirt because the designers of fashions for women in Paris set the hobble skirt agoing some years back. So Englishmen in the twentieth century are still wearing the intellectual hobbles of agnosticism and objective idealism made for them by the fashionable thinkers of last century.

Now there are in particular two types of nineteenth-century philosophy which deny the Atonement. The first is the objective idealist type which, at any rate in its logical implications, refuses to admit that Atonement is necessary. It denies that man is estranged from God. It maintains, on the other hand, that God is everything, and that therefore nothing is evil, but all is the working out in experience of the eternal nature of God. Some of these idealists call themselves monists. There is only one substance, they say, and that is God. And how can God be estranged from Himself, or how can any reconciliation be necessary within God? I do not pretend that our objective idealists express themselves in this crude fashion. But it is in this sense that their teaching is popularly understood. But speaking of objective idealism in any form it must be pointed out that its gorgeous and arrogant metaphysic has a deadly enemy in that still more gorgeous and arrogant thing that we call scientific method. And if one thing is more obvious than another to the scrupulous and scientific student of mankind and of history, it is that human nature is so fallen that some atonement, some reconciliation with God, is necessary. The old-world Jew who said "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" summed the evidence up in a fashion which no modern thinker can better.' And here is some of

the evidence. First of all, consider the devastating disappointment and dissatisfaction which come to any man who has a large first-hand experience of life without any knowledge or experience of Atonement. We can get instances of this to whatever age or civilisation we look. Consider ancient Persia and inquire of her typical poet. Omar Khayyam entered upon life quite in love with it. It seemed beautiful and enticing beyond words, so that he sang :

Here with a little bread beneath the bough,  
A flask of wine, a book of verse—and thou  
Beside me singing in the wilderness—  
Oh wilderness were paradise enow !

And yet before he died he turned with bitter resentment upon the world of which he had had his fill and cried :

Oh Love ! could you and I with Him conspire  
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,  
Would we not shatter it to bits—and then  
Remould it nearer to the heart's desire !

Not greatly removed from Omar in time or race was Qoheleth, the author of Ecclesiastes. He tells us how he set to work to get the best out of life : “ I made me great works ; I builded me houses ; I planted me vineyards . . . and whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them. . . . Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do : and, behold, all was vanity, and a striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun.”

If we turn from east to west, we find the same thing. How terrible is Tacitus' condemnation of his own age and society. After recounting the wickedness of Rome, with its wars, its murders, its adulteries, its ruins, he adds, “ All was one delirium of hate and terror ; slaves were bribed to betray their masters, freedmen their patrons. He who had no foe was destroyed by his friend.” Was ever bitterer and more

scornful sentence penned ? And it is the same from century to century. Even the artificial though polished poet Pope, who thought himself the exponent of that optimistic philosophy which described this as the best of all possible worlds, uttered one of the most pessimistic epigrams in all literature when he said :

“ Man never is, but always to be, blessed.”

And to-day, what is the most insistent cry ? It is the cry of discontent with the natural condition of man. Eugenists like Dr. Saleeby, fierce immoralists like Mr. H. G. Wells, advocates of the life-force like Mr. Bernard Shaw, wild Nietzscheites grovelling before a grotesque superman, all agree with Christians that the one thing needed is a new type of manhood.

A second line of evidence that man is estranged from God is this : All the advances and discoveries of human genius are liable to perversion and do actually serve to torture and degrade the race as well as to serve it. The motor car has brought back again a form of highway robbery, and helps clever rascals to outwit the law. The telegraph has made gambling such a disease of the state as it never was before. The aeroplane's most effective work so far has been to help Italians slaughter Turks and Arabs. Education itself has heightened unrest, ambition, and envy. Two thousand years ago humanity boasted two marvellous products of evolution—Roman law and Jewish morality. There came into the world a Man since recognised by all mankind, so far as able to judge, as the noblest and most beneficent of the sons of men. And what happened ? This Man, Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth, was tortured to death by the representatives of Roman law and Jewish righteousness.

In the face of this evidence then—the judgment of the most capable men of all ages, and the evils which are associated, even with the highest goods that humanity

knows or produces—we may dismiss once and for all the assertion of the monist that there is no need of Atonement because there is no estrangement from God, who is All.

