CHRIST AND HIS CROSS

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BY

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The Meaning of the Cross,
The Meaning of the Resurrection,
Jesus Christ and the Meaning of Life,
&c., &c.

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TO MY WIFE

CONTENTS

THE FRED J. CATO LECTURESHIP

In response to an offer made by Mr. Fred J. Cato to provide the endowment for a lecture that should be an original contribution to Theology, and of interest and value to Australasian Methodism, 'the Fred J. Cato Lectureship' was founded by the General Conference of the Methodist Church of Australasia at its triennial meeting in Sydney, May 19, 1932.

'The lecturer shall be a representative Methodist Minister or Layman, preferably from Great Britain, to be selected by the General Conference or by a Committee of the same, and he shall deliver the lecture or a synopsis thereof during the sessions of the General Conference. The Publication of the lecture shall be subject to the following conditions:

(*a*) That the subject matter of the lecture shall not have been previously published.

(*b*) That it shall subsequently be published to the satisfaction of the Committee.

'Mr. Cato's desire and purpose were to enrich the life and thought of the Australasian Methodist Church and to encourage and foster fraternal relations with Methodism of other lands.'

A. J. BARCLAY, President-General.
A. E. ALBISTON, Secretary-General.

PREFACE

THE more essential parts of this volume were delivered as the first Fred J. Cato Lecture during the sessions of the General Conference of the Methodist Church of Australasia, held in Melbourne in May of this year.

It was part of the intention of the foundation that the lecturer should, where possible, visit the chief centres of Australia and gain some acquaintance with the work of the Churches, and especially of Methodism. This I was able to do so far as a stay of two months in that great continent allowed. I should probably have learned more if I had spoken less, but this was determined for me. My memory is now a poor thing and oblivion follows hard upon my heels, but it would be quite impossible to forget the generous kindness I received on all hands during my stay in Australia.

Two other memories will remain with me. One is the warmth of feeling towards the home country which continually takes the visitor from England by surprise, and reveals

a profound spiritual bond which has little or nothing to do with considerations of mutual advantage. The other was the courage of those who have done or still are doing the work of pioneers in that huge continent so full of difficulty and of hope.

Twenty years ago I wrote, in the series of Manuals of Fellowship, a short study of some twenty pages on *The Meaning of the Cross.* It was little more than a pamphlet and was intended for the help of Study Circles and similar groups. Some few lines in the present book I have reproduced verbatim from the Manual, because I found I could not say what was needed in better or fewer words. I have not abandoned the argument outlined there. It was, however, only a beginning. I have found it an open road and pursued it during the intervening years, finding no barrier to turn me back. For myself, at any rate, the significance of the Cross here traced stretches far beyond my range of vision and loses itself in the Infinite.

In the writing of this book I have had chiefly in view the many who are concerned with theology but not trained in it. They are concerned with religion; their religion obliges them to think and thinking raises questions which demand answers. The size and scope of the book therefore has been to

some extent determined by the audience which I had in mind: but this does not mean, I hope, that I have shirked any of the labour of the task or failed in due loyalty to the greatness of the theme; and the theologians must forgive me for avoiding technical terms and taking pains to be intelligible to the inexpert.

W. R. M.

December, 1935.

INTRODUCTORY

Blest Cross! Blest Sepulchre! Blest rather be
The Man that there was put to shame for me!

JOHN BUNYAN.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

'THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH,' it has been said, 'has never formulated a doctrine of the Atonement. . . . The atoning work of our Lord has been discussed as vigorously as His Person, and, at least in the Western Church, a good deal more persistently; but the discussions have never been brought to a head. There is hardly a conceivable interpretation which cannot claim some high authority; there is no interpretation which can claim supremacy.' This is true, and it is important, not as indicating a sealed mystery where the inquiring mind is 'out of bounds'; but rather as leaving an open door for further inquiry and more light. The need for such inquiry is indeed urgent to-day, because the situation is unique. The criticism of past interpretations has left none of them standing; all are found, at one point or another, to be inadequate, or unworthy, and therefore unserviceable.

This was not so in the past. Although there was no credal pronouncement designating this or that interpretation as orthodox, this does not mean that ordinary Christian people were left without any interpretation by which their minds could travel without being put to confusion. The theologian whose business it is to study theories of the Atonement may be bewildered by their variety and their divergences, but simple believing Christians were not so bewildered, because they were not aware of these rival theories and their inconsistencies. They were only aware of the one that was offered them. It was suggested in the liturgies and the ritual of their worship; it was taught them in definite instruction, and was so widely accepted that it had all the force of authority for those to whom it was proclaimed. And further, whatever the theory, it had always enough of the truth, and answered so far to the scheme of things as seen at the time that faith and reason could have honest dealings with each other.

It is a mistake to suppose that ordinary unlearned Christians were content to believe merely that there was *some* sort of connexion between the death of Christ and the forgiveness of their sins, without troubling to inquire what that connexion was. It would be

nearer the truth to say that they thought the connexion self-evident. If they sang

> He knew how wicked men had been,
> He knew that God must punish sin,
> So out of pity Jesus said
> He'd bear the punishment instead,

they were not sophisticating; they were not solving a problem; they were, in all child-likeness, celebrating their deliverance. It is true that what they sang is not warranted by Scripture, and could not now be sung by most of us without challenge. But it was not all untrue. Some of the questions which we cannot evade had not emerged for them, and, if they mistook vicarious suffering for vicarious punishment, they were nevertheless moving in the region of great moral realities. When a modern hymnal reprints the hymn, it omits the offending verse, and signifies thereby the abandonment of a certain interpretation of the Cross, but of course it puts nothing in its place, and the gap must surely strike any attentive reader as significant. The same process may be observed in the case of other hymns. In the hymnal[1] which I know best, there used to be a verse which read:

> For what you have done
> His blood must atone:
> The Father hath punished for you His dear Son.

[1] *The Methodist Hymn Book.*

So it was in 1876. In the 1904 revision the word '*punished*' disappears and the non-committal word '*stricken*' is substituted. In 1933 the whole verse disappears.

Again, in Charles Wesley's hymn ''Tis finished! the Messias dies' there were two verses as follows:

'Tis finished! all the debt is paid;
Justice divine is satisfied;
The grand and full atonement made;
God for a guilty world hath died.

The types and figures are fulfilled;
Exacted is the legal pain;
The precious promises are seal'd;
The spotless Lamb of God is slain.

In 1904 these verses were omitted. In 1933 the hymn disappears. It disappears, not because it is a poor hymn, but because it says what the revisers could no longer believe. But what do we believe instead? What is our better interpretation?

It is not to be wondered at that some serious thinkers, looking at the long series of inadequate explanations, disowned one after another, should come to the conclusion that the problem is insoluble—insoluble perhaps in the very nature of things. Sometimes an attempt is made to distinguish between the 'fact' and the 'theory' of the Atonement,

in the hope that we can hold to the fact and dispense with any theory. But this distinction will not avail. The word ' theory ' is not perhaps the happiest one, considering its associations. But in this subject the search for a theory was, and is, simply a search for meaning, and for more and deeper meaning. A fact without a theory is, as Denney said long ago, a fact without a meaning, and we shall not be permitted to take refuge in a formula which is too sacred to be intelligible.

The early Christian confession—Christ died for our sins—has been offered as a sufficient statement of the fact, stripped of all theorizing. But of course the ' theorizing ' is already there, for the moment we say *for our sins* we are putting a certain interpretation upon a bare historical fact. But if our interpretation is true, then it is part of the fact. If we go on to say that He died as the substitute for sinners, or to satisfy divine justice, or to offer a vicarious penitence, or to make an appeal to the heart of man—our ' theory ' is either true or not true ; but, if it is true, it is again just part of the fact. There is really no such thing as ' bare ' historical fact. A theory of the Atonement, therefore, should mean the fullest and truest interpretation of the Cross which we can now attain, and it is not merely our right, but our duty to seek for it, with

all the honesty and humility of which we are capable.

There may be real humility in the declaration of some that we must be content to affirm that the death of our Lord was, in some way known to God but unknown to us, necessary to our salvation. But though the wayfaring man may of necessity pitch his tent there overnight, it is no real resting-place for mind or heart. Nor, as I think experience has proved, is an adequate basis for the Christian message of salvation to be found there. It is the will of God to enlighten, not to confound, our poor human minds. God's secrets are open secrets, and divine mysteries are all penetrable. With humility and patience we may enter in and find meaning, and, with answering wonder and deepening humility, find again more meaning. We shall never exhaust His mysteries nor comprehend them : we shall understand but a very little, but it will be real understanding and growing wonder.

To return now to the point at which we began, it is indeed a striking thing that upon this central theme there is no 'orthodox' interpretation of the Cross which can claim the explicit authority of the Scriptures or of the Christian Church throughout the centuries. If such an interpretation had been

found in the New Testament, the rigorous theory of inspiration which soon arose would have stereotyped that interpretation as authoritative and necessary to salvation, and thereby excluded all others. This is, of course, precisely what did not happen. No great theologian has been able to leave the question alone; no theologian has ever been able to speak for the whole Church.

It was natural to think that upon a theme so central to the Christian faith it was only necessary to assemble the materials provided by the New Testament, and from them derive an authoritative doctrine of the Atonement. Accordingly, throughout the centuries, the Bible has been diligently searched, not without result, but not with the result desired. The significant thing is that competent scholars, working on the same materials, arrive at diverse results. Every theory in turn justifies itself by what purports to be a true interpretation of the Scriptures. If we are inclined to blame the ambiguity of the records for this diversity among the interpreters, it must be remembered that the writers of the New Testament were not retired theologians, with time on their hands. They were ardent missionaries who had taken their lives in their hands; they were evangelists of a great message, charged with the

care of infant Churches and new converts, obliged to deal with a hundred immediately practical problems of thought and conduct in a new way of life. None of them ever thought of forestalling A. B. Bruce by writing a book called *Christianity Defensively Stated*. They did endeavour to witness to the glowing experience of life and freedom which had become theirs in Christ.

The earliest Christian thinking, therefore, as represented, for instance, by the Acts of the Apostles, hardly attempted an answer to the question which is so insistent for our minds—why it was necessary for Christ to die for our salvation. It is clear that, from the beginning, the experience of Christian disciples rested on the faith that 'Christ died for our sins,' and at first they neither needed nor offered any further explanation than that it was 'according to the Scriptures.'

This does not imply (although Rashdall[1] declared that it 'cannot be too strongly or too confidently asserted') that 'the doctrine was accepted simply and solely on authority'—that is, on the authority of the Scriptures—or, as he said elsewhere, upon a misunderstanding of the Scriptures. To this day the story of the Cross, told in heathen lands, or to people of an alien religion, who

[1] *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*, p. 82.

know nothing and care nothing for our 'authority,' makes a direct appeal, and does beget penitence and faith and assurance of forgiveness. It seems to them credible that the death of that Holy One should have some reference to their unholiness, and should carry some message of salvation—all this without any recourse to any authoritative Scriptures. It is surely inconsistent to maintain, as the 'moral influence' theory expounded by Rashdall does, that the death of Christ is the supreme appeal of the love of God to the heart of man, and then deny the directness of that appeal to the first generation of Christians—as we do if we explain their belief as resting simply and solely on authority. Men cannot believe that Christ died for their sins without believing something material about Christ, and about His dying, and about sin; and, however we may explain it, the human mind and the human conscience seem to find that each of these has some relevance to the others.

But it is true, as I have said, that the earliest Christian teaching does not appear to have passed on to any further explanation of the connexion between the death of Christ and the putting away of sin. Perhaps in the ardour of the new experience it was not possible for them to feel the need of any such

explanation. In any case, there was no one intellectually capable of pursuing the question until St. Paul arrived; and, though St. Paul comes nearer to a theory of the Cross than any other of the New Testament writers, it cannot be said that even he did more than provide materials for a theory.

With such data as the New Testament provides, we might indeed have come sooner to something like general consent in the interpretation, but for reasons other than the fragmentariness of the materials. It is because at a score of different points the decision does not depend on scholarship or scientific impartiality. In questions of this ultimate kind we all have our unconscious affinities, inhibitions, unsuspected preferences, astigmatisms, quick and dead cells of the brain. Above all, we may go astray because we are endeavouring to interpret an experience immeasurably richer than our own. The reason why a particular expositor prefers one explanation to another may be—just because he prefers it. No one can pretend to immunity from disabilities of this kind. All we can do is to set forth the truth as we see it as honestly as we can; then, in good time, the truth will bear witness to itself, shining out amid the inadequacies and

half-truths in which our imperfect apprehensions have placed it. Already this has to some extent taken place. There have been theories of the Atonement, long held and defended, which are now seen to be arbitrary, irrational, even gross. They no longer need to be attacked, because they have disappeared and no longer cumber the ground. And no doubt God has much more of this sifting work to do—to our profit and His glory.

