

## Sin and the Atonement.

BY THE REV. JOHN M. SHAW, M.A., LOGIEPERT.

SIN is fundamentally and essentially the introducing of a great cleft or rupture into God's world through the misuse of what Dante called 'the dread gift' of free will. Religious history everywhere, outside Christianity, shows us man under the sense of guilty responsibility for this fatal 'fall' from God's purpose and rebellion against His will, attempting to knit up the rupture and overcome the cleft, and so bring himself back into the great Fellowship.

Now the foundational proclamation of the Christian religion is that what man in all ages and races and conditions has been, and is, attempting by propitiation and sacrifice and self-torture, but attempting vainly, to do, God Himself in His Infinite Love and Grace has done, and done once for all. He has provided the Atonement, so that there remaineth now no more sacrifice on our part for sin. When we ask how God has done this, we come to the great fact which is the primal wonder of the Christian Gospel, the fact of what is called the Incarnation—God manifest in the flesh—that fact, the essential meaning of which has been expressed by the poet thus :

'He sent no angel to our race  
Of higher or of lower place :  
But wore the robe of human frame  
Himself, and to this lost world came.'

As saith the Scripture : 'In the fulness of time'—that is, at the end of a long process of development or preparation, a preparation or development directly in the history of Israel, but indirectly in religious history outside Israel—'God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, to redeem' a sinful world ; sent Him forth from His eternal Presence and Glory, Very God of Very God, to take upon Him our human nature, becoming born into this sinful world of ours a little child, and growing up through childhood to boyhood and then to manhood, that thus born and thus growing up, very man of very man, He might in our human nature, and from within humanity, offer the sacrifice well pleasing to God for our redemption, and thus knit up the rupture and bind back God's world again to Him.

The chief work of the latter half of the nineteenth century—of the last sixty or seventy years—has been the re-emphasizing of the genuine

historical humanity of Jesus, and with that the re-discovery of what is called the Gospel of the Incarnation, the Gospel of the Life. The full results of this great re-discovery we have not even yet entered truly into. But, with all the great services which it has done, and has still to do, this recent almost concentrated emphasis on the Incarnation has been apt to call attention off too much from the great fact in which the Incarnation issued, and in which the significance of the Life is uniformly represented in the N.T. as alone having its true consummation or completion, namely, the Death on the Cross. To the N.T. writers, both of Gospels and of Epistles, the Death was the predominant fact, the fact of supreme importance in the manifestation of Jesus Christ. This is reflected even in the proportion of space given in the Gospel records to the story of the last week of our Lord's earthly life and ministry, what is called the Passion Week. Taking an ordinary Bible, what do we find? Out of thirty pages of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, ten are given to the record of the last week. In St. Mark, out of nineteen pages, six are given. In St. Luke's Gospel, the proportion is a little less, but in St. John it is more. Out of twenty-four pages taken up with the whole story, ten are concerned with the last few days. Not only so, there are ample indications that in Jesus' own thought His death held a corresponding place as the fact of supreme importance and significance, the great fact and act of His life. Most of us, I dare say, have seen Holman Hunt's picture entitled 'The Shadow of the Cross.' The picture represents the interior of the carpenter's workshop in Nazareth, with Joseph and the boy Jesus at work. The boy pauses for a moment's rest from His work, and, as He stretches Himself in the doorway, the shadow of a cross is thrown by the sun on the wall behind. The picture may be fanciful in form, but the underlying idea is true to the facts. We cannot read the Gospels with any degree of attention without observing how from an early stage in His life, at the very latest from the beginning of His public ministry, the thought of His death was ever present to His mind as involved in His business or 'vocation' here on earth, as the culmination or

concentration of it indeed, the thing for which above all He came into the world. This great fact, and the meaning of it, is what we are to consider together now.