The idealistic and monistic philosophy, however, was not the most characteristic English philosophy of the nineteenth century, nor is it the most effective in making the intellectual atmosphere of the twentieth century. This peculiarly nineteenth century philosophy was rather agnosticism whose chief spokesmen—Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, Huxley, and Tyndall and the rest—taught men to believe that freedom of the will, a life after death, and real revelation of God to man, were all mere pleasant and flattering fancies. If there was a God at all, men could not know Him, could not be consciously estranged from Him, and could not come back to Him by any Atonement. The only world of which men could have any knowledge or power was the world of matter. All life obeyed the laws of matter. All life, therefore, was determinist, and our supposed purposes, schemes, plans, searches, were poor and pathetic illusions. Now I do not propose to controvert this view of life. All I am concerned to do is to point out that it is not modern. It is not up to date. It is a bit of the furniture of those stolid and respectable mid-Victorian days at which any twentieth-century schoolboy feels it his duty to fling a gibe. It belongs to the anti-macassar stage of domestic history. The formative thinkers of to-day have put it aside once and for all. The late William James in America, Professor Rudolf Eucken of Germany, M. Henri Bergson in France—all these belong to a school which will not have agnosticism at any price, and to which the determinism of the nineteenth century is a mere metaphysical shibboleth. The same spirit is alive in England too. True, we have no one outstanding philosopher, but if Mr. Schiller and Sir Oliver Lodge may be taken as indicating the living

trend of thought, we are far enough away from both agnosticism and determinism.

We have a right to say then that modern philosophy does not put a ban *à priori* upon any doctrine of the Atonement, and that those who will have nothing to do with this central element of Christian belief because of modern thought, are labouring under a misapprehension as to what is being thought in these new days.

And now we must turn to another important phase of thought which claims to invalidate any discussion of any theory of the Atonement, and that is the modern high sense of ethical responsibility. There are not wanting those who condemn any theory of the Atonement as immoral. For every theory of the Atonement must involve the belief that God will do something for man by which man will escape the inevitable results of his own misdeeds, whether those results be pain (*i.e.* punishments) or moral evil (*i.e.* consequences). Putting it crudely, Atonement, we are told, means some one (*i.e.* Christ) bearing the sins of some one else, and so saving that person from the results of his own wrong-doing, which is immoral. The Atonement therefore is ethically impossible. Now this is a very widespread view. Indeed, it is a view which causes a good deal of uneasiness and real concern to many people who are not critics of Christianity, but actual members of the church. I may perhaps therefore be permitted to put forward certain simple considerations to show that this verdict is unjustified and ought to be revised. I want to show that the doctrine of vicarious suffering is wholly in harmony with all that we know of moral evolution. And in order to do this let us adopt for the moment the extremest and most difficult view of the Atonement possible. One theory of the Atonement is that Jesus on Calvary took the place of the sinner and suffered in His own person the results and conse-

quences and punishment of that sinner's evil deeds. Without ourselves accepting this doctrine we may at least agree that if the ethical objection in question to *this* theory of the Atonement can be removed, the ethical objection becomes invalid for *all* doctrines of the Atonement. Now we all agree to-day that there is development in the world of morals. Man advances from a primitive morality to higher forms. Races in the early ages of mankind had lower ethical ideals than are ours to-day. In historic times we can see the process of development going on. Even to-day we can actually ourselves experience the process. We feel in our own persons how lower ideals give way to higher.

Further, the moral development that has taken place from primitive times to the present follows certain definite lines. The process is in a constant direction. Let us isolate two of these lines; first the line of conscience, and secondly the line of punishment. What is the primitive stage of conscience? We cannot go back to the very earliest stages, for we have not the evidence. We can, however, go back to the taboo stage, and at that stage we see that the rightness or wrongness of a deed was determined by its relation to some apparently artificial rule which had nothing to do with the intrinsic value of the deed. In some tribes, for instance, to touch a pig, or to come within a certain circle, was a sin; while to kill a man, or to rob or to lie was not thought wrong at all. But moral development has brought us to a different stage. To-day we see sin according to a larger scale and the individual conscience is very tender. It is the intrinsic nature of the evil deed which hurts the conscience. There is consequently a very different, and perhaps greater, range of possible wrong-doing. A host of things regarded as venial or indeed admirable in primitive times are now abhorrent and treated as criminal. The development

and elaboration of the moral code has made wrong-doing a more complex and widely ramifying system. That is the one process. Sin is more clearly defined and more seriously repudiated. The conscience is more tender.