A word may be permitted as to the presuppositions which one brings to such a theme as this. An important part of my argument is concerned with the Synoptic record, and some who are acquainted with modern criticism will think that the foundation there is too precarious for any confident building. I am not of that mind. I admit the validity of the critical method. Only the obscurantists now are left to fight the losing battle for infallible records. But if I cannot march under their banner, I am as little able to agree with those who think that we can know little or nothing of Jesus as He appeared amongst men. Von Hügel declares 'It is now a view fairly widespread amongst serious scholars that, almost entirely restricted, as we are, to the older constituents of our first three Gospels, for literal information as to our Lord's very words and acts,

we really do and can know but very little as to what He Himself actually taught, did, and was.'[1] The qualification which he adds is certainly not overstated: 'But such a view cannot be pressed with regard to the main features and characteristic lines of that wondrous teaching.' I have sometimes thought that Catholic theologians, both Roman and Anglican, are apt to abandon too easily the historicity of the Gospel records, because they have a second line of defence, and feel more sure of the infallibility of the Creeds than of the accuracy of the Evangelists. Certainly a good deal of modern criticism at work upon the Gospels is disintegrating in its effect. One may study some scholarly books on the Gospels only to find they leave upon the mind no picture of Jesus at all, and the faith of the first generation of Christians remains more of an enigma than before. Everything shrinks as the dissection proceeds. This belittling result occurs so often that it would almost seem as if some critics had adopted the rule 'of two meanings, choose the less.' Many of us who belong to the earlier generation, and were happy enough to enjoy a faith before we heard it challenged, found it needful later on, as a matter of honesty, to strip and begin the

[1] *Essays and Addresses.* Second series, p. 189.

quest anew with very few things of which we were sure. But these few sufficed. As we studied the Gospel records, we found that one certainty drew in another: one saying authenticated another: each clear characteristic found its fellow. Some process of spontaneous integration took place before our eyes: the lineaments of the Sinless One grew clear and became imperative for our minds: the growing harmony itself detected the discords and silenced them. The sanity and serenity of Jesus, the tolerance and the inexorableness, the kindness and the severity, the majesty and the intimacy—these things and such as these stood forth from the Gospel pages and were not, we were persuaded, our illusions, but God's revelation. It is no longer needful to contend for a doubtful word or uncertain detail here or there when Jesus Himself shines through the records, at once knowable and inexhaustible.

THE PARADOX OF THE CROSS

They took counsel against Him how they might destroy Him.—MARK iii. 6.

Ye asked for a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of Life.—ACTS iii. 14.

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.—GALATIANS vi. 14.

I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.—1 CORINTHIANS ii. 2.

CHAPTER II

THE PARADOX OF THE CROSS

THE CROSS is the chosen symbol of the Christian faith, and the Word of the Cross is the gospel of salvation. Every paradox becomes a commonplace by familiarity. But this one paradox at each fresh return of thought still stings and startles the mind. A cross is two pieces of wood, nailed together to make an instrument of torture, and death by torture. It carried originally no associations but those which a decent mind would shun. The lingering end of a crucified criminal was a sight to break the heart and sear the mind of any beholder. There was no sanctity which was not dishonoured when they crucified a man. Stripped of its specifically Christian associations, a cross might fitly have symbolized the incredible cruelty of man to man.

Whatever offence a man might have committed, to crucify him was a fresh crime. But this Man had 'done nothing amiss,' so

the malefactor confessed, some breath of the infinite purity of Jesus reaching him through the rifts of his torture and stirring him to sudden compunction. 'We have received the due reward of our deeds, but this Man has done nothing amiss.' 'Certainly this was a righteous man,' the centurion said, washing his hands of a bad business. But if neither the centurion nor the malefactor had spoken, the authentic records declare it, and the consciences of men, both good and bad, through all the centuries, bear witness to it. Such a death for such a Man! That *they*, being what they were, should crucify *Him*, being what He was—this might well have been remembered as the crowning infamy of human history. The Cross might have remained as the symbol of man's incurable depravity, proof against the divinest appeal, and the Word of the Cross only a verdict of infinite contempt for humanity.

But the New Testament knows no such word as this. Its message is far otherwise—'God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of Christ.' To Jews a stumbling-block, to Greeks a piece of foolishness, but to believers the manifestation of the power and wisdom of God. For this psychological reversal I see no other name than miracle. The sudden fading of all the human associations

of crucifixion, the inability to see it any longer on its human side as a brutal murder (which it was), the emergence of a new meaning, divine and all-absorbing, the transforming of a passion of just resentment against the ways of men into a nobler passion of wonder at the ways of God—all this is too remarkable to be comprehended in an easy historical assent. Familiar as the road may be, the wayfaring man and the scholar alike must slacken their pace here, and take time.

Consider the case of the eleven disciples of our Lord. They loved Him well enough to follow Him when others had left a 'hopeless cause,' and the signs of imminent danger were no longer to be gainsaid. They had given to Him all the love and reverence that they were capable of giving, and they gave it because He evoked it from them. At the end, bewildered and helpless as they were, they still hung about the scene, while the best and dearest and holiest Man they had known was dragged about from place to place for a night and a day, to be interrogated, humiliated, buffeted, stripped, lashed on the bare body, and at last horribly done to death within their sight. They were not stone, these men. Neither were they mean men, concerned only for their own skin; nor poor-spirited men, incapable of resenting

the murder of One whom they loved. Had they no fire of resentment? No decent rage against so foul a wrong? On far less occasion than this they were ready enough to resent a slight upon their Master. James and John had their notion of how discourtesy to Him should be visited. 'Wilt Thou that we bid fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' Where, then, is the passion of resentment? It simply is not there. The nearest approach to it is in half a dozen words at the close of Stephen's defence before the Sanhedrin. 'Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? and they killed them which showed before of the coming of the Righteous One; *of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers.*'[1] There, indeed, in that company both courage and sincerity required that he should charge them with their own sin, and it is done in a sentence. Yet, even so, their sin is not peculiarly theirs; it is only the repetition of the endless disobediences of Jewish history.

The address of Peter at Pentecost (when certainly courage was not lacking) is still more significant: 'Him, being delivered up

[1] Acts vii. 51, 52.

by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hands of wicked men did crucify and slay : whom God raised up.'[1] That is all : and, with that word, the special guilt of the immediate actors in the Crucifixion may be said to disappear from the pages of the New Testament. For here again the indictment, it should be observed, is not against the responsible authorities who contrived the death of Christ ; it is an indictment of the whole people. 'You used the hands of wicked men to crucify and murder.' The crime was the crime of the Jewish people, and it was in keeping with all their past. This dawning conception of the rejection of Jesus Christ as a sin in which they all had a part, the living and the dead alike, widened all the horizons and deepened all meanings. It left no room for denunciation of one by another, for it left no man clear. It changed the passion of indignation and perhaps the lust for revenge into penitence and a moving appeal.

The words of Peter convey something even more significant. Something had come to the first disciples in those early days after the Resurrection which lifted them high above the ordinary human reaction which we should have regarded as inevitable. It was

[1] Acts ii. 23, 24.

the disclosure of a purpose of God fulfilling itself through the deeds of men, and the recognition of a new meaning, divine and absorbing, in the whole sequence of events. It was not merely the fact of the Resurrection and the joy of recovering their Lord which accomplished this change. Had it been that alone, the Resurrection might have come only as a late undoing of what ought never to have been done. If the death of Christ remained a blank mystery, the Resurrection would have been another mystery, and the mind would have been left with a problem, not a message.

In that memorable walk to Emmaus recorded by St. Luke, it is Jesus Himself who propounds the question, '*Ought not the Christ to suffer and then to enter into His glory?*'[1] So far as His companions were concerned, everything in them rose up to declare that *He ought not.* But, when He had finished, they were saying with beating hearts, '*He ought. It became Him.*' Not till then could faith get on its feet or find a voice to speak. The revelation of the saving purpose of God in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus held and filled their minds. It was now a matter of little account what scribes and pharisees meant and intended

[1] Luke xxiv. 26.

when they had their midnight talks, and hurried to and fro 'collecting evidence.' What God meant was all in all. They were concerned with the act and deed of God, and they could not look for long at anything less.

Nothing could really have prepared the Apostles for what actually happened in Jerusalem during that last week, but Jesus did what could be done. After the confession of Simon Peter at Caesarea Philippi, the Synoptists tell us that Jesus *began* to forewarn them of the Crucifixion. He returned to the subject again and again, and His language was plain and unmistakable. They did not, however, receive it. '*They understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, and they perceived not the things that were said.*'[1] The very form of this wandering sentence sounds like an echo of their bewilderment. And, if they were bewildered, it was not because they did not understand the meaning of words. They were not stupid, and there was a reason. The mind can entertain incompatibles so long as they concern matters of little urgency or interest to us; but, when they concern things about which we really care, we cannot endure the flat contradiction of opposing facts. We hold to

[1] Luke xviii. 34.

the one and deny or ignore the other, and there is, of course, an element of moral choice involved. We may criticize the behaviour of the Apostles, who at the very time when their Master was going to His death, forewarned as they were, were yet carrying on a heated discussion about precedence and seats of honour—when their King should have His Court—and were apportioning in advance the rewards of their own loyalty. There was here, indeed, a moral bar to the understanding of what was happening beside them. But, apart from this altogether, it is questionable whether anything but the event itself could have brought them to believe that God would allow His chosen to suffer. The event teaches; sometimes nothing else will.

Yet, though they did not receive His forewarnings, they were not entirely unaffected. Unwelcome truths, when they have once knocked at the door, will knock again, and, though we deny them, we know they are there.

Moreover, there was something deeper and more inescapable than the explicit predictions of His death, which was silently disintegrating their preconceptions and bringing vague premonition of things to come. Like

the rest of us, they had their notion of what the ways of God must be and what they must not be, and when this their house was shaken they attended feverishly to the propping of the walls. We can see now that nothing less was being required of them than to exchange the temporal for the eternal, and to take up their abode in the unseen. This is not some precarious inference. It is not a question of a word here or a word there. The tone and mood of all the later chapters of our Gospels is prophetic of an end which was also a new beginning. A recent writer says gravely that 'the belief that our Lord anticipated both the Passion and also in some sense the Resurrection, is certainly deeply rooted in the Gospel tradition, *and may well be historically based.*' Criticism of this kind, with its conventional hesitation, seems to me to have lost sight of Jesus. It is just because He is moving on, aware and resolute, to the Passion, that the relations between Jesus and His disciples are disturbed and sometimes unhappy. We can see His pace quickening, and every step leads Him further away from their understanding. 'What I do, thou knowest not now' might have been said by Him to any one of them, any hour of any day, during the last stages. They were in one world and He in another. They were thinking of to-day

and to-morrow. He was in the world of the eternal. Their horizon ended with their own country and their own time. The horizons of Jesus were all the world and all the centuries. Yet it is they who are vague and bewildered and He who knows His direction. It seems perverse to refuse the impression which the records make upon us of a final concentration of all the energies of Jesus in one deliberate and far-seeing purpose which had no limit of time or place or person; and it ought not to surprise us to find that the one Man who knew how to deal with any man was the Man who was thinking of all men.

Our own poverty-stricken experience is a precarious guide to the experience of Jesus, but, such as it is, it may help us to appreciate what we are dealing with here, and give us some insight into His mind. Man was made 'looking before and after' with those two windows, memory and hope, given him in order that he might not live upon the fugitive moment—'to feed and sleep'—but possess the inheritance of the past and direct himself toward the future. At any real contemplation of the pilgrimage of life, with its far horizons, behind and before, some dim awareness of the infinite and eternal may reach

us as a kind of home-sickness, and it is always a deeply moving experience. Charles Wesley's claim to find in Christian experience

Future and past subsisting now

may be too daring a claim for mortal men: but our greatest moments give us a foretaste of it, for then our petty preoccupation with the parts of life is rebuked in a sudden awareness of the whole. A man's greatness or littleness may be measured by the horizons in which he lives and moves and has his being. If he lives for selfish or merely transient ends, he is under necessity to construct some kind of protective shell to defend himself against too much remembering or forecasting, and he may end by crawling in his shell from one feeding-place to another. But this hiding of ourselves from our true environment, which is the infinite, is nothing less than the disowning of our manhood and the slow dying of the soul. On the other hand, the regenerating moments of our life are those in which we find ourselves, our littleness, encompassed, subdued, and quickened by a sense of the infinite.

It may be well at this point to forestall an objection which will arise in some minds. I am, of course, aware that some modern criticism of the Gospel records will regard

such important inferences of the kind I suggest as precarious, on the ground that we cannot now distinguish between what may be the authentic words of Jesus and what must be assigned to the Christian community shaping, modifying, and amplifying the records, with more regard to edification than to accurate reporting. No doubt there are instances of this latter kind, but, if they are as frequent and as fundamental as some scholars suppose, we must conclude that we really know very little of Jesus. It will not, then, be the meaning of the Cross merely which is left in obscurity: every article of the Christian Faith is thrown into doubt. If the 'Jesus of History' is pronounced irrecoverable, I am persuaded that the authority of the Christian Church, in which some hope to take refuge, will be a feeble and temporary substitute for the authority of a Christ historically knowable and known. It is not possible for a reasonable mind to maintain the truth of the Incarnation if we find in Jesus nothing more of insight and prevision, nothing more of depth and prophetic penetration, than might safely be expected in any person of good intelligence. If the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, no doubt this involved human limitations; but if they were precisely our limitations He

could not be the Word. To put it at the lowest, they would be the limitations of greatness. Are we to be suspicious of the record whenever the thought of Jesus appears to outrange His contemporaries, and even takes the modern by surprise? This is to deny, not only His uniqueness, but even His greatness, for all the great masters in the realm of thought constantly put us to wonder by the depth and range of their insight. If we apply to the study of Jesus such standards as we should use in estimating ordinary men, and proceed to reject everything which rises into supremacy, we are disqualified from the start, and in the end we are left with more problems than we had at the beginning. If, however, we refrain from this belittling criticism, and allow the records to make their own impression upon us, we find a wholeness and simplicity in their pictures of Jesus, and a greatness also in the days of His flesh, which has *some* congruity with what men have since believed Him to be.

GOING UP TO JERUSALEM

And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem ; and Jesus was going before them : and they were amazed ; and they that followed were afraid.—MARK x. 32.

He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.—LUKE ix. 51.

CHAPTER III

GOING UP TO JERUSALEM

WE TURN, then, to the records to consider especially the later stages of the ministry of Jesus. That widening of the horizons which we noted as significant is at once the feature which arrests us. For Him every passing event stood in its true context of the eternal. No preoccupation with the present obscured the history of the past or hid the significance of the future; He was concerned with the whole. His help for each individual was as prompt and kind as ever, but each individual man was now EVERYMAN, a kind of representative; all his tribe were speaking and acting in him. When the authorities were taking counsel to make away with Him, not knowing what they did, Jesus saw what they were doing and recognized it for what it was. It was only what their fathers had said and done before them. This was what men were; this was what they were to be saved from. A long chapter in human

history was drawing to a close; He was there to wind it up and to open the new. The 'stage' now was 'all the world,' and the players were 'all the men and women in it.' The burden of Christ was nothing less than the need of the world.