And first, and to begin with, let us remind ourselves that, in dealing with the death of Jesus, we are dealing with a veritably historical fact, not a legend, but something that actually happened, a fact of human earthly history. This it is needful to say at the outset, for in the religions of the pagan world we come across legends of gods who came to this world and died—Attis, Adonis, Osiris, and others,—and sometimes the case is represented as if the N.T. story of the death of Jesus has been shown by the comparative study of religions to be on all-fours with, and indeed a reflection of, these conceptions or ideas which were prevalent in the Græco-Roman world when Christianity came upon the scene. The cases, however, are altogether different. Attis, Adonis, Osiris, and the others are in no sense historical figures, and the legends of their coming to earth, and dying, and rising again are but figurative embodiments of the birth, decay, and reanimation of nature year by year. But, in the case of the death of Jesus, we are face to face with a plain, human, historical fact. 'Jesus of Nazareth was put to death in the reign of Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea.' Where do we read that? We read it in the records of the Roman historian Tacitus. The death of Jesus, that is to say, is a fact of human history, a fact of Roman history, recorded as such in the Roman historical books. Now, viewed thus, it was looked upon as the death of a criminal, of one who died not of old age, or of disease, or by accident, but of one who was put to death, and that the most violent and criminal death, in the prime of life, while still a young man. And this is all we can say of the death of Jesus from the point of view of purely secular history. We may say His murder was unjust. Lawyers acknowledge this. No two witnesses, the records tell us, could be found to agree together as to the charge brought against Him. Pilate declared that he found no fault in Him, and even Herod had not a word to say against Him. We may even say His death was a martyrdom, the highest or noblest instance in human history of a man who faced death itself rather than compromise with truth and righteousness. That, at most, is all we can say from this point of view. But, when we pass to

the Gospels and the Epistles, how differently the death is looked upon there. What a wide divergence, what a gulf even, there is between the point of view of the Gospels or the Epistles and the point of view of Tacitus! There the death is looked upon, not as the death of a criminal, not merely as an unjust murder, not even as a martyrdom, but as something very much more than that. It is represented as a fact of Divine history and significance. God Himself was in that fact, and in it in a unique way. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.' 'Having made peace through the blood of his cross,' He 'hath reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ.' The death, indeed, is looked upon as the supreme revelation of the love of God to a sinful world; the fact through which, above all, we have the Atonement, in such a way that the Gospel is concentrated in it, and the Gospel which we are called to preach is not merely the Gospel of the Incarnation—the Gospel of the Life—but above all, 'the Word of the Cross.' 'We preach Christ crucified, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.' And the question we have to ask ourselves is this: how such a death—a death which, looked at from the purely secular historical point of view, is a murder, at most a martyr's death—could come to be represented as a fact of religious history and significance like that?

Now the best way, I think, and the simplest way, in approaching an answer, will be to start from the oldest statement of the case, namely, the apostolic interpretation and explanation. This finds varied expression, but the truth expressed is the same. 'Christ died for our sins.' 'Christ hath suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.' 'He is the propitiation for our sins.' 'Our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ.' 'In whom we have our redemption through his blood.' This is the uniform apostolic representation and interpretation of the fact. Sometimes it is spoken of as if it were Paul's peculiar doctrine, and no doubt it is in Paul that we have the fullest and the clearest and the most developed statement of it; but it is the teaching equally of Peter and John and all the Apostles. Moreover, it is in line with Jesus' own interpretation. It is very often said to-day that the Apostles gave a new emphasis to the death of Jesus, an emphasis which He Himself did not give, and that to this extent they distorted His teaching. So

we have, for example, in some quarters the contrast drawn between what is called the 'Gospel of Jesus' and the 'Gospel of Christ'; and Paul in particular is spoken of as 'the founder of Christianity as a Gospel of Redemption.' Now there is indeed less perhaps than we might have expected of explicit teaching from Jesus Himself as to the meaning of His death, so far as our records go. And the explanation for this is sometimes stated in this way: that 'Jesus came not to preach the Gospel, but that there might be a Gospel to preach.' And that is very true. But let us remember also, what is so clearly reflected in the Gospels themselves, namely, the utter inability of the disciples to understand the significance of their Master's death. Not only were they unable to grasp its meaning, they refused even to believe that it could ever happen. And so Jesus had to say to them, 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth.' It was only after the death, through the interpretation of the Spirit succeeding on the Resurrection and Ascension, that the meaning of the fact came to be understood by them. Jesus in the very nature of the case, therefore, was limited or restricted in His teaching of His disciples in regard to His death. He had to accommodate His teaching to their state of mind. And yet, with all that, there are at least two great occasions recorded in the Gospels on which our Lord plainly indicated the sacrificial or atoning character of His death. One was when the disciples were quarrelling about precedence in the Kingdom, and Jesus said unto them: 'Whosoever would be first among you shall be servant of all. For verily the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mk 10<sup>44f.</sup>). The other occasion was at the Last Supper, when, on the night before the Cross, He made one last great attempt to lead them to understand the meaning of the great fact of the morrow. Taking the cup, we are told, He said: 'This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.' The 'new covenant' established in the death of Jesus—that was just the restored bond, the union between God and man reconstituted on the basis of our Lord's sacrifice for sin. In both cases we see Jesus Himself plainly indicating that His death would possess a sacrificial, atoning, or propitiatory efficacy. 'Sacrifice,' 'Propitiation,' 'Passover,' 'Ransom'—such, then,

is the circle of ideas used in the N.T. both by the Apostles and by Jesus Himself to explain or represent the central significance of the death on the Cross.