Parallel with this another process has gone on. There has been a development along the line of punishment, as well as along the line of conscience. But it has been of a very different order. The primitive stage of punishment was relentless, ruthless, sweeping, bloody. The commonest penalty was death. The sinner was destroyed. Often enough his punishment was not death, but torture—torture which did not cease till death proved more merciful than man. Little by little, however, the notion of justice grew up, and the effort was made to “make the punishment fit the crime.” At this stage the watchword of morality was “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” The individual must bear the full weight of his misdeeds: wrong-doing must come home to the wrong-doer. But the process of change did not stop there. It has gone on until now the tendency is to lift the result of his wrong-doing from the shoulders of the individual. While it is recognised that the consequences of evil must be, it is seen that the evil itself is only got rid of in as far as the consequences of the evil are shouldered, not by the culprit but by the community, or rather, by the nobler elements of the community. As yet this tendency has not shown itself as fully in the state as it has done in the family, in philanthropy, and in the church. Every philanthropy, whether it be an almshouse, a Friedenheim, a hospital or an orphanage, is, at least to some extent, and that a large extent, a device for shifting the consequences of wrong-doing on to the shoulders of those not immediately concerned with it—that is, from the guilty to the innocent.

I cannot pursue this matter further. I have, however, indicated, what could be established much more completely, the

fact that the development of the moral sense has, among others, these two results : on the one hand, it makes the conscience much more sensitive to evil, and makes the evil appear much more abhorrent ; and on the other hand, it tends to make the innocent community take a vicarious interest in the wrong-doer, being ready more and more, not to punish him more severely, but to bear his burden for him. The type of morality towards which mankind is moving, then, is a type in which evil will be quickly and keenly detected and resented, but in which, instead of fierce and bitter punishment of the sinner, those sinned against will rather suffer on his behalf. And surely, what is the tendency of the ethical development of humanity is a reliable index of the attitude of God toward evil, and our own moral nature justifies even the substitutionary theory of the Atonement—that theory which regards the perfectly holy God as taking up, and Himself bearing, the sins of mankind.

Perhaps I may push this a little further and say that the Atonement is in harmony with the profoundest laws of our own life as we all of us know it. I know that for every man there are moods in which, on the contrary, the Atonement seems incredible. But I want to set over against such mere moods the consideration that, knowing what we do of life, and given God, it were utterly incredible did we not have a historic Atonement. For consider : if a teacher is to teach, he must give himself for his pupil. Unless he will step down from his grown-up world he abdicates the right to have pupils. Or again, a good man who would save the fallen must somehow go down to him. He must put his arm about the shoulders of the ragged and filthy. If he refuse, he refuses the one chance of success. And a woman who would have a child to rejoice her heart and to be her own must go down to face death that the new life may come. She must be weary that her child may be strong, she must

suffer that the child may rejoice. She must look into the darkness of death if she would lift her little one into the light of life. If she refuse the suffering she refuses the child. A mother she will not be. Beautiful she may be, accomplished and strong—but a mother, never. And I say that here we have a law of life which is consequently a law also of God. If God should refuse to come down to save us through the travail of His soul, He would abdicate His place as God and stultify all His love as Father of our souls. Creator He might be, Allah He might be—but God the Father, never.

We have now completed this first part of our discussion. We have seen that the general philosophic and ethical prejudices which tend to prevent men to-day from even considering fairly the Christian doctrine of the Atonement, are not really valid. The stream of modern thought has really swept these prejudices away. The man who thinks that philosophy and ethics discredit the Atonement, is not a modern man. His dominant notions are obsolete. It is time he discarded them.