If we follow the account of our earliest Gospel, St. Mark, this aspect becomes steadily clearer and more significant. After the confession of Simon Peter and our Lord's prediction of His death, He warns His hearers what following Him may mean, and makes it clear that it is a life-and-death business. 'If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.' I question whether these words were intended to lay down the conditions of discipleship for all time. In spite of all our fervent language about the way of the Cross for all Christians, it is certain that we need a liberal dilution of the meaning of the word before it becomes relevant to any conventional standard of Christian living. It may be necessary to exhort Christians to accept some minor hardships, to do something a little uncongenial, to increase a subscription, but we had better keep some sense of proportion and abstain from references to the Cross in such connexions. The word recovers its concrete sharpness when we restore it to its

original context and remember that Jesus was going up to death, and that for all who travelled in His company it was to be a dangerous journey, with an uncertain end, and they would receive no safe-conduct pass from Him. To take up the Cross means a frame of mind in which you are not afraid to lose your life because you have already given it away. But while these words are addressed in the first instance to a particular audience at a particular time, and with a particular reference, there follow words which show that His eyes are looking far beyond the immediate occasion: 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also shall be ashamed of him, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.'[1]

The evangelist's account passes on to the Transfiguration.[2] No doubt there is an element of symbolism in the account. Part of that experience of communion with the Father was the secret of Jesus alone, and only in symbols could any of it be conveyed to us. This may be one of the instances where the more our interpretation is literal, the more it is impoverished. But it is sufficient for our purpose to know that the

[1] Mark viii. 34–38. [2] Mark ix. 2–8.

evangelists all show Him gloriously transformed, and represent Him as speaking with Moses and Elijah. These two names alone call up the whole history of God's dealings with His people, and when St. Luke tells us that the subject of their speech was 'the *exodus* which He should fulfil at Jerusalem,' the whole scope of the Christian Redemption, from its preparation in Israel to its consummation in Christ, comes into view. This is the subject of His thoughts at the time where He hears Himself named again as the 'Beloved Son' of God. Whatever else the record conveys, it cannot mean less than this.

When He comes down from the mount He finds an unhappy scene: a distracted father looking for help for his epileptic son; the disciples humiliated by their failure and endeavouring to explain it; the scribes and pharisees presented with an excellent opening and making the most of it. But when an appeal for help is made to Jesus Himself, His first answer is not addressed to the father or to any of those present. '*O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I bear with you?*'[1] It is a cry of pain, but not over the particular audience before Him. That strange assemblage was, after all, representative. They belonged to their

[1] Mark ix. 19.

generation, and their way of leaving out God, and mishandling every situation in consequence, was the old pitiful story of unbelief which seemed as though it would never end.

Still following St. Mark's account, the next incident is the question of the pharisees about divorce. The answer of Jesus here comes nearer to *legislating* than almost anywhere else. It would be impossible, for example, to make a legal enactment of the words, ' If a man smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other,' for this would miss the whole spirit of the word and reduce it to absurdity. But His pronouncement on divorce might go almost bodily into an Act of Parliament and could be enforced by the secular authorities. Its significance for our present argument is that He is deliberately dealing with the relations of men and women—not merely at that time and that place, but for all peoples and for all time. He departs from His usual habit—of refusing to legislate—because the issue that was raised was nothing less than the question whether a woman was property, or was a person and a child of God. So also in the incident which follows—the little children brought to Jesus to be touched; though He took them in His arms and blessed them, His words make it clear that He is

thinking not chiefly of those children but of all children; and, as a matter of fact, His thoughts about children have revolutionized the thoughts of the civilized world.

Again, when James and John made their request, bespeaking the places of honour when honours should come to be distributed, and the other ten were indignant, presumably because they were forestalled, Jesus, we read, called them all to Him, and gave directions for the society which was to bear His name after His death—His eyes still upon the far horizons.

Their way was not to be the way of the world, where to be honoured is to be excused from service and put in command of the service of others. Their way was to be the way of their Master, and greatness was to be reckoned by service—service unto death. 'For verily the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.'[1]

The characteristic which we have been tracing—the widening of the horizons—dominates almost every incident of the last week. The triumphant entry into Jerusalem startles us by its apparent incongruity with

[1] The consideration of these significant words forms part of the general argument in chapter viii, p. 134.

the way of Jesus. It would surely be true to say that He preferred quiet, personal, and unobtrusive ways. It was a principle with Him to avoid the spectacular, and He kept a watchful eye on any rising tide of mass emotion. But His entry into Jerusalem *was* spectacular, and even sensational—and it was intended to be so. He arranged secretly beforehand with some unknown disciple for the loan of the animal. He accepted from the crowd, as though it were His due, demonstrations of loyalty which came near to worship. Hope and expectation swept like a tempest over the multitudes. The prophecy of Zechariah which St. Matthew recalls in this connexion cannot have been absent from the mind of Jesus, and it is worth while to continue it beyond the point at which the evangelist stopped. 'Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the nations; and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.'[1]

When Jesus rode into the city that day,

[1] Zech. ix. 9–10.

silent among the shouting crowds, He knew how much and how little this vociferous enthusiasm meant. But He knew also that every habitable part of the earth had its representatives among the myriads gathered at Jerusalem that day, and all Jerusalem heard a message and were confronted with His claim before the night had come. The action of Jesus is consistent neither with humility nor good sense unless His mind had firm hold of a purpose which reached far back into the history of His people, and forward to a boundless reign of peace and blessedness. Nothing can save the Triumphal Entry from an intolerable theatricality if it was not the symbol of something at least as wonderful and transforming as the Christian Faith has declared Him to be. History has its comment to make. Now, after nineteen centuries, when He still has no Kingdom worthy of Him, and His people are so little like Him that the best of them are almost ashamed to claim His name, He yet has such a Kingdom and such a people as no one could have dreamed of then.

On the following day He 'cleansed' the temple. It was done deliberately, but not in cold blood. There was passion in the deed ('He overthrew the tables of the money-changers') and in the word ('My house shall

be called a house of prayer for all the nations, but you have made it a robber's cave'). Again, that note, 'all the nations'! It is not to be supposed that He expected by that one act to alter the customs that made the temple-courts a repulsive cattle-market. He knew that the traders would be back again to-morrow—a little more wary, and the worse because they were aware. But He was not thinking of what they would do to-morrow. His deed would remain. It must have seemed to those who cared for Him that He was storming the very citadel of His enemies, and it is true that He left them no room now for compromise or for dallying. He was forcing things to an issue, but His action is unintelligible and provocative unless it was the outcome of a purpose which looked forward far beyond immediate results.

The twelfth chapter of St. Mark opens with the parable of the Vineyard. The parables of Jesus, as we know, are nearly always intended to illustrate some one truth or to light up some concrete situation, and they must not be pressed beyond the occasion. But the parable of the Vineyard is different; it is of the nature of an allegory, and condenses the whole story of God's dealings with His people into a tale. Not many words known to men carry such a weight of meaning

as does that poignant sentence, 'He had yet one, a beloved son : *he sent him last unto them, saying, Surely they will reverence my son.*' It is right that we should try to understand all we can of the self-consciousness of Jesus, but we ought to know when He is beyond us, and the mind that could frame such a sentence with such a reference can only leave us wondering. In this connexion one recalls the lament over Jerusalem[1]—that tree which carried nothing but leaves, and those leaves not for the healing of the nations—recorded by Matthew and Luke. But the Jerusalem which moved Him so deeply was not the city of a date A.D. 26 or 27, not the city of walls and streets and merchandise, as, say, Pilate could see it. It was a Jerusalem stored with the tragic history of centuries, and now the scene of a last sacred trust forgotten and betrayed.

The story of the anointing at Bethany carries the same significance as that which we have been tracing hitherto. We wonder whether any of those present could have kept from tears when He gave to the woman's deed that sudden turn—'She hath anointed My body aforehand for the burying.' But some critics interpose a veto on the words which

[1] Matt. xxiii. 37 ; Luke. xix. 41.

follow—' Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever the gospel is preached throughout the whole world, that also which this woman hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.' I had not thought this word suspicious, nor found it necessary to treat it as a sort of marginal comment added in after years by the Church, when the subsequent facts suggested it. ' The Gospel ' was not a new word in His vocabulary. Nor does it seem open to question that our Lord did contemplate His gospel being preached throughout the whole world. In the situation described one would expect some generous indignation from Him in presence of the frigid criticisms of men who were too blind to know a beautiful thing when it was there ; and the warmth of His appreciation of the woman's offering—giving better and more timely than she knew—all this seems like Him, and like no one else.

There follows the account of the Last Supper. He Himself, we observe, had determined the time, the place, and the company ; and the climax of that memorable meeting is to be found in the words, ' This cup is My blood of the Covenant which is shed for many.' Jesus could have used no words more charged with spiritual history for those who were at the table with Him than ' Covenant

blood,' and none so piercing and profound for them as the words 'My blood.' He deliberately recalls the prophecy of Jeremiah—'Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant . . . not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers. . . . But this is the covenant that I will make . . . I will put My law in their inward parts and in their heart will I write it, and I will be their God and they shall be My people.'[1] In the hour when death is imminent, we expect a good man, fallible as he is, to attain a deeper sincerity and to speak the very truth. If he has spent his life for his fellows, he must now take leave of his work, and let it stand for better or worse, for no more now can be added. But such is not the language of Jesus, nor any backward look. He will have them look at His death and, in a manner, receive it and take it as the pledge of a new beginning. His death is to be the sharing of His inmost life with those who believe on Him and the inauguration of the new Covenant of God's remaking of men.

Such things as I have urged in the last pages will not be accepted without qualification at one point or another. But two conclusions seem to me to emerge beyond

[1] Jer. xxxi. 31–33.

reasonable question. The first is that Jesus is shown as concerned with a far wider audience than His own contemporaries, and with a work that was nothing less than the salvation of the world. In all the closing scenes His purpose has outrun the calendar days; the horizons have widened to the scale of the infinite. The barriers of time and place have gone down for His mind. Already He is passing from the here into the Everywhere; from His own age to all the ages; from His own people according to the flesh to that new family which He was to gather from all the earth. He is not, as we say, preoccupied or absent-minded, so as to be unable to attend to those immediately about Him. He does all that can be done for Peter—and for Judas; but it is as though a thousand Peters and a thousand Judases yet to be were in His view. Behind them all is Everyman.

The second conclusion is that, after a certain point in the history, Jesus with increasing intensity and concentration pressed on to Jerusalem and a foreseen death, which was to be, not the failure of His purpose nor its end, but the way to its consummation. His adversaries had made their choice and knew what they wanted. But He took the situation into His own hands; the time and the

place were of His choosing. At every stage His redeeming purpose outshone their pitiable deed, and from the beginning the Cross bore His meaning, not theirs.

WHY THEY CRUCIFIED HIM

I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this I also did in Jerusalem: and I both shut up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, and when they were put to death I gave my vote against them. And punishing them oftentimes in all the synagogues I strove to make them blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them I persecuted them even unto foreign cities.—Acts xxvi. 9–11.

CHAPTER IV

WHY THEY CRUCIFIED HIM

WE COME NOW to the question, Why did Christ thus steadfastly set His face to go up to Jerusalem? Why press on to a death which was not only foreseen, but almost invited? '*The Son of Man must suffer many things and be killed.*' What was the necessity which lay behind that 'must'? This is the question which any theory of the Atonement, any interpretation of the death of Christ, must attempt to answer. The attempts, of course, have been many. Some of them are obsolete now, and need detain us no longer. Others survive by the measure of truth that is in them, and must be considered at a later stage of our inquiry. But at the point which we have now reached there is a road forward which still keeps us among certainties, and is open to every Christian mind. Two questions require to be answered: (1) Why did men put Him to death? (2) Why did He lay down His life?

This chapter deals with the first. Why

did men put Him to death? Remembering what Jesus was, and what was the environment into which He came, it is clear that conflict was *inevitable*, and that His death was the one foreseeable end of the conflict.

In the first place, Jesus offended His contemporaries at the sensitive point of their patriotism. Patriotism, as we know, may be a noble and disinterested love of one's own country; it may also be a contempt of other countries, and, by successive stages of corruption, may sink to a 'moral lunacy.' Historically it shows itself as one of the fiercest and most intolerant passions known to man. The patriot seldom recognizes or tolerates any other kind of patriotism than his own, or, indeed, is able to conceive of any other. The patriotism of Jesus was not that of His contemporaries. Its passion is revealed to us in that heart-broken lament over Jerusalem, but it owed none of its heat to contempt of others, or resentment, or pride, or prejudice. He would have turned His people away from all their hopeless dreams of disputing with Rome for material sovereignty, and recalled them to their true vocation, which was the spiritual leadership of mankind. The mark of Jewish patriotism was to hate the Romans. Jesus told them to love their enemies. We need only go back less than

twenty years, and remember our own condition during the War, in order to realize the fierce resentment with which such a counsel would be received. If a Jew had used our idiom, he would have described Jesus as a pro-Roman, and asked no better reason for hating Him.

Further, all a Jew's contempt for the Gentile world was fortified by religious sanctions, for religion and patriotism were inseparable in his mind. If he were a good Jew, his patriotism was a part of his religion: if he were not so good, his religion was a part of his patriotism. The Almighty God, he thought, could do nothing more worthy of Himself than to break the oppressor and exalt the favoured and long-suffering people. The humiliation of their nation was the raw sore in every Jewish mind, and, since they could not understand the far nobler and more spiritual conception of patriotism which Jesus held, they were exasperated by it, and all the more exasperated because at times He seemed to be the one who might have fulfilled their hopes. If we wish to know what kind of tolerance an unpopular idea of patriotism may expect, it is not necessary to call in the historian to conduct us two thousand years back. Some of our own daily papers will be sufficient.