Now, to-day, it is often said that these are ancient or primitive ideas. To speak of the death of Jesus as a 'sacrifice' or a 'propitiation' is, it is said, to use ideas or figures borrowed from O.T. ritual, and thus to run N.T. thought into O.T. moulds. To connect the death of Jesus with the sacrificial ritual of the O.T., that, it is represented, may have been natural enough for a Jew, but for us to-day it is old-time and obsolete. Now we may admit that sometimes too close a parallel is attempted to be drawn between the details of the O.T. ritual and the death of Jesus. Though, let it be said, if we believe the O.T. to be a preparation for the New, then we may well hold that the O.T. ritual was itself meant to be a preparation for the understanding of Christ and His saving work. But let us get behind forms and figures and ritual, to the facts on which the interpretation is based. The comparative study of religions shows us that sacrifice is a universal fact, a phenomenon of the religious history, not of Israel only, but of every people. And the deepest and the truest element in this universal practice of sacrifice is not merely the expression of man's sense of dependence on, and gratitude to, God, but the feeling of the dis-union or dis-harmony between the human and the Divine, and the consequent need for making propitiation or reconciliation of some sort. The practice of sacrifice, that is to say, is the testimony of history to man's universal sense of the fatal rupture—a rupture for which he is responsible, and therefore guilty, and for which he feels some atonement or reconciliation necessary. It is this need, the deepest need of man everywhere and always, that is claimed to be satisfied, and alone adequately and for ever satisfied, by the death of Jesus. And this it is that is the essential and abiding truth behind the view of Christ's death as sacrificial or atoning.

Now to explain how Christ's death accomplished this Atonement, and the necessity of His death for Atonement, this brings us to the consideration of what are called 'Theories of the Atonement.' We cannot here enter into these in detail. Suffice it for the present purpose to say that, many and varied as these theories have been and are, they divide themselves into two great classes. They range themselves on either side of one great dividing line. On the one side, we have that class

of theory which finds the chief atoning efficacy of the death of Jesus to consist in its influence on man, and on man's attitude to God. On the other, we have those theories which, while recognizing the element of truth in this class of theory, lay stress rather on the influence of Jesus' death on God, and on God's attitude to man. The former, which emphasize the manward aspect, are called 'subjective' theories of the Atonement; the latter, which lay stress on the Godward aspect, are called 'objective' theories of the Atonement.

To refer to these briefly, and to take the former first—the 'subjective' theories. These theories find the atoning efficacy of the death of Christ to lie chiefly in the fact that there we have the manifestation or demonstration, the supreme manifestation or demonstration, of the love of God to a sinful world—the proof that God still loves and cares for man, even in his sin, and seeks his holy welfare. In the life and in the teaching of Jesus we have the first revelation of this fact, of God's holy love suffering because of sin, and yearning over the sinner. But it is in the Cross we have the supreme manifestation or demonstration of it. For there we see the length to which God's suffering love will go in seeking to convince man of His reconciling love, and, as such, the death of Jesus is fitted to make to man a commanding moral appeal to lead him to repentance and new obedience. The chief efficacy of the death lies, that is, in the moral influence it is calculated to have on man in the way of reconciling him to God. So these theories are sometimes called by the general name of 'moral influence' theories. Now, let us recognize the great element of truth for which this class of theory stands. It conserves evangelical truths which the other class of theory has often tended to do less than justice to. This truth, to begin with, that Christ is not to be conceived as coming in between an angry God and a sinful world, and by His suffering and death appeasing an else irreconcilable God. Christ's death has sometimes been represented in that fashion, as 'softening the heart of the Judge,' as if it was Christ's sacrifice that evoked God's love to man, and made Him willing to be reconciled. That is an altogether unscriptural representation. The uniform N.T. view is that it is God's Fatherly Love that is the primal spring and source of the Atonement. The atoning work began on the Father's side; God the Father loved, and so provided the Atonement. As Jesus Himself said,

'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.' 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.' This great foundational truth of the N.T. this class of theory conserves. And also this further truth, that, if we are to do justice to the atoning efficacy of Christ's death, the death must be viewed in close organic connexion with the life. The suffering and sacrifice of the death was but the culmination and consummation of the suffering and sacrifice of the life, and as such only, as the death of such a life, had it atoning efficacy. The tendency of evangelical Protestantism has been, I fear it must be confessed, to give too exclusive attention to the death of Christ out of this organic connexion with the personality and the life.