## II.

Having now seen that the doctrine of the Atonement is not incompatible with modern thought, we can proceed to the main subject before us, namely, that the Atonement is more than a theory, it is a reality in modern life.

Now Christians claim that with the life and death of Jesus something profoundly important happened to mankind. They claim that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. They claim that the life and death of Jesus somehow brings man into touch with God, makes a way of escape from the sin and misery of life, and makes it possible for men to have complete confidence in God and use His power for their own individual salvation and for the reconstruction of society.

Well, how can this claim be substantiated? I do not think men to-day want to doubt the Atonement. They would like to find it. They would like themselves to be reconciled to God, so that the discontent and uneasiness should pass out of their lives. And they would like society to be reconciled to God, so that it should be a pure and strong and noble thing. What is it then that stops men from taking advantage of that real Atonement which Christians say has already been made? I think one of the things that hinder is this: men feel that what is wanted is not an event in ancient history, but something real in modern life. We have not much use for the merely historical. Things are of no interest to us if they merely happened once upon a time. We are only interested in things in the past which are definitely and inevitably connected with things in the present. If the Atonement is something that happened during thirty years or three years or three days and then stopped, never to go on again, like a clock that has run down, it somehow is not convincing to us. For we find that God does not work by sudden strokes. All the wonderful things of God are processes—unending processes which constantly reproduce themselves in every new age with added beauty and power. The difference between what God does and what man does is just this: what God does is eternal, whereas what man does is sudden. The rose blooming in the conservatory now is a slow product; not merely has it taken months to produce, but millenniums. It is the latest in an eternal series. That it exists now is due to God, and God has made it by an infinite process, not suddenly. And that is why it differs so profoundly from the artificial rose. The artificial rose is an incident. It has, in a sense, no past and no future. God's rose is eternal, and has an infinite past. It belongs to a sequence which is represented through all time.

Now if the Atonement is really God's work, must it not

be part of an eternal process? It cannot be simply an incident. But if it is part of an eternal process it must be here now. We must find it somehow in being to-day. It must be in London as well as in Jerusalem, it must be in the twentieth century as well as in the first. We must be able to verify it in modern life. And we will believe in the Atonement if we can do this, if we can find it at work in modern life.

Of course the New Testament claims for the Atonement just this historic and permanent quality. It does not describe or set forth the Atonement as a mere sudden action on the part of Christ or of God, something isolated in the course of history, a freak incident quite different in quality from anything that had gone before or was to come after. Jesus Himself described His own ministry as the culmination of a series in the parable of the landlord who sent servant after servant to his tenants, and afterward sent his son. The apostle Paul, writing to the Ephesians about the Atonement, says: "This is in harmony with God's merciful purpose for the government of the world when the times are ripe for it—the purpose which He has cherished in His own mind of restoring the whole creation to find its one Head in Christ; yes, things in heaven and things on earth, to find their one Head in Him." And in the book of Revelation we find the astonishing sentence, "all that dwell on the earth shall worship him (that is Antichrist), every one whose name hath not been written in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain from the foundation of the world," or, as Dr. Weymouth vigorously puts it, "the Book of the Lamb who has been offered in sacrifice ever since the creation of the world." Such phrases might be multiplied. They show that in the opinion of the writers of the Bible the historic Atonement was not a mere incident, but part of an age-long process: not a momentary act of God, but a revelation of

His constant activity : not something peculiar, the resort of God in despair at the failure of all His previous efforts to redeem mankind, but something typical, the right clue for the interpretation of all prior and subsequent dealings of God with mankind. In Christ, the Christ of Calvary, all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily. He was the eternal Word, the light that lighteth every man coming into the world, and at the same time eternally one with God. What Christ was so clearly and mightily for a few years on earth God is in the unseen world for ever.