But there was a second count in their indictment against Jesus, and it went deeper. Coming before men as a teacher of religion, He seemed to the religious authorities to be undermining the very foundations of religion. No doubt there was a better religion amongst the contemporaries of our Lord than that which we encounter in its official representatives, as recorded in the Gospels. Pharisaism had a better side than the evangelists show us. That they do not show it was not their fault. They saw pharisaism in conflict with Jesus, and therefore they saw it at its worst. But it is clear that the prevailing religion was traditionalism. When the soul of a religion dies, the ritual often remains. Truth and reasonableness fade and make room for arbitrary rules and practices. To what grotesque lengths this submerging of reality may go, may be seen in the endless trivialities of the Sabbath rule as current in the time of Jesus. Thirty-nine different classes of prohibited labour, each with its subdivisions, refinements, extensions, evasions. The exposition of it reads like the Court etiquette of a mad king. How could Jesus have anything in common with those who thought that this pitiful kind of casuistry was the behest of God? 'You tithe your mint and anise and cummin, and forget justice and the love of

God.' We shall not understand the severity of our Lord's condemnation of the current pharisaism unless we see it as He saw it—as darkening the face of God and hiding Him from men.

The pharisees might have found the teaching of Jesus less intolerable if the irrationality of their own system had not presented so glaring a contrast to the infinite reasonableness of Jesus. But even the ignorant and uninstructed felt the difference in this respect between His teaching and theirs. The common people spoke of His authority, not at all meaning that He was dogmatic, but that He spoke as one who knew, and was convinced that we might know also. Religion, as He presented it, was not the affair of experts. He believed in the self-evidencing power of His message, and taught that it was only our insincerity which makes the ways of God seem obscure, and God Himself so hard to find. The grace and power of such teaching might have persuaded the pharisee; but, if it does not persuade, it must provoke.

Traditionalism, such as it was, *was* their religion, the house of their soul, and they had worked hard to build it. It was not to be supposed that they would be gentle with any one who was seen to be undermining its foundations. If Jesus was right—as sometimes

the troubled pharisee suspected—he had made an arduous journey for nothing—except to make return more difficult. All his prestige and position, all that he had worked so hard to win, was worthless, and most of what he had taught was false, if Jesus was right. Listening to Jesus, a pharisee may well have remembered the prophetic word, 'Your righteousness is as filthy rags'; but, when such a suspicion once crosses the threshold of the mind, a man must either yield or take up arms.

The motives of the Sadducees were of a different kind. Priesthoods in general have not earned a reputation for heavenly-mindedness under difficulties. Usually they have known how to defend themselves when attacked. They knew how to fight like ordinary people for their position, for their living and their world. Nothing that Jesus stood for had any place in their scheme of things, and, as soon as He was seen to be powerful enough to be disturbing, the Sadducees could be depended on as allies against Him.

The chief guilt of the Crucifixion lies at the door of the official classes; but what of the rest of the people? So far as the people were concerned, it is true that He had a measure of response. 'The common people heard

Him gladly.' 'They wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.' But His call to a national and decisive repentance, and a new return to God, to seek their blessedness where He said it was and not where He said it was not, to hear His words *and do them*, stirred no real response except among the few. A following of a kind at times He had, and it would have been formidable enough if He had allowed them to fight His battle in their way. But it would not have been His battle nor His cause. Their thoughts were not His thoughts nor their ways His ways. With most it was a superficial enthusiasm which came with the day and went with the night. With others, His word went deeper, for it was living and powerful, but if He carried the first line of their defences, He was repulsed at the second. To listen to Jesus with any seriousness was to find oneself borne upon a stream of new and disturbing thoughts and hopes and fears, on to a moral crisis in which everything was at stake, and there were few that did not turn back to the old ways again. Jesus in fact was too great to be negligible, otherwise they would have been glad to ignore Him. He came, so He said, to cast fire on the earth, and when men have built their house of 'wood, hay, stubble,' fire is the enemy. His

word was quick and powerful. His message broke into their secular world, and showed it mean and pitiful and insecure. The gathering enmity which we can trace in the gospel story was, from the side of His enemies, a mere matter of self-defence. They fought against Him with such weapons as they were accustomed to use, and those were the weapons which He had forsworn from the first. He would not fight: He would not fly: they would not change. So they crucified Him.

I am far from supposing that this aspect of inevitability is the whole meaning of the death of Christ, but it is an indispensable part of the meaning. It was not through the superlative wickedness of specially malignant men that Christ died. Those who were responsible actively or passively were fairly representative of the respectabilities. Religion the bondslave of patriotism, patriotism corrupted by contempt, prestige defending itself, inertia disturbed into action, insincerity exposed—such things are part of the story of mankind, and they supplied the motives for the putting to death of Christ.

WHY HE LAID DOWN HIS LIFE

I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again.—JOHN x. 17–18.

One who is all unfit to count
As scholar in Thy school,
Thou of Thy love hast named a friend—
O kindness wonderful!

Thou dwellest in unshadowed light,
All sin and shame above—
That Thou shouldst bear our sin and shame,
How can I tell such love?

NARAYAN VAMAN TILAK.

CHAPTER V

WHY HE LAID DOWN HIS LIFE

IT IS NOT DIFFICULT, then, to understand the mind of those who compassed and at length accomplished the death of Jesus. They were men of like passions with ourselves; they were of our stature. But it is another matter when we come to our second question: Why did Jesus lay down His life? For this means an attempt to understand in some measure the mind of Jesus Himself, when He went up to Jerusalem and to death; and the better we understand Him, the more do we find Him beyond us. It is not, as I believe, that the materials for a judgement are too scanty or contradictory. Fragmentary as our records are, the wholeness and transparency of His mind, the profound harmony between all that He did and said and thought, cannot be hid, and they make one ready to name Him the most knowable person in the world. It is the range and depth of His mind which defeat our labouring apprehensions—that,

and the unfamiliarity with the spiritual country in which He lived and moved and had His being. Hatred we know, and all its ways. Prejudice and fear, passion and caution, we know; but of love we know little, and our only chance of knowing the mind of Jesus is to understand what love is and what are its ways.

Love, as we know it, is often a give-and-take affair, where the mutual advantage is well in evidence, and it is part of the understanding that there are not to be any too unreasonable exactions on one side or the other. This is why the command of Jesus to love our enemies seems to many people absurd, and by many others is quietly deferred to some indefinite time to come, when possibly the absence of enemies may make obedience simpler. But occasionally we have seen instances of a rarer kind of love —a love which persists against contempt and indifference, which gives and receives nothing in return (save new demands), which survives the disillusionment of treachery and still refuses to despair. Whenever we see love of this quality, the wonder of it astonishes us as a thing incalculable, and hardly belonging to our world. Even our sense of 'justice' is assailed; here is something that ought not to be. No one ought

to spend like this ; certainly no one deserves to have such spending upon him, so the inward protest seems to declare.

It is love of this kind which begins to give us some insight into the love of Christ. Such love is never idle ; it is occupied with the one task of the sinner's recovery. Denied six ways, it finds a seventh ; repulsed seven times, it returns upon its amazing errand unto seventy times seven. To love a single depraved person means to devote oneself to his recovery, and to love to the uttermost is to devote oneself utterly. 'To seek and to save' one single lost character is to set out upon the longest and hardest journey known to human experience, with no guarantee that the search will be rewarded or that our strength will hold out to the end.

I may be permitted to recall an instance which came within my own knowledge. A good many years ago I knew a working man in the north of England whose wife, soon after her marriage, drifted into vicious ways, and went rapidly from bad to worse. He came home one Sunday evening to find, as he had found a dozen times before, that she had gone on a new debauch. He knew in what condition she would return, after two or three days of a nameless life. He sat down in the cheerless house to look the truth

in the face and to find what he must do. The worst had happened too often to leave him much hope of amendment, and he saw in part what might be in store for him. He made his choice to hold by his wife to the end and to keep a home for her who would not make one for him. Now that a new and terrible meaning had passed into the words 'For better, for worse,' he reaffirmed his marriage vow. Later, when some one who knew them both intimately, ventured to commiserate him, he answered, 'Not a word! She is my wife; I loved her when she was a girl in our village, and I shall love her as long as there is breath in my body.' She did not mend, and died in his house after some years, in a shameful condition, with his hands spread over her in pity and in prayer to the last.

I hope that no apology is needed for providing a concrete and contemporary instance of what love to the uttermost really means. It is not, of course, a disputable question, and assent is easy. What is not easy is to put ourselves under the power of such truth as this and to feel its poignancy and its majesty. Yet we shall not advance far into the meaning of the Cross of Christ until we have in some measure felt ourselves personally involved in the reproach and the

appeal of being loved like this. I cannot but think that the Christian Church would have been saved from some fantastic and some forbidding theories, if interpreters had been content to follow this guiding light—at any rate until it failed them. Any one who is familiar with the long debates associated with such words as propitiation, sacrifice, and satisfaction knows how soon discussion leaps off into abstractions, and we use language not knowing what we say. It will be necessary to examine later the conceptions which underlie such words, but the right way at present is to follow the road where it is clear and as far as it will go. It will bring us to the edge of the divine mystery, and even then those who are of the right spirit will not be stayed for want of a path which humble feet may tread.

We shall endeavour, therefore, to follow as well as we can what must have been the experience of our Lord, especially during the last months of His ministry. I say what *must* have been, because mere guesswork at such a point I hold to be forbidden. But we are entitled to argue from His character and His vocation, and it may be well to state in advance a certain conclusion to which the argument brings me. Both by His character and by His calling—and

for Him the two were one—Jesus was committed in life to a unique experience which in the nature of things flesh and blood could not long survive. 'To seek and to save that which was lost' imposed a burden upon Him from which His love never drew back, but which the human frame, dependent as it is on brain and nerve, and subject to exhaustion when the due limits are passed, could not indefinitely endure. The records, I believe, indicate that He knew this Himself, and was aware before the end that there was a breaking-point, and that it was not far away; and, with this in view, He was consciously hastening to the consummation of His death and resurrection.

Let us begin with the twelve, who were in a sense His peculiar care. He chose twelve men, it has been said, 'each capable of breaking His heart.' That they left all and followed Him was good, but they were twelve fallible men. One of them betrayed Him, and the loyalty of the rest more than once came near to collapse. Their perseverance could never be taken for granted. It was their Master who held them, and He held them only by continual watchfulness and delicacy of help. Simon Peter was the key man of the twelve. If Jesus had lost Peter He might well have lost them all.

But Simon wavered. 'Simon, Simon,' said Jesus, 'Satan hath claimed you back for himself; but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not.' Consider what it meant for our Lord to pray for Simon, that he should not lose all. But when we do consider, we are in depths where all our thoughts are drowned.

We can guess something of what such prayer must cost from the letters of St. Paul. Most of us as we read the letters of St. Paul have found ourselves wondering at the cost of that stream of passionate intercession which came from the heart of the Apostle. 'How unceasingly' he prays, sometimes with joy and thankfulness, sometimes with tears, always with the discrimination of real care and sympathy. 'God is my witness . . . how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request.'[1] Sometimes the passion of concern deepens to a real travail of soul—'My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you.'[2] 'I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Ghost, that I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's

[1] Rom. i. 9. [2] Gal. iv. 19.

sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh.'[1]

St. Paul, of course, is not alone in all this; he is the chief of a noble band of intercessors through all the Christian centuries; but it would be idle for most of us to pretend that we understand the cost, the burden, and the recompense of a life like this. Of one thing, however, we may be sure—the servant in this respect was not above his Lord. 'God is my witness, how I long for you all with a love that is not mine, but Christ loving in me.'[2] Jesus needed not to take lessons from St. Paul or any other in the secrets of prayer and concern for others. His nature was more serene than St. Paul's; the compensations in His case were more than we can guess, but the travail was there. When He prayed for Simon, virtue went out of Him.

Judas also was one of the twelve, but all of Christ's striving could not save him from himself. What manner of wrestling Jesus had for the soul of Judas the few details recorded enable us to imagine. Warnings and appeals were many, but they were all unheeded. Jesus washed the feet of Judas on the last night, along with the rest—again an appeal. He allowed him a place at the farewell meal, dipped the bread in the dish and gave it to Judas—a strange and moving

[1] Rom. ix. 1–3. [2] Phil. i. 8.

courtesy, which, in sheer horror of such desecration, might have stayed the man from the consummation of his treachery, even at that late hour. When nothing would avail, Jesus, unable to watch any longer this desperate determination to go on with the business to which Judas had set his hand, gave him the word, *What you are going to do, do quickly. Get it done.*

Take one further instance. They brought to Jesus a woman taken in adultery, quoted the law of Moses which enjoined the penalty of death, and asked His opinion, thinking to find occasion against Him.[1] When at His challenge the accusers all melted away, Jesus dismissed the woman with the words, 'Neither do I condemn thee. Go thy way,' He said, 'from henceforth sin no more.' But is it to be supposed that when the woman

[1] Seeley in *Ecce Homo* (chap. ix.) comments: 'The effect upon him was such as might have been produced upon many since, but perhaps upon scarcely any man that ever lived before. He was seized with an intolerable sense of shame. He could not meet the eye of the crowd, or of the accusers, and perhaps at that moment least of all of the woman. Standing as he did in the midst of an eager multitude that did not in the least appreciate his feelings, he could not escape. In his burning embarrassment and confusion he stooped down so as to hide his face, and began writing with his finger on the ground. His tormentors continued their clamour, until he raised his head for a moment and said, 'He that is without sin among you let him first cast a stone at her,' and then instantly returned to his former attitude. They had a glimpse perhaps of the glowing blush upon his face, and awoke suddenly with astonishment to a new sense of their condition and their conduct. The older men naturally felt it first and slunk away; the younger followed their example. The crowd dissolved and left Christ alone with the woman.'

was gone from His sight she was dismissed from His mind, carrying away with her, as she did, not only some gift of peace, but also the problem of an infected mind and much besides? Or did He think no more of the still worse plight of her accusers who went away unforgiven? Did she, did they, have no place in His prayers at the day's end, and was the prayer just a 'making mention'? Here surely were lost sheep, and He was the Good Shepherd. His character and His vocation supply the answer to our question. But the same question emerges continually in the daily contacts of our Lord's earthly life, and it demands the same answer. Jesus had no defence against human need. Necessity was laid upon Him. He 'so loved that He gave.' He so cared as to feel. Any man, any woman, who encountered Jesus any day, might leave with Him a fresh burden even to tears.