But, with all this truth, the question remains: Is this an adequate, or sufficient, explanation or representation of the atoning efficacy of the Cross? True, so far, with a great element of truth, is it the full truth, is it the deepest truth? The question, it seems to me, cannot but be raised: If this is all, and if this is the deepest element in the atoning work—the influence, namely, of the death on the mind of man, an appeal to him to be reconciled to God because of this supreme demonstration of God's suffering love—how could Christ's death show God's love? If I may take a homely illustration which I hope will not be considered irreverent. Supposing, in crossing the Atlantic last week, some fellow-passenger had come to me on deck and said: 'I have a great friendship for you, and, to prove the genuineness of my friendship, I am to cast myself overboard into the sea and be drowned.' How, we ask, could such an act prove that person's friendship for me? Would it not seem an altogether arbitrary, even a suicidal act? But suppose, on the other hand, that by accident I had fallen overboard and was in danger of being drowned, and that then my friend had cast himself overboard to save me; that were an altogether different situation. There would be a connexion then between his act and his friendship. The only suffering, that is, that can truly reveal or demonstrate love is that which is necessarily involved in love's purposes. There must be some necessity, some 'needs be' about the act, else it can appear only arbitrary. And what we feel about the merely subjective theories of the Atonement is that by themselves alone they do not satisfy this elementary demand

of our moral reason. More than that, however, they are not adequate to Jesus' own representation of the case. His death, in His own view, was not an accidental fact. 'The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be killed,' He said. 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth may in him not perish, but have eternal life.' There was to His own mind, apparently, a necessity about His death—a necessity that was no mere outward compulsion. In that sense it was voluntary. Did He not say, 'I lay down my life of myself: no one taketh it away from me?' 'Thinkest thou that I cannot beseech my Father, and he shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?' The necessity or 'needs be' of His death was an inward, objective necessity as represented by Christ Himself, especially in His sayings, referred to above, about the 'ransom for many' and 'the blood of the new covenant.' Like the sufferings of 'the Servant of the Lord' in the O.T. evangelical prophet, His sufferings and death were expiatory, or propitiatory. Indeed, it is significant to note that there are indications that it was this very prophecy of the Servant of Jehovah, who, saved by suffering for his people, as depicted in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, which He knew Himself to be fulfilling in His death. The necessity of His death, that is to say, was not merely manward but Godward. It was involved in His 'vocation' of restoring man to reconciled, saving fellowship with God. What this necessity was, we may not be able to define with any great exactitude. But, at least, we can see the direction in which it lay. It was the outcome of God's Holiness, and of God's holy loving purposes for His sinful children. God being who and what He was and is—He in whom the moral order and the moral purposes of the universe are constituted—His forgiveness could be granted, and can be granted, to sinful man only on such terms as should on the one hand do right by His own holiness, and on the other ensure ours. That means, the forgiveness that can be bestowed on sinful man must be a forgiveness that at once ensures respect for the righteous order of the unwise violated by sin, and induces true penitence and moral amendment on the part of the sinner. And Jesus, by His suffering and death, satisfied this twofold requirement. He made it

possible for God to be at once Holy and Just, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. The atoning efficacy of His death on the Cross lay therefore in the influence it had not merely on man's attitude to God, but, first and foremost, on God's attitude to man. This is the inalienable truth for which the so-called 'objective' theories of the Atonement stand—the truth which we must maintain and conserve at all costs, if we are to do right at once by Jesus' own representation and that of the whole N.T., and by the demands of the morally awakened conscience.