This is the explanation of the Church's determined and passionate adherence to the doctrine of the deity of Christ through good report and ill. A wedge driven between the mind of Christ and the mind of God must ultimately split off the Atonement from the eternal process and make it a mere historic incident. Anything that hinders us from believing that the purpose and self-abnegation of Christ is of the same nature, or even substance, as God's central will in relation to man, must hinder man from trusting without reservation to that reconciliation which Jesus sought to effect between man and His Father. If we are to believe that the holiness and love displayed on Calvary are eternal things, resident at the very heart of the universe, and capable by their mastery of framing and dominating all the deepest laws of the universe, we must believe that the claim that Jesus made when He said, "I and my Father are one," was a substantial claim representing a permanent fact in the unseen and eternal world. That is what Christians mean by insisting that the Lamb of God is seated on the throne of God.

Let us be clear, then, that we understand how Christianity regards the relation between the historic Atonement and the eternal processes and activities of God. Here is a simple illustration. I see in the physical laboratory a prism upon which a beam of sunlight falls. This beam passes through

the prism and as it emerges is thrown upon a screen. As it falls upon the screen it is split up into a series of bands or bars of colour from violet to yellow. All imaginable colours are there, and, if we could but see them, some colours at present unimaginable. What does this tell us? It tells us that the beam of light which passed through the prism was composed of a great variety of rays, each of its own peculiar wave length, and that these various rays when combined made the simple white light. But it tells us more than that. It tells us that the rays of light combined in the one beam come from a source of light, the sun, in which are a variety of glowing substances—gold, silver, iron, copper, sodium, carbon, and a host of other chemical elements—each of which contributes to the band of colours displayed through the prism. Nor is even this all that we learn by the spectrum. We learn from this that all the ordinary sunlight that floods our earth, making life and joy possible, producing food and beauty, penetrating every human dwelling and un-failing in its service to every race and generation, has within it knit together all those colours of the spectrum corresponding to all those substances in the sun. So it is with the Atonement. In the wonderful life and death of Jesus we see, not merely a curious and peculiar incident in human history, like a physical or intellectual freak, but a revelation both of the real nature of God and of the secret of His constant and universal activities. True, in this instance we only have the one prism—the one sinless life, the one Cross of Calvary. But the Atonement is not an exceptional activity of God. It is the constant activity of God displayed in an arresting and convincing fashion.

At this point a difficulty arises which we must clear up before we proceed further. If, it may be said, God's activity is always the same, if He constantly feels and acts towards mankind as Jesus felt and acted, where does the value and

peculiar service of Calvary come in ? Is it not true that what is called the transaction of the Cross made a difference both to God and man ? Is it not true that it has made an eternal difference to the relations between God and man ? This is a question of great importance, and something must be said with regard to it here. The historic Atonement of Jesus is unique in various ways, but chiefly in this, that it makes clear for the first time in human history what is the attitude of God to man and sin, and it therefore creates in man confidence and trust in God, doing away with his misunderstanding and suspicion, and so once and for all altering man's attitude to God. But you cannot alter man's attitude to God without also, even though indirectly, altering God's attitude to man. If my friend turns his back on me, I see the back of his head. That is my relation to him. When he turns round I look at his face. My relation to him is changed. I can now do what I could not do before, I can express to him the friendship in my heart by the expression of my face. Now what the Atonement does is (among other things) to induce men to trust in God. They turn their faces to Him. In a sense this does not alter God's relation to them, for He loved them from the beginning. But for the first time it enables God to make His love visible to them. So it does affect not only man but God, and therein lies its uniqueness, and its being wrought once and for all.

“ But,” some one will say, “ have you not thereby given up your contention that the Atonement is an eternal process, operative to-day as surely as two thousand years ago ? Have you not thrown it back again to be a mere incident once upon a time ? ” By no means. A mighty and indeed unique incident may be after all necessary to the carrying on of a constant process. John Fiske has somewhere used an illustration for another purpose which will serve here. Suppose you have a cone. Now imagine a plane cutting the cone

parallel to the base, and make that plane tilt up. When the plane was parallel to the base of the cone, it cut a circle. As soon as you tilted the plane it cut an ellipse, and as you tilt it more and more the ellipse becomes more and more eccentric until at last, without any warning, "your plane cuts a parabola, whose sides curve off into infinity, and never touch ends again." But only for a moment. As the tilting proceeds the parabola is deserted as suddenly as it was created. Now you can make that tilting as slow as you like, as slow as the process of cosmic evolution. But, however slow you make the process of tilting, your parabola can only last for one instant. All the past of the process led up to it. Itself is part of the process. After it the process continues essentially unchanged. But nevertheless this sudden parabola was a necessary element in it. So it is in the Atonement as an eternal process. All that process leads up to Calvary. From Calvary onwards the process continues permanently. Calvary itself is an essential element in the process, but one never to be repeated.