It is necessary to distinguish with some care at this point. The Incarnation means that our Lord had human limitations, but it does not mean that all our limitations were also His. Among ourselves the gift of sympathy is surely one of the most precious endowments of human nature. Without it, mankind had better have stayed at the animal stage. We have a special and instinctive

reverence for those who, forgetting themselves, are most sensitive to the needs of others. For though

> . . . in the sea of life enisled,
> With echoing straits between us thrown,
> Dotting the shoreless watery wild
> We mortal millions live alone,

yet, ' enisled ' as we are, we honour the more those who venture out upon the ' echoing straits ' which divide them from their fellows, and return with the hazards and cost of the voyage printed upon them, and their only freight—more understanding and more love. But this human power of responding to the need or sorrow of others has its limitations of two kinds, moral and physical. We may be limited in sympathy simply because we are selfish men, and either have no mind to concern ourselves with other people's needs, or perhaps are afraid of what it may involve if we ' let ourselves go.' And this is just sin. But there is another kind of limitation which is necessary and is imposed upon us. We may, God helping us, have a real concern for the condition of millions whom we shall never see, but the concrete instance, the immediate neighbour whose trouble is before our eyes, affects us differently. We may be aware that there are some millions of unemployed people who cannot find work ;

but if we encounter one single person who, after endless searching and continual refusals, is at the point of despair, his face and tone may haunt us day and night, may affect us more deeply than the most impressive statistics, and incidentally change our whole outlook towards others like him. No doubt it is true that a quickening of the imagination and widening of sympathy, so as to understand and appreciate whole classes of men with whom we have no personal relations, is one of the most urgent needs of our present civilization. But, even if this were achieved, a distinction would still remain between the invisible multitudes with whom we have indirect and incalculable relations, and the individual persons who are found on our part of the road, and to whom we cannot choose but make some response, right or wrong. We are not big enough to carry all the world. Further, God has not given us memories to retain every experience. No burden endures with just the weight which it had at the beginning, and the sorrows of others, as well as our own troubles, which affected us years ago, may have gone into oblivion. Some of them perhaps ought not to have been forgotten, but it was right that some others should. No doctor could do his work if he felt about every patient's trouble as acutely

as he felt about his first, or as if the patient were his own child. He cannot carry the ever-lengthening chain of each sorrowful house that he has visited through the years.

Our limitations were not the limitations of Jesus, but we know in part where they were like and where they were unlike. Unlike us, Jesus had none of the protection of indifference against the needs of others; nor was it possible for Him at any time to disclaim responsibility or say that any man's need was not His affair. He was more sensitive and discerning than the best of us, and, with 'the most vulnerable heart in the world,' never faltered in the constancy and courage of His sympathy. He was like us in His human dependence upon God, but unlike us in that His dependence was conscious, willing, and unwavering—that is, it was perfect faith. He was like us in what we may call the perspective of perception—there was for Him a near and a far, a foreground and a background in His experience. We know that, in our own experience, one single case of painful and incurable disease coming within our immediate circle, though it may remind us that there are multitudes of unknown people who are in the same condition, will stand in the foreground of the mind, distinct and separate from all the rest.

It was so also with Jesus. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is bold enough to say that Jesus 'learned obedience by the things which He suffered'—by the human experiences which He underwent. Each successive experience meant something to Him, and none of them was so far discounted by foreknowledge that the experience, when it came, brought nothing new to him. We can see that some tokens of love and tenderness shown to Him near the end were inexpressibly dear to Him as they came. Every instance of insight and of trust refreshed Him; but also every new instance of refusal, of wilful blindness, of hardness of heart, of treachery and cruelty, brought fresh pain to His heart, and required from Him what was always given—a fresh surrender of obedience.

Now, when we consider what it was to live after this fashion—never to hide Himself from any need or disclaim relationship with the meanest and the worst, to see His task daily increasing before His eyes and still retain the love that will not let us go; in a word, to bear the character of the Saviour of the world—it is no precarious inference to say that even the Son of Man could not indefinitely carry in a human frame a burden so awful. His love, indeed, could not fail;

His courage was not found wanting. But 'the outward man,' the bodily tabernacle, must break down under this ever-increasing strain.

Jesus knew this well, and felt it within Himself. He knew also that the manner of His dying must be a manifestation of His mission and of God's will. He knew, further, that death would not release Him from His vocation or end His work, but that it would free Him by the way of resurrection from human limitations, and put all authority and power in His hands. Therefore we see Him hastening to Jerusalem and to death, because He was also hastening to the Resurrection and fullness of life and power.

Many utterances of our Lord confirm us in this conclusion, but two instances will suffice. The incident of the epileptic boy immediately following the Transfiguration preserves a striking word which not one of His followers would have dreamed of inventing. Coming down from the mount and from that transfiguring communion with the Father, He finds Himself in a scene that was in the strict sense *godless*. His disciples humiliated by failure and heated with argument, the scribes enjoying their victory—a victory which meant that the epileptic is still a tormented epileptic—Jesus cried, 'O

faithless generation, how long shall I bear with you! how long shall I be with you!' It is the cry of a nature strained to the utmost limit, and uncertain how long strength will hold out. The cup was not yet full, but it was filling. Again, in the garden at Gethsemane we read that He 'began to be greatly amazed, and sore troubled. And He saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.'[1] '*Sorrowful unto death*' is His word, and we must not allow it to be weakened to a conventional phrase. How near to death is one who was undergoing the agony described by the evangelists! He knew of a sorrow which kills. While yet no scourge had touched His flesh nor any hand of violence been laid upon Him, He was pressed to the very edge of physical collapse by an inward sorrow which had nothing to do with bodily pain, but only with the sin of men whom it was His to save.

Jesus, then, knew that one way or another death was near. He knew that, however it came, it would come from men's sin—from men's sin even if they never lifted a hand against Him. And, since He knew also by now that it was the will of God that men

[1] Mark xiv. 33–34; Luke xxii. 44: 'And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground.'

should do with Him what it was in their hearts to do, and death therefore should come to Him that way—the secrets of many hearts being thus revealed—He went up to Jerusalem to challenge their sin and to accept death at their hands.

But death, as I believe, had for Jesus two aspects—an aspect of suffering and an aspect of release. Of suffering certainly, but not primarily of bodily pain. The sufferings of crucifixion were, indeed, such as hardly bear thinking about, but there were two thieves beside Him, and they also were crucified, and one of them, according to the records, bore himself worthily through it. The real suffering of Jesus, of course, lay in a region where we can only look on from afar. To be done to death by those for whom He cared, for whom He could not cease to care, could not disown—this was the suffering of the Saviour of the world. But He foresaw His death also in the light of release—not, of course, release from the infinite task committed to Him, for that would mean release from His character as well as from His mission in the world; not release from that humanity which He was never to disown; but release from the limitations and frustrations which are inseparable from life within the body.

It seems strange that any who hold the Christian position should be doubtful about this. Either it is true or not true; but, if it be true, it must affect our whole understanding of our Lord's mind. Those who think that the Incarnation is the beautiful and pathetic thought of man, but not the act of God, may well deny to Jesus any such prevision of what was to come, and grant Him just so much foresight as the limitations of the age would permit to a noble mind. But if we believe that He was rightly called the Beloved Son of God, and have found Him doing His own authentic works among His people to this day, and yet must suppose that, for His mind, death was an impenetrable veil which hid everything beyond, no coherent view of Him remains possible. Is it to be supposed that His thoughts never travelled beyond death, or that travelling there they found no answer, nor any that regarded? It cannot even be argued that the question was not raised in His day. When the Sadducees, who denied the after-life, put their question, Jesus answered them summarily, but almost as if the question were too foolish to need an answer. He bade His disciples not to be afraid of those who could 'only kill the body' and *after that* could do no more. Was the 'after that' a region which His

thought never visited? I can see no reason for suspecting the recorded predictions by Jesus of His resurrection, except those arguments which deny also the uniqueness of His person. But if the resurrection was in His mind, and He knew that He had come into the human family to stay, then it can hardly be doubted that He looked forward to His death as a release into an untrammelled ministry in the Spirit.

We may now look back upon the way we have come. We have been following so far one straight road. We have been considering Jesus as one committed both by His character and His mission 'to seek and to save the lost' —to seek in love those who did not want to be found and to save those who were refusing to be saved. We see Him dedicated to the hardest and costliest of all conceivable undertakings—the recovery of sinners. We can trace something of the accumulating burden which such a vocation necessarily involved, a burden so great that long before it reached its limit, if limit there were, the bounds of what flesh and blood can bear must have been overpassed.

If His love had been less than perfect—that is, if He had been other than He was—He might have questioned at one point after

another whether He had not gone far enough. Some few He had gained, and they might gain some others. But this question did not arise with Him. There could be no term to the Shepherd's search for His lost sheep 'until He found it.' He could not disown any who needed Him, and none needed Him more than those who disowned Him. Pilate could wash his hands of Jesus, but Jesus could not wash His hands of Pilate. Each repulse of His love, as we have seen, was not only a fresh affront to Jesus, and an increase of His task, but it was for Him infinitely aggravated by the knowledge that it was prophetic of the like to come. He knew, as none of His enemies knew, that in that tremendous tragedy they were the representatives and forerunners of us all. At the trial He kept silence and answered never a word—perhaps because the whole proceedings were an irrelevance. He Himself said the only thing that could be said for His accusers—*they* knew not what they did. He knew.

He went up to Jerusalem, we said, to challenge their sin. They in their turn challenged His love. When sin had flung its last dart and said its last word, He answered them from His Cross. If we may dare to say so, He there betrothed Himself for ever to the human race, for better, for worse, for

richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. Seven words from the Cross are reported, but there was another, which said: 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' It was said by the only begotten Son of God with full purpose of heart, and it has never been unsaid. That pledge stands for ever, and binds Him to our race in its deepest need. It binds Him: it confronts us. Every one of us must reckon with that word—or, rather, with the One who said the word. I may deny it; I may ignore it; I may never have heard of it; but it stands. If I sit in the courts of the House of the Lord, I may sing, 'He loved me and gave Himself for me.' But if I choose to sit at the table of harlots, and steep myself in sin's delirium, it is still true that He loved me and gave Himself for me, and His presence I cannot escape.

Here, then, is *a* meaning of the Cross of Christ which depends upon nothing precarious, nothing arbitrary, nothing which obliges us to fall back upon bare authority or a wavering tradition. It would be said by a long line of interpreters that the sufferings of Christ must mean much more than this. It may be so. But we ought first to know how much 'this' really is. The sufferings of Christ on this interpretation were not the penal consequences of sin endured on our

behalf, or in our stead; nor were they the divine condemnation of sin accepted by Jesus in our name; nor were they the sufferings of a vicarious or representative penitence offered to God in the name of those who could not offer it themselves. Their virtue was not in any *quantum* of suffering which could be set over against the sin of the world, as a vindication of the moral order, and so leave God free to deal with us in mercy. His sufferings followed inevitably from His character and His office as Redeemer, because in love for sinful men He devoted Himself utterly to their recovery. There we see not merely a revelation of the holy love of God for men. We witness the act and deed of Christ done with all His heart and soul and mind, when, for the love He had for men, He burdened Himself with the whole situation which our sin had created, embraced the prospect of endless sacrifice, and dedicated Himself without reserve, in face of all that sin could make of us, to the task of our recovery to God and to holiness.

Every significant event in history modifies the human environment for all future time, and in this sense the death of Christ, regarded simply as an event in history, has produced enduring changes which affect us all. But while some events affect us whether

we know anything of them or not, some others affect us through our knowledge of, and our response to, them. So, for instance, any notable instance of courage or endurance coming to our ears may quicken us to emulation. In this way the death of Christ, as the death of Socrates, may powerfully move those who hear the account of it to better thoughts and braver lives. But when we speak of what the death of Christ has wrought, we mean something different and vastly deeper than this. If His death came through His voluntary bearing of the sin of men, and His refusal to throw off the load ; if the very hour of death was for Him the dedication of Himself to the recovery of men to God and to holiness—then it was in the nature of a personal pledge, and that pledge is relevant to each one of us, but only if He who made it still lives, and is of the same mind and is engaged upon the same infinite task. The pledge stands if He stands—Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. I believe that we should regard with suspicion any interpretation which isolates the death of Christ, as though there alone was to be found the secret of our salvation. Christ Himself is our salvation, and the New Testament knows no other than the Christ who died and rose again, and lives with those who

believe in Him. It will be well to consider whether some of our difficulties in arriving at a true interpretation of the Cross of Christ are not due to our putting asunder what the New Testament has joined—the life and death and life again of our Lord Jesus—for our salvation is not in His death, nor in His rising, but in Himself, who died and rose again and abides with all who believe in Him.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF ST. PAUL

For His sake I lost all that I had; and, far from wishing it back, I reckon it no better than the scourings of the street in my desire to gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having any righteousness of my own—the kind that comes by keeping the Law—but the righteousness which consists in being set right with God through faith in Christ, the righteousness given by God Himself into the hands of faith. I spoke of gaining Christ; but I long to know Him as He is, to know Him in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, to find my nature growing into conformity with Him in His dying.—PHILIPPIANS iii. 8–11.

Christ the beginning for the end is Christ.—MYERS.