Now the objection has sometimes been raised that this 'objective,' or, as it is often called, 'substitutionary' view of the Atonement is, in the very nature of the case, immoral. It is contrary to our moral sense—so it is sometimes represented—to suppose that one could suffer in this way for another, and so let that other off the due reward of his or her wrong-doing. And I must frankly confess that this objection does seem to me to be valid against certain statements of the theory—for example, against the Reformation doctrine of Substitution. If Jesus be but one more in the race, one individual suffering for other individuals, I do not see how the objection is to be answered. But if He be such an One as He claimed to be, the 'Son of Man' Himself, not one man more in human history, but He in whom humanity itself is summed up and represented, and, as such, One who is not an outsider to any man, then the objection falls. For then His vicarious suffering is a case not of simple substitution, a mere *quid pro quo*, but rather of identification. As 'Son of Man,' the 'Second Adam,' He could identify Himself with sinful humanity, and did identify Himself, in such a way as to 'say Amen from within humanity' to the condemnation of God on sin, and suffer all that this involved. The place of such vicarious suffering, the suffering that comes from identification, as a factor in the moral development of the race and the moral order of the world, evolution has shown us more clearly than ever—the father, for example, suffering in and for his son, or the mother for her child. There is nothing arbitrary about such suffering. It is the necessary outcome of the organic constitution of the human race. And Christ's vicarious suffering is but the highest instance or illustration of this law of the organic moral order. For being such an One as He was, He could come, and did come, into such relation

to the human race as to be more utterly identified with it than even a father can be with his son, or a mother with her child. What this identification of Christ with sinful man in His life and above all in His death involved—all that it involved—we cannot tell. We would need to be God Himself to tell that. The mystery, the unfathomable mystery, of the suffering of Christ involved in His redemptive work is impressed on us, especially as we read the story of the agony in Gethsemane, with its complex of sorrow and conflict and submission, and then as we ponder His cry on the Cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'—that, coming at the end of His wonderful life of holy fellowship and perfect faith and obedience. We feel that here we are in the presence of something altogether different—different indeed by the whole diameter of difference—from ordinary human suffering and death. It was, let it be said, not merely the physical sufferings of His passion and death on the Cross that led to that agony and conflict. These were not of the essence of the case; these were not His chief or deepest sufferings. It was the inner agonies of a holy soul like His in the concentrated grapple with the consequences of man's sin, in His work of making atonement and reconciling us to God, being 'made of God sin on our behalf,' and in it going through an experi-

ence of unthinkable loneliness, an experience of spiritual forsakenness and abandonment even by God Himself. This is an awful thing to say, the very essence of awfulness, and yet to say less—to say that Jesus in uttering these words was but taking up the words of the Psalmist in a momentary mood of depression like his—is to involve us in the much more incredible acknowledgment that, in the culminating moment of His work, Jesus' faith in His Father for the first time was less than perfect. It was a forsakenness and a desolation which He experienced in order that it might never have to be ours. In Mrs. Browning's striking and solemnizing words:

'Yea once Immanuel's orphaned cry, His universe hath shaken—  
It went up single, echoless, "My God, I am forsaken!"  
It went up from the Holy's lips amid His lost creation,  
That, of the lost, no son should use those words of desolation.'

It cost God that, it cost Christ that, to knit up the rupture caused by sin and thus make possible the fulfilment of His chief end and aim in the whole evolutionary process. And the only fit attitude on our part, in relation to it, is the attitude of adoring wonder and whole-hearted surrender.

'Love so amazing, so Divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.'

## Literature.

### THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY.

LAST month we noticed a volume of the 'International Theological Library'; this month we are able to notice other two. They are (1) the first volume of Professor George Foot Moore's *History of Religions*, and (2) *The Philosophy of Religion*, by Dr. George Galloway (T. & T. Clark; 12s. each).

Professor Moore has been best known as an Old Testament scholar. His commentary on *Judges* in the 'International Critical' series gave that series not a little of its fame. But some years ago he was transferred to the Chair of the History of Religion in Harvard University, and has given himself with his wonderful powers of study and insight to that fascinating subject. Readers may rely upon the information which his volume contains

being up to date, and they may be sure that his whole attitude will be in accordance with the best special knowledge available. He does not profess to be a first-hand authority on all the religions which he describes in this volume; but he does profess to have studied the authorities with all his might.

This volume contains a history of the religion of the following countries: China, Japan, Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, India, Persia, Greece, Rome. The order is nearly from East to West—a non-scientific order perhaps, but very convenient—and it is not possible yet, if ever it will be possible, to take the countries of the world in any order that could be spoken of as strictly scientific.

Together with its reliability of fact the volume has the welcome characteristic of a clear, nervous English style. It is a joy to read it, and the