So then the Christian doctrine is that the Atonement is a fact to-day. It is in modern life. Just as all the colours of the spectrum are in all the sunlight of every day, however dim that light at times may be, so the whole glory of God's holiness and love revealed by Christ on Calvary are real and operative around us through all the world to-day. This means of course that God is constantly being and doing for us what Jesus was and did on Calvary. Let us try to get at close quarters with this. First, the mind of Christ as shown on Calvary is the mind of God to-day. And the feature of Calvary which is most characteristic is pain, it is the unmerited suffering of the Holy One. This it is that has made all the world pause to marvel, this it is that has sent a thrill and shock through all the human race like the sudden quiver of a galvanic battery, so that the ideals and institutions and

very characters of men are shattered and changed. That Christ thus died—prematurely, unjustly, horribly—“is the wonderful thing, the shocking thing, the thing that has wrenched the whole trend and tendency of human history into a new course. ‘Jesus died’ is a phrase which, like some monstrous magic incantation, has set new and unexpected forces free in the world, and beaten another host of forces back into Hades.”<sup>1</sup> I have said that the characteristic thing about Calvary is the pain. That, however, is not quite true. The characteristic thing is pain on our behalf, and because of our sin. His death was not *mere* suffering. It had a moral purpose in it. It was pain because of sin, and in order to salvation. Jesus was able to appreciate nature—we know how He loved it all. He also delighted in human intercourse and loved life along with His friends, and it must have been bitter for Him to leave it all and set His face steadily towards the Cross. But all this was as nothing compared with the agony which beset Him as He saw the sin of the world. It was not the Roman executioner nor the Pharisaic scoffer that hurt Him really—it was the sinful heart of the world that rejected His love and His Father.

Now in all this we see into the heart of God. Every sin of man pains Him. Every touch of impurity or greed or falsehood grieves His Holy Spirit. Every time we sin God is crucified afresh. What was once in our world on the Cross, is, so long as sin continue, in the unseen world, in God’s heart.

Next, Jesus had a forgiving and saving purpose. He was bent upon destroying the sin that seemed to destroy Him. He proved immediately to be, by His death, stronger than sin. How so? Because He set up in men’s hearts a conquering hatred of sin. When we see what Christ suffered because of sin, we see how hateful a thing it is, we see it in its true colours. “The nature of dynamite is seen in

<sup>1</sup> See *Atonement and Progress*, by the present writer.

the explosion, the nature of prussic acid is seen in death by poisoning, and the nature of sin is seen in the undeserved sufferings of Jesus which offer a vista of spiritual pain to our vision which we know to be beyond anything we ourselves could suffer." But not only does Jesus reveal the nature of sin. He also reveals the nature of holiness. The world has set Him on high as the type of the good man once and for all. He fulfils and transcends all prophecies. His reality makes all imagined supermen foolishness and shams.

Jesus, then, sets before us the vision of sin in all its horror as something to be shunned, and the vision of holiness in all its beauty as what the soul eternally must seek. But these are not mere visions. They are not merely poetic imaginings on the part of Jesus. They are not the creation of a moral of religious genius, without any necessary contact with the facts of daily life. This purpose of Jesus to suffer all that we may be saved, and to show us the way of life at all hazards, is a revelation of the heart and purpose and practice of God. If we look into the heart of the eternal Father we see there both the grief and pain of Jesus on account of sin, and also His unalterable determination to grapple with sin and finally overcome it.