CHAPTER VI

THE CONTRIBUTION OF ST. PAUL

THUS FAR we have confined ourselves to the Synoptic Gospels, especially St. Mark, seeking an answer to this double question: Why did men put Christ to death, and why did He lay down His life? We have sought our answer, not merely in isolated passages or sayings referring to His death, but in His whole bearing, from the time He set His face steadfastly towards Jerusalem and death.

No one man has ever made so magnificent and permanent a contribution to Christian thought and the understanding of the Christian message as St. Paul. It is as impossible to dismiss Plato from philosophy as St. Paul from Christian theology. It is a commonplace among students that his theology rose out of his experience and was determined by it; but, although it is a commonplace, it involves some very exacting conditions for his interpreters. For if the clue to his theology is his experience of

Christ, then we are required in some measure to understand and appreciate a religious experience of extraordinary richness, range, and intensity—an experience which was able to transform completely a very vigorous and masterful personality. Any character study of St. Paul provides you with a rich catalogue of opposites. His experience of Christ gave him the fullest freedom, yet made him glad to call himself the slave of Jesus Christ. It ended his life, he tells us, made him a dead and buried man, yet he was never so alive and never so much himself, Paul, as then. It endowed him with a supernatural energy and a supernatural peace—an almost incredible activity resting upon a unique passivity. It was an experience of Christ utterly personal, and by that very quality proclaiming itself of universal significance and validity. All this profound integration and quickening of his personality was the direct result of his contact with Christ. For St. Paul the one vitalizing, constraining, and commanding reality was Jesus Christ. Now nothing of this can really be understood from outside. There is no need to treat St. Paul as though he were infallible. It is not necessary even to claim that he is final in the matters of which he speaks. It is sufficient to know that he is *relevant*; and how relevant

he is those will know best who have the freedom of the country he knew so well.

There is no better clue to the understanding of St. Paul's whole theological position than the accounts given of his conversion: '*As he journeyed, it came to pass that he drew nigh to Damascus: and suddenly there shone round about him a light out of heaven: and he fell upon the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goad. And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: but rise, and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*'[1]

A brief dialogue, but is there in history one more momentous? Never was a strong man more completely defeated than St. Paul at that moment. At every point he is found to be in the wrong. In the first place, he is met by One whom he believes to be dead, and finds that He is alive. Next he encounters One whom he has despised and feared and hated, even with a kind of fury of hatred; and now he finds that he has been hating and fighting against the Christ of God. He has now to pay the price, or, if you will, receive the reward of his past thoroughness. He had tried the pharisaic way to the limit,

[1] Acts ix. 3–6, xxvi. 14.

and it has brought him to this. He is taken red-handed. Hot on his errand of persecution, with those incriminating authorizations in his pocket, serving now only to identify him with the crucifiers of the Lord Jesus, he is stripped of every defence. Of all the house of his laborious building, not one stone remains upon another. He has earned nothing but condemnation, and may well have waited for the stroke to fall. But—and this is his introduction to grace, the theme of all his after-years—he hears no word of condemnation. The voice that speaks to him speaks not in judgement but in utter kindness and sovereign pity—'*it is hard for thee to kick against the goad.*' Not condemnation, but forgiveness, is here. The word forgiveness, indeed, is not used, and with good reason. Even in our own human relations, we rarely use the word when we really forgive, because the mention of the word almost inevitably conveys something of patronage and humiliation. But forgiveness itself, forgiveness without upbraiding, is here. Finally, in one word, 'Rise and enter into the city and it shall be told thee what thou must do,' Christ quietly takes possession of St. Paul and St. Paul's life, and gives the first command to His new servant.

The whole structure of St. Paul's theology

is laid bare in that one encounter between him and his Saviour. We may add that all the fundamentals of evangelical religion are contained here. Words like sin and righteousness and grace acquired in that encounter a wholly new content for the Apostle and for all who came after him.

First, as to sin. The Apostle declares in the Epistle to the Romans that he 'had not known sin' until the law came, forbidding it. With even deeper truth it might be said that he had not known sin until Christ came to him—forgiving it. Sin crucified Christ—that one fact made all other definitions partial and inadequate. 'Sin,' says the catechism of my youth, 'is any want of conformity to, or transgression of, the law of God.' True, but not enough of the truth. St. Paul could never think again of sin as merely, or even chiefly, the transgression of a law, or falling short of a standard; nor would he have been content with more modern terms, such as the choice of the lower, nor could he think of it as deriving its evil character from its anti-social quality. Sin was a wrong done to One who was utterly to be loved, utterly to be worshipped. Just in so far as Christ is real and present to any man, as He was real and present to St. Paul, so does this aspect of sin rise into solitary pre-eminence.

He

Second, as to righteousness. The futility of self-righteousness in all its forms was made final for St. Paul by what happened in the outskirts of Damascus that day. It was not that he had not gone far enough on the difficult road of behaviour. It was not the road at all—either for him or for any one else. All schemes of human effort, all the strenuous moralities, all attempts to meet the requirements of a demanding God, perished for St. Paul in the humiliating but saving discovery that this could never be the way. It could never be the way because it mistook the character of God and the relations between man and God.

For (thirdly) the relations between God and man were now set in a wholly new light by the revelation of grace, and St. Paul's experience made grace sovereign and supreme. In the hour of the exposure of his ill desert, when he was stripped bare of all 'merit' and left without one plea, Christ in utter pity and kindness gave him freely all, and more than all, he had vainly sought to win; reconciled this unwitting enemy and made him more than friend; freed this arduous slave and made him a son. Paul knew, as any man in the like case knows, that there is nothing to do when confronted with this forgiving kindness but to receive it.

To think of deserving it, or of doing something towards deserving it, was rejected from his mind as an indecency. To add anything to it, to put anything beside it, was to dishonour it. So St. Paul judged, and so must every one judge for whom the infinite grace of Jesus Christ has become real. The whole strength of St. Paul's intellect and the passion of his heart was in the words, '*not of works; it is the gift of God.*'

It is at this point that I find Dr. Rashdall's exposition of St. Paul's view so unsatisfactory. Regarding it as a 'duty pertaining to intellectual honesty first to exhibit St. Paul's theories as they must present themselves to the cold, impartial, critical exegete,' he arrives at the conclusion that St. Paul's theories on the one hand, and his 'deepest religious consciousness' on the other, have very little to do with each other.

'What does faith mean to St. Paul? Does it mean belief? And, if so, belief in what? I think it cannot be denied that St. Paul does habitually identify faith with intellectual belief. That is shown by the illustrations which he gives to prove that, even before Christ's coming, faith had been the root-principle of goodness in the holy men of old. Abraham's faith consisted in believing God—believing the various divine

communications made to him, in particular believing that he should beget a child when he was a hundred years old.' [1]

Now what is this 'intellectual belief' which by critical surgery has been removed from the personal life in which it was organically embedded? Othello believed Iago and murdered Desdemona in consequence. Then he believed that she was innocent and killed himself in remorse. Was this intellectual belief? The thing which Othello believed, and then disbelieved, touched him too nearly to allow this kind of intellectual abstraction. We may have an intellectual belief in an historical fact when it is nothing more to us than a fact of history—has no more significance for us than that it once happened. But when we are dealing with things which concern us, and about which we care, it is impossible to have a *merely* intellectual belief. 'Abraham believed God.' This is the proof offered that for St. Paul faith meant intellectual belief. Yet when St. Paul is permitted to develop his illustration in his own way we find him writing as follows: 'Abraham . . . in hope believed against hope. . . . And without being weakened in faith he considered his own body now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years

[1] *Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology*, Rashdall, p. 108.

old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb: yea, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that, what He had promised, He was able to perform.' If this is intellectual faith, there would seem to be considerable intrusion of ethical and emotional content; and, in consequence, the Apostle, being much moved, is carried on to a great conclusion—' Wherefore also it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned unto him; but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on Him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.' If only we avoid abstractions, keep to the realities which obtain between persons, and remember that righteousness is essentially a matter of personal relations, can a man do anything more entirely right or more momentous in its consequences than to *believe God*—if need be in spite of all appearances? But if we must insist that, for St. Paul, faith meant merely intellectual belief, there remains, of course, nothing but the contempt which Dr. Rashdall did not conceal for the doctrine of justification by faith.

Yet it was this despised doctrine which was for St. Paul the key of his prison. It came to him as an astounding revelation of the mind of God in Christ. Because it gave him his emancipation, he contended for it throughout his missionary years with all the vehemence of which he was capable, and, when he was near the end, restated it as the one and only ground where he dared to stand before God.[1]

If, then, we may credit the Apostle with some coherence of mind and a measure of understanding of his own spiritual experience, we find that his gospel was the message of a boundless salvation available for every man in Jesus Christ Himself. When he speaks of the death of Christ in this connexion, he is not thinking of an event which is always receding into the past, because he is living and moving in continual fellowship with the One who died and now is alive again. In all his thinking and choosing, at every turn in the conduct of his life, he is 'in Christ'; he is dealing with a Person—with One who loved Paul and gave Himself for Paul, who loves Paul and holds him now.

I shall discuss presently the question whether the expiatory interpretation of the Cross has the authority of St. Paul, but one

[1] Phil. iii. 9.

material consideration may be mentioned here. If the meaning of the death of Christ is expiatory, it must be the fundamental meaning, and render all other meanings subordinate, if not irrelevant. If the laying down of His life was the acceptance of the divine condemnation of sin on our behalf and in our stead, or if on the ground of that 'satisfaction' God can now regard the sin of the world as expiated or 'atoned for,' and is free, therefore, to be gracious and to remit punishment, as otherwise He could not be, this is manifestly the final secret of salvation. The effect—I think the inevitable effect—is to isolate the death of Christ even from Christ Himself, and to make His laying down of His life a work wholly different in character and in effect from all that went before and all that has followed since. It is worthy of consideration whether this is not the reason why, in long tracts of Church history, the three years' ministry of our Lord came to be regarded as a mere preliminary to His real work, and the presence of the Indwelling Christ through the Christian centuries a supplementary—both losing immensely thereby in significance. The strength of St. Paul's faith is the indissoluble unity of the life and death and resurrection of the living and commanding Christ who had

charge of his life. 'To-day,' says Forsyth, 'it may be more needful in certain positions to preach the Christ of the cross than the cross of Christ.'[1] It is a valid distinction and an important one; but I do not believe that St. Paul would have allowed that they were permissible alternatives. The one object of his faith and the one subject of his preaching was Christ Himself.

This view of St. Paul's gospel brings us near to the point we reached in earlier pages by the synoptic road.[2] That was no precarious or doubtful path, and it brought us to the place where every one of us is confronted with a Risen Saviour who, in the days of His flesh and the hour of His death, concerned Himself with the plight of all sinful men, and in love without limit pledged Himself to the work of our recovery from all sin. We find One who means now what He meant then, and fulfils now what He undertook then. This was what happened to St. Paul on the way to Damascus, and this was his message to the world.

[1] 'To-day it may be more needful in certain positions to preach the Christ of the cross than the cross of Christ. There is a strategy in the holy war. It is the last crisis that calls the reserves to the front. But whether we preach the Christ who atoned or the atonement of Christ, it is still an atoning Christ and an atoning cross we preach.'—*The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 82.

[2] See p. 93 ff.

EXPIATION

Only at the Cross of Christ does man see fully what it is that separates him from God; yet it is here alone that he perceives that he is no longer separated from God. Nowhere else does the inviolable holiness of God, the impossibility of overlooking the guilt of man stand out more plainly; but nowhere else also does the limitless mercy of God, which utterly transcends all human standards, stand out more clearly and plainly. That God can be both at once, the One who 'is not mocked,' and the One who 'doth not deal with us after our transgressions'; that neither aspect is sacrificed to the other, or can be subordinated to the other as a mere attribute; that God is equally the Holy One who asserts His unconditional claims, the One whose glory may not be given to another, and the Merciful One who gives Himself to the very utmost limits of self-emptying—this fundamental theme of the whole Bible is the message of the Cross, the truth which is not to be separated from the fact, but in it alone, in this actual happening, *is* the truth.—EMIL BRUNNER.

CHAPTER VII

EXPIATION

IT IS NECESSARY NOW to examine more closely those theories of the Atonement which I have described by the word expiatory. The word may not be quite the right one for all those to which I refer—perhaps there is no word which would accurately describe them all. But I mean to include all those interpretations which find the meaning of the Cross in something done between the Father and the Son alone, something required by a righteous God, offered by Christ and in turn accepted by God and effecting a change in respect of the sin of the world[1] (independent of any subsequent response from men). This change may be likened to

[1] When we speak of 'the sin of the world' we are, of course, using Scriptural language. Even if we were not, we should be obliged to find and use such phrases. But it is easy to forget that we are using abstractions, and that there is no such thing as 'the sin of the world'; nor, indeed, is there such a thing as sin, though with our limited minds we must have such a word—no such thing as sin, but only *persons sinning*. So also no such thing as love—only *persons loving*.

the payment of a debt[1] or the vicarious endurance of a penalty, or the removal of a moral barrier between God and man. I include theories of expiation, of substitution, of 'satisfaction,' or vicarious punishment, vicarious condemnation, as well as theories of vicarious penitence.

These interpretations have taken many forms, some worthier than others. But there is a long line of tradition behind them, and some of them—some even which have now lost all defenders—have been so interwoven with the faith and love of countless believers in the past that I should regard any light-hearted or superior criticism of them as an offence. I will illustrate first, therefore, from a writer to whom I am deeply in debt. The moral passion which is felt through all of Denney's work was an inestimable benefit to me in time past, and I can never differ from him without regret. For him the death of Christ had a significance which isolated it from all else: it was in that death alone that God was dealing with the 'sin of the world' regarded as a whole. By that death sin was expiated. He writes, 'St. Paul had

[1] I am not questioning the legitimacy of such metaphors as the payment of a debt, provided they are understood as illustrations valid only at a single point, and never to be erected into a theory, or allowed to impose an interpretation which has no other justification, and runs us into moral contradictions.