What we see, then, in Calvary is a revelation of the eternal nature and purpose of God. It shows God's repugnance and hatred for sin, and His determination at all hazards, even at the hazard of Himself coming into horrible contact with sin, of saving the children He loves from the enemy. As a mother will fling herself with bare hands upon the wolf in order to save her children, so God grapples with our sin. The Cross of Calvary, then, is on the one hand the exhibition of the very heart and purpose of God, and on the other hand the explanation and characterisation of the whole sweep of human experience upwards. The movement of mankind

from its blind primitive gropings toward the greater light, to twentieth century grapplings with doubt and with social evil, is summed up in the Cross which is the symbol of the Atonement. The death of Jesus compresses into a few pulsations the age-long redeeming work of God ; it is the pivot upon which the human race is being swung heavenwards ; it is the fulcrum by means of which the love of God up-levers sin. More simply expressed, on the Cross God is saving the world. God's whole effective work for and upon man is of the order of the Cross. His Atonement is not momentary but perpetual, not incidental but essential, not a gift but a giving, not a transaction but a process.

Now if all this be true, we see the immense importance of the Atonement to modern life. Surely there can never have been a greater dissatisfaction with human life than there is to-day. The keenest thinkers of the age are impatient of human frailty and folly. They cry out for the Superman. They have mighty visions of a possible nobler humanity. Says Mr. Bernard Shaw : " Are we agreed that Life is a force which has made innumerable experiments in organising itself ; that the mammoth and the man, the mouse and the megatherium, . . . are all more or less successful attempts to build up that new force into higher and higher individuals, the ideal individual being omnipotent, omniscient, infallible, and withal completely, unilludedly self-conscious : in short, a god ? " Well, so far so good. We will not quarrel with Mr. Shaw's phrase, but recognise here, what is very general, a desire to escape the pettiness, folly, and weakness of men : a desire which is really, out of sight as it were to Mr. Shaw himself, a desire for salvation from sin. But the question is, how are we to get this higher manhood ? Too many of our modern advocates of supermanhood call us to go by the way of impulse, self-expression, getting all we desire at all costs. Fatal error ! That has been the way of many—it

has been tried by innumerable Neros and Leopolds, and is now being tried by every contemptible little debauchee in London. The real way toward the superman is the way of the Cross. Self is not the world-movement : selfishness is not the power that fashions a noble destiny for mankind : self-seeking is not the mood and might of the God who sways the ages—Atonement is the world-movement : self-giving is the power : Calvary is the way of God.

In the twentieth century the power of God comes into operation as men share the spirit and way of living of Jesus. God calls for men who will live their lives from His point of view and with His purpose revealed on Calvary. It is the Christ of Calvary who holds the key to the future. He is the true master and fulfiller of modern social aspirations. He is the true inspirer of men who seek by their own lives and labours to uplift mankind. For He did not count it worth while to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men ; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross. And because this Christ is real and living to-day, the very God in our midst, He is master of the morrow, as well as of modern life. I shall never forget the thrill that passed through a great assembly of three thousand people gathered last summer in Philadelphia when the Rev. J. T. Forbes, of Glasgow, said in his impressive way : " If I had to deliver a dying message to-day it would be, Let us be Christians without compromise." That is, let us make way for the Atonement spirit, the Spirit of God in our own lives, that we may be channels by which the untiring love of God may flood our world. Let us believe that whenever a high impulse moves in us to give rather than to get, whenever we are ready, at our own cost and charges, to arrest and destroy the suffering of others, whenever in business we put the

general interest before our own, whenever we cast our influence and possessions, despite pain, into the stock of human good—we are not acting as curious exceptions to universal law, nor led merely by the sentiment of a weakling, but are in vital touch with the eternal and redeeming work of the God of the ages, we are caught up into the central movement of God as he reveals Himself peculiarly and characteristically in the work of Atonement. Let us also be sure that the mighty surge of life to-day, lifting and bearing away structures that have divided and perplexed mankind for ages, and pulsing with the aspirations and tears of millions of souls, ringing with indignation in face of modern civilisation, and moving toward a vaguely imagined nobler life for the human brotherhood, is not a mere temporary fashion in feeling, or quaint vagary of our weird human nature, but is rightly to be interpreted only when we see it in the light of Calvary and know that the God who would reconcile us to Himself at so great a cost, is ever in our midst with the same purpose, the same self-giving, and the same power of conquering love.

NEWTON H. MARSHALL.