[in mind] the awful fact of the crucifixion with everything physical and spiritual which made it real : *that* was the bearing of sin and the expiation of it.'[1] He is equally explicit in a longer passage which I take from his later work, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation :*

> The work of Christ is not designed to impress men *simpliciter*. It is designed to impress them to a certain intent, to a certain issue ; it is designed to produce in them through penitence God's mind about sin. It cannot do this simply as an exhibition of unconditioned love. It can only do it as the exhibition or demonstration of a love which is itself ethical in character and looks to ethical issues. But the only love of this description is love which owns the reality of sin by submitting humbly and without rebellion to the divine reaction against it ; it is love doing homage to the divine ethical necessities which pervade the nature of things and the whole order in which men live. These divine ethical necessities are in the strictest sense objective. They are independent of us, and they claim and receive homage from Christ in His work of reconciliation, whether that work does or does not produce upon men the impression which is its due. This is an objective atonement. It is a homage paid by Christ to the moral order of the world established and upheld by God : a homage essential to the work of reconciliation, for unless men are caught into it, and made participant of it somehow, they cannot be reconciled ; but a homage,

[1] *The Death of Christ*, James Denney, p. 130.

at the same time, which has value in God's sight, and therefore constitutes an *objective atonement, whether any particular person is impressed by it or not. Even if no man should ever say, 'Thou, O Christ, art all I want; more than all in Thee I find,' God says it. Christ and His work have this absolute value for the Father, whatever this or that individual may think of them:* and as it is only on the basis of Christ and His work that reconciliation becomes an accomplished fact, it is strict truth to say that reconciliation — in the sense of man's return to God and acceptance with Him — is based on an objective atonement. It is because divine necessities have had homage done to them by Christ, that the way is open for sinners to return to God through Him.'[1] (The italics are mine.)

In all this, and in the whole chapter to which the latter quotation belongs, there is much that is true and worthily said, but it has no necessary dependence upon the theory which the author expounds. This interpretation of the death of Christ as an act of homage required by God and offered by Christ, which constituted some kind of moral equivalent to offset the sin of the world, an act of homage which of itself removed the barrier between God and man occasioned by sin—this interpretation is not, I believe, derived from St. Paul. It may be defended —and others of the same family—as being in line with some utterances of St. Paul,

[1] Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, p. 234.

but it is not derived from him, and it depends on other than Scriptural grounds for its validity.

It is indeed a doubtful procedure, in dealing with so rich a mind as St. Paul's, to continue all his utterances to a conclusion, in the same straight line. To begin with, he was not composing a treatise; he was writing *letters* to certain people who lived in the first century, and using such language, such arguments and illustrations as would be likely to reach them. It is certain that none of St. Paul's converts understood all that he wrote, but it is equally certain that he meant to be intelligible to them. Next, he was all the time wrestling with a treacherous language, conscripting in His Master's name words which had only known secular service, and pressing upon them a weight of meaning they had never known. Further, in the new thought-world in which he pioneered, there were no Roman roads. He followed any fragment of a pathway if it helped him on his way, but he knew when to leave it because he took his direction, not from human sign-posts, but from the sun and the stars. It is therefore a mistaken reverence for the Apostle which builds a tabernacle wherever he left a footprint. He accepts the help of any human analogy, but the more striking

thing is that he can dismiss it without notice the moment it becomes unserviceable. I submit that the reason St. Paul does not 'develop' the ideas of propitiation, of expiatory sacrifice, and the like, is not because he was short of time, or had not thought out his position, but because he had already passed beyond them to richer significances where those ideas no longer served.

The classical passage in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans will serve as illustration of what I mean, and it may serve the better because it is considered to be one of the strongholds of the expiatory interpretations. The Apostle has argued that the fundamental need of the world is *righteousness*. The Gentiles need it—witness their *unrighteousness* and its ruinous consequences, plain evidence of God's condemnation. But the Jews equally need it. They have God's law but do not keep it. All alike, Jew and Gentile, are unrighteous, and all alike are helpless to change their situation. We may paraphrase from verse 21 onwards: 'But now God has taken the case into His own hands. What all were needing and none could find is disclosed at last. It has not come, as we thought it would, by command of law or behest of conscience. This new Justification is not, as we had thought, God's

verdict on our good works ; it is God's gift to our great need, and it comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ. It is offered freely to every one who will believe and receive it. To every one, I say, for there is no distinction here. All have sinned. Every life has fallen short of God's glorious meaning for men. All of us alike must be " justified," cleared, accepted, not on our merits, but by His grace, which comes to us in the deliverance that is ours in Christ Jesus '; (and now I quote, not paraphrase) ' *whom God set forth, a propitiation, through faith, by His blood,* to show His righteousness, because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime in the forbearance of God.'

There is nothing small in this passage : in its range and sweep it is characteristic of the mind of St. Paul. There is nothing obscure or difficult save in the few words which I have italicized. It is worthy of note that the description of God's purpose in the Cross does not direct us to seek its significance in some dealing between the Father and the Son which has ' absolute value ' for God, independent of any effect upon men. The purpose is one we can understand ; its human counterpart is very familiar to us. It is the divine solution of what is always the problem of forgiveness, namely, how to make

forgiveness utterly free without making it free-and-easy ; to forgive the sinner without condoning the sin ; to achieve reconciliation without compromise of truth. This is the real problem of forgiveness, and every one who has faced it in human relations, where there has been some real betrayal, knows how desperate it is.

But the phrase italicized *is* difficult, and it is difficult, not for one school of interpreters, but for all, as the literature on the subject shows. ' *Whom God set forth, a propitiation, through faith, by His blood* '—there is no question that this is sacrificial language.

The word ἱλαστήριον, translated propitiation, presents us with difficulties at the outset. In the LXX, ἱλαστήριον usually denotes the ' mercy seat which was sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifices.' In the LXX, again, the corresponding verb signifies God's own act in Himself delivering men from sin. In both instances the word has already shed its primary meaning of ' appeasing or rendering favourable.' Gore, who certainly would do nothing to weaken the sacrificial import of the language, explains thus : ' Propitiating—that is, something which enables [the Father] to show His true character of righteousness, and to acquit, or accept among the righteous, irrespective of what he has done or been,

every one who has faith in Jesus.' But the word propitiation has made a long journey from its native country when it can be interpreted thus. The truth is that this word, like many others, once baptized into Christ, has 'become a new creature; old things are passed away; they are become new.' How much, we ask, is left of the idea of propitiation, when once we have said that it is the offended person who provides it and offers it to himself?

It is not, of course, merely the ambiguity of a word which raises the difficulty. The question concerns the interpretation of the sacrificial language which we find in the New Testament. That language cannot mean for us what it meant for those who used it in sincerity before Christ came. Our Lord did not in words abrogate the sacrificial system of Judaism,[1] but He made it an irrelevance for those who believed in Him, and it would have become an idolatry for them to have long retained it. This alone shows us how profoundly Christ had changed the whole approach to God and the conception of God. When we read those sacrificial terms in the light of Christ and His revelation, some meanings which belonged to the system deepen immeasurably; but some become

[1] But see Matt. ix. 13 and xii. 7.

incredible, and it is He who has made them so. The Christian revelation should have made it impossible for us any longer to think of God as needing to be *appeased*, or, in any ordinary sense of the word, *propitiated*; still less can we think of Him as desiring us to express our penitence or turn away His wrath, by the slaughter of animals. No one disputes this now, but it is questionable whether Christian theology has frankly abandoned all that Christ made obsolete, or whether, on the other hand, where it did abandon, it went on to profounder truth than that which it left behind.

The characteristic word of the Christian revelation is that it is God Himself who is the author of our salvation. It is God Himself who *sets forth* Christ as the way of salvation[1]; God who gives His only begotten Son[2]; God who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all[3]; God who commends His own love toward us in the death of Christ[4]; God who is reconciling the world unto Himself in Christ[5]. The truth reiterated in such passages must be fundamental and regulative for all Christian thinking, but it is very difficult to do it justice, or even to avoid obscuring and denying it,

[1] Rom. iii. 25. [2] John iii. 16. [3] Rom. viii. 32.
[4] Rom. v. 8. [5] 2 Cor. v. 19.

so long as we remain within the limits of sacrificial conceptions. Sacrifices are men's offering to God; Christ is God's gift to men. The difficulty of a reconciliation here seems obvious enough, but, if it were not obvious, it would be demonstrated by the long series of sincere attempts at a solution, each winning temporary acceptance only to lose it again, and leaving the mind both hurt and hungry. Is it because the bread of life has been served with so many small stones?

It was, of course, inevitable that sacrificial analogies should be in the mind of every Christian, especially every Jewish Christian, in the early days of the Christian Church. Sacrifices of many kinds are a large part of the history of religion, and their origin has been abundantly discussed. Authorities are not wholly agreed on the question of origin, but, if they were, they could not help us greatly here. For the origin of a custom does not tell us why it survives, nor what its meaning may be for those who observe it in times and conditions far removed from its primitive beginnings. The history of sacrifice tells of a conscience ill at ease; and the shedding of blood—the most poignant symbol that men could find—speaks of some deep distress in the heart of men which struggled for utterance and craved relief. In the minds

of the most sincere, the sacrificial shedding of blood was a kind of passionate confession of sin. It came nearer than words could do to express what they felt of ill desert and condemnation before God. That feeling and conviction was immeasurably deepened by Christianity, and, the need to express it increasing likewise, the language of sacrifice, with all the gathered associations of the past, was the readiest and sometimes the only language available.

But the idea of sacrifice as propitiating God or winning His favour was already disappearing from the best minds in Judaism. In the prophets of the Old Testament we see how the idea of sacrifice, in the expiatory sense of the word, is being transcended and left behind. 'Sacrifice and offering Thou hast no delight in; mine ears hast Thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required.'[1] 'For Thou delightest not in sacrifice; else would I give it: Thou hast no pleasure in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.'[2] 'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the

[1] Ps. xl. 6. [2] Ps. li. 16.

blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before Me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample My courts ? '[1] ' I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'[2]

This was bold language to use at a time when the sacrificial system permeated religion and was reckoned to be the very core of it. And, if we ourselves took it seriously, it might prove to be more revolutionary in theology than was quite welcome. For the drift is clear ; it makes an end of *expiation.* God requires penitence and amendment, not expiation. Expiation is not demanded—but not because sin is not so great a matter as had been thought ; not because, as a modern has it, ' the barbaric sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, with the moral hatred it carried, is giving way to a more natural attitude.' Expiation is not demanded, because it cannot be given. Sin cannot be expiated ; it can only be forgiven. For there is no offset for sin, no ' satisfaction ' for sin. There is nothing in the moral realm analogous to the balancing of accounts. This is the principle which the prophets at times envisaged, and in so doing they prepared the way for the ending of all sacrifices regarded

[1] Isa. i. 11.
[2] Hosea vi. 6 ; quoted by Christ, Matt. xii. 7.

as offerings for sin. Sacrifices remained for the time to speak what they could of the truth—to declare the awful character of sin, to exhibit forgiveness always *with an element of cost*, always by God's mercy, in God's way, and upon God's terms.

When sacrifices had gone, having served their office, sacrificial language remained to do what it could. For the higher revelation must always borrow from the lower, and new truth must accept the help of that perilous ally, an older language. The Christian use of sacrificial words, with their associations of awe and wonder, of penitence and gratitude, was inevitable. But in the New Testament, as I believe, the drift is away from expiation, and those ideas which are kindred with it. Even when those ideas were dominant in Judaism they were not unchallenged, and their retention in Christian theology tends to confuse and impoverish the Christian revelation.

But there is a long tradition of Christian thought which rejects this conclusion, and finds in the death of Christ, interpreted as an expiatory sacrifice, not only *a* meaning, but *the* meaning—the fundamental and all-determining meaning of the Christian revelation. I have nothing in common with those to whom 'tradition' is only a word of

disparagement. And, in this instance, the tradition is so deeply involved with the faith and devotion of countless Christian people, and has been expounded and defended by so long a line of thinkers, to whom only sheer ignorance would deny the tribute of reverence, that it is hard for any one who has learned even a little of the lesson of humility, to question their conclusion. If there were amongst those authorities sufficient agreement; if the conclusions on which they were agreed provided some quiet for the mind and a place where faith had leave to rest; or if, further, one could see no way through to deeper and more moving significances than those which belong to the theories I question, I, at any rate, should not attempt to add one to the multitude of counsellors. Thus much I must endeavour to make good in the following chapters.

EXPIATION AND THE ALTERNATIVES

Theological explanation has oscillated between the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement as the centre and heart of Christianity. It ought to be obvious that what is needed is a deeper conception in which both will find their meaning. This is found in the person of Jesus, which alone can give meaning to either the Incarnation or the Atonement. . . . Events take their meaning solely from the motives and disposition of those responsible for them, or from the attitude taken towards them by those whom they affect. The mere facts of the Incarnation and the death of our Lord, as also indeed His miracles, have in themselves no specific quality, apart from what He was in Himself, and what He mediated through these things.—W. FEARON HALLIDAY.

God does not redeem us merely by revealing His love. He reveals His love by redeeming us.—DALE.

CHAPTER VIII

EXPIATION AND THE ALTERNATIVES

IN CONTINUING OUR CRITICISM of the expiatory interpretations of the Cross, it may be well to indicate once more what theories I include under this description. By the expiatory interpretation, then, I mean all those theories which find the meaning of the Atonement in something done and completed between God the Father and Christ Jesus in dying—either (1) something borne by Christ (whether the punishment of sin or the divine condemnation of sin, endured in our stead), or (2) something offered by Christ (e.g. a perfect penitence and confession of the sin of the world, made in our name). This did, of itself, change the relation of God to men (whether by satisfying divine justice, or the ethical necessities of the case, or by the homage done to God's holiness), thereby releasing His grace towards sinners, which till then had been inhibited by His holiness reacting against sin. This change, though

it had men's subsequent response in view, was prior to it and independent of it. Hence it may rightly be described as an 'objective Atonement,' and a common term for it was 'the Finished Work.'

We have now to consider further whether these theories are justified as a true interpretation of the sacrificial language of the New Testament, and especially of St. Paul.

1. We turn aside from St. Paul for the moment, to recall a passage from the Synoptics to which reference has already been made. '*For verily the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.*'[1] If one wished for an example of the unhappy results of pressing a metaphor beyond its due serviceableness, the long story of the misinterpretation of this passage, would serve as well as any. For nine centuries the theory that the death of Christ was a ransom paid to the devil who had acquired rights over us, a theory developed to grotesque and even repulsive conclusions, held its ground. It is unnecessary now to criticize this strange aberration, since it is long since repented of; yet the use of the word and its cognates, both in the LXX and in the New Testament,

[1] Matt. xx. 28.

should have been sufficient to show how naturally the word had widened its connotation so as to signify the divine deliverance and its cost, without any thought of a third party to whom the 'ransom' was paid. If we are to press the word back into the narrow mould of its etymological origin, we must of course perform the same operation with the kindred word 'redemption.'

Christ died for our sins. 'Mine the life won and Thine the life laid down.' Was it not a natural thing that He should use a word which had already left its original associations behind and which was the perfect word to describe the deliverance of sinners at the cost of the Saviour's life? But this is not necessarily the sacrificial (that is, the expiatory) interpretation, though it is often claimed so to be. It is significant that in the context, the saying stands as the supreme example of the Christian law of service. 'Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you: but whosoever would become great among you, shall be your servant: and whosoever would be first among you, shall be your slave.' Then follows the saying which we are considering.

Our Lord tells us that He came into the

world, not to be served, but to serve. The rule of His life was the principle of His death. He lived and died serving; and the supreme service which He did for mankind was to die for them. In that context then, it was fitting to speak of His dying as the supreme example for us all to follow. But in all this there is no expiatory reference. There was nothing to isolate the death and clothe it with a significance which had no parallel in His life; and this is what all the theories of expiation do. Consider then what happens when we introduce the idea of expiation as the true interpretation of the passage. If the death of Christ is to be regarded as a sacrificial offering to God by the sinless Sin-bearer, in order to expiate the sin of the world—such an interpretation removes it at once from any analogy with anything that we can do. It stands sole and unapproachable. In the mystery of that transaction He has no follower, no imitator. If the words had come from any one but our Lord Himself, the advocates of the expiatory interpretation would, I believe, have been conscious of a kind of impropriety in pointing sinners like ourselves to that one solitary divine deed which of itself expiated the sin of the world, holding it up as the example for us all. A startling phrase of St. Paul's may be recalled

here. He speaks of 'filling up that which was lacking of the sufferings of Christ.' Could he have used such language if the sufferings of Christ, in his view, were the bearing of the divine condemnation of human sin? It is not necessary of course to argue that our Lord's words *exclude* the 'sacrificial' interpretation, but certainly they do not affirm it.

2. Among the letters of St. Paul the one to the Romans comes nearest to being a systematic treatise. It sets out to expound his Gospel, not in relation to particular circumstances, but as God's message for all mankind. In the third chapter there are twelve words (ten in the Greek) which definitely recall sacrificial usage, and there are no others in the epistle—'*Whom God set forth as a propitiation through faith in His blood.*' One line out of nine hundred! It is much more than an arithmetical point. The expiatory interpretation of the death of Christ, if it is held at all, must be primary.[1] Where it is received, it must rule, and it seems to me barely conceivable, if St. Paul in his own mind interpreted the mystery of the Cross in expiatory terms, that he could have left it in that context with so passing and fragmentary a reference. But this abrupt

[1] See pp. 110, 111.

abandonment of an analogy just where it might be the starting-point of a theory is typical. Consider how attractive, and, up to a point, how serviceable, sacrificial analogies and illustrations must have been for those who had a new revelation to declare and no language adequate for the task. The wonder is, not that sacrificial terms are used in the New Testament, but that they occupy so small a space and are so little depended upon.

3. It is not the vicarious principle which is in dispute. For St. Paul the vicarious character of our Lord's sufferings and death is always present. What had He to do with suffering or with death, except for us men and for our salvation? But *vicarious* is not a synonym for *substitutionary* nor for *expiatory*. In human life the vicarious principle is everywhere, substitution nowhere. A mother suffers *for* her child, in order that her child may not suffer. But it is not the same suffering; she does not endure herself the suffering which she averts from the child. All the sufferings of our Lord in life and in death were vicarious. 'He died for us that we might live.' But the death He died was not the death He saves us from, and the life we live is not the life He laid down.

4. Yet the Christian confession is right: these qualifications, if we ponder them sufficiently, do not weaken the sense, but they would weaken the sentence. Baur speaks of St. Paul's lack of 'mediating ideas,' but it is not always the lack of mediating ideas, but the presence of something else, which perplexes our colder faith. The pressure of unseen realities was upon Him. He was shaken with the greatness of the revelation. The strangeness, the wisdom, the mystery, and the intimacy of God's ways in Christ Jesus filled him with wonder, and left him to wrestle with the task of uttering what 'cannot be uttered.' This stress of mind and heart, not always constant but continually recurring, affects his language, and its results are to be seen in the passionate condensations of speech, the fusing of beginning and end, the elimination of all 'mediating ideas,' those exulting antitheses stripped of all qualifying terms—all those features, in fact, which we find in great poetry, saying more in a single line than any paraphrase can say in a page.

For illustration, consider another passage of St. Paul's: '*Him who knew no sin, God made to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*' Now the

literalist is hopelessly at fault in such a passage. Luther, indeed, commenting on a kindred passage (Gal. iii. 13), comes near to taking it literally, partly perhaps because his combative nature inclined to 'vehemency.' So he writes :

> And this, no doubt, all the prophets did foresee in spirit, that Christ should become the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, rebel, and blasphemer, that ever was or could be in the world. For He being made a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, is not now an innocent person and without sins, is not now the Son of God born of the Virgin Mary; but a sinner which hath and carrieth the sin of Paul, who was a blasphemer, an oppressor, and a persecutor; of Peter which denied Christ; of David which was an adulterer, a murderer, and caused the Gentiles to blaspheme the name of the Lord; and briefly which hath and beareth all the sins of all men in His body, not that He himself committed them, but for that He received them, being committed or done of us, and laid them upon His own body, that He might make satisfaction for them with His own blood.

Other commentators, unable to follow language of this kind, point out that St. Paul does not say, and cannot mean, that God made Christ a sinner. But neither can it mean that He made Christ to be sin, for sin is an abstraction. There is no sin apart

from sinners. And neither can we 'become righteousness,' though we may become righteous. So we must all begin interpreting. If we interpret the words to mean that God made Him to bear the punishment of sin, the guilt of sin, the condemnation of sin, these are all interpretations which must stand on their merits and cannot claim offhand the authority of the Apostle. But guilt is precisely the thing which cannot be transferred ; punishment the thing that must not be transferred. And condemnation? Condemned by whom? By God? Then are we to think that in the most awful hour, when He was doing the Father's will, He was conscious of the Father's 'condemnation'? Is not this to introduce fiction just where it is most intolerable?

The whole passage,[1] surely one of the noblest in sacred literature, is charged with feeling. Language, frail craft as it is, is loaded with meaning to the water's edge. Looking at Christ in His Passion, despised and rejected of men, adjudged a malefactor and a blasphemer, crucified as a criminal, left and abandoned as if He were the one sinner of the world, we ask, Why is He, who knew no sin, there at all? For us men and

[1] 2 Cor. v. 14–21.

for our salvation. Who sent Him there? God sent Him. Why? That we sinners might become righteous 'in Him.'

I am not conscious, in such a rendering, of evading anything that St. Paul says, though very conscious that the attempted paraphrase and perhaps any paraphrase, is a poor way of reproducing the Apostle's tremendous antithesis, stripped, in the passion of his gratitude, of all qualifying terms.

5. I have dealt with the two passages which seem most favourable to sacrificial theories of the Cross. There are, of course, many others which are quoted in its defence, and what I have urged, if valid at all, *mutatis mutandis*, is valid for these others. The assembling of these passages does at any rate serve to remind us how deeply the death of the Cross had penetrated the heart and mind of the early Church. The death of Christ is for any thoughtful Christian, whatever his *theory* of the Cross may be, the most poignant moment in the whole Christian revelation, and there are no words more arresting or more charged with feeling than the words '*His blood.*' But the sacrificial significance is not the only context for such words. They belong to the language of all mankind. For St. Paul especially, they

were piercing words, apart from any sacrificial associations, because he had come nearer to having a direct share in the shedding of that blood than others. It is foolish to suppose that no one may speak of the blood of Christ except those who accept the expiatory and sacrificial interpretations.

6. It has been maintained by some that St. Paul's chief emphasis is upon the Resurrection rather than upon the Cross. It is a poor exercise of the mind to set the one against the other; but those who isolate the death of Christ as that which of itself effected salvation for us, ought to consider how inseparable are the death and the Resurrection in the mind of, say, St. Paul. Where *they* stay at '*Christ died for our sins*,' Paul continued '*And rose again.*' This occurs again and again—often enough to suggest a kind of incapacity for thinking the two affirmations apart. A passage already quoted affords a specially significant example. Speaking of Abraham's faith, he writes: 'Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned unto him; but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on Him *that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our*

justification.'[1] Are not the words italicized a warning lest we divide between the dying and the rising again of the Lord Jesus? It would seem wise to allow the Apostle to finish his sentence before we construct our theory from the half of it.

It is true that the Apostle writes, '*God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*'—and with good reason. The Cross was indeed the stumbling-block and offence of the new faith for all the Apostle's contemporaries, Jew and Gentile alike.[2] It was impossible for the Christian to ignore it or gloss over it, even if he had wanted to. But now that the wonder of the divine purpose was revealed in it, to glory in the Cross of Christ was at once their confession of faith and their challenge to the world. But would it be untrue to say that

[1] Rom. iv. 23–25.

[2] 'In one respect it is impossible now to conceive the extent to which the apostles of the *crucified* Jesus shocked all the feelings of mankind. The public establishment of Christianity, the adoration of ages, the reverence of nations, has thrown around the *cross* of Christ an indelible and inalienable sanctity. No effort of the imagination can dissipate the illusion of dignity which has gathered round it; it has been so long dissevered from all its coarse and humiliating associations, that it cannot be cast back and desecrated into its state of opprobrium and contempt. To the most daring unbeliever among ourselves, it is the symbol, the absurd, and irrational, he may conceive, but still the ancient and venerable symbol, of a powerful and influential religion: what was it to the Jew and to the heathen? the basest, the most degrading punishment of the lowest criminal! the proverbial terror of the wretched slave! it was to them, what the most despicable and revolting instrument of public execution is to us.' —Milman's *Bampton Lectures*, Lect. vi., p. 279.

St. Paul equally gloried in the Resurrection? Any argument, any train of thought with which he may be engaged, is imperilled in its course if he mentions the Resurrection. If the apostolic precedent is worth anything, we shall be obliged to say in the same breath, *He died for us—and rose again.*

7. It is possible, then, to debate, if we are so minded, whether it was the Cross or the Resurrection which was the central and luminous point for St. Paul. What cannot be questioned is that Christ Himself is both centre and circumference. We may collect references in the Epistles to our Lord's death and to His Resurrection, but one thing we cannot do, we cannot collect references to Christ Himself, because they are everywhere. All we could do would be to produce the letters entire; for the letters are, one may say, just Jesus Christ Himself. St. Paul's one theme is Jesus Christ—never a Christ crucified and therefore dead, never a Christ risen and now disappeared, but always the Christ who died and rose and lives for evermore with His people. The Apostle could never have written

> Our blest Redeemer, ere He breathed
> *His tender last farewell.*

Christ fills the pages of the Epistles as completely as He fills the pages of the

Synoptic Gospels. And this brings us back to the position already stated as the message both of the Gospels and of St. Paul. That is not a true interpretation of the Cross of Christ which isolates the death, assigning certain benefits of our salvation to that alone, and others to His risen and ascended life, seeking in the parts that which can only be found in the whole.

8. I am not enough of a modernist to be able to think that the latest excursion of the expert's mind is a sure guide to the truth. It is not always a safe rule to line up in the longest queue, for sometimes, even with experts, the queue has been found at the wrong door. Nevertheless, the strange story of Christian thought on the subject of the Atonement, and the direction which it is now taking, is admonitory. The acknowledged absence of a theory in the New Testament; the various attempts at a theory, and their acceptance for a time; the efforts, sincere but almost desperate, to hold to old terms and lines of argument, fearful lest any truth which they conserved should be lost; the piecemeal abandonment which ensued and the new attempts made in their turn—all this might suggest to us two things: first, that the Church is here concerned with

something vital to the faith; and, second, that something alien has mingled with the traditional interpretations, which refuses to be incorporated in the living truth, simply because it *is* alien.

We may begin with what Aulén calls the classical theory,[1] which explains the Atonement as the victory of Christ achieved by His death over sin, death, and the Devil; but the theory offers only rhetorical explanations why the Cross should have achieved this result, or what was the real nature of the victory. In due time this gave place to the ransom theory, viz. that the death of Christ was a ransom paid to the Devil, who had rights over us; and this strange theory, carried at times to grotesque lengths, held ground for some nine centuries until it was displaced by the theory of Anselm. But Anselm's theory of the Atonement, conceiving the death of Christ as a 'satisfaction' offered to God because of the affront to His 'honour,' based as it was on notions of feudal chivalry, could not hope to survive the centuries without drastic modification. The modifications arrived in due succession, all with some element of truth, but all of them tainted with some alien infection. Thus, Dr. Forsyth, who himself holds an expiatory

[1] *Christus Victor*, by Gustaf Aulén.

view, recites for us the errors which we must no longer tolerate :

> The New Testament has a principle and a norm which is positive enough to enable us to rule out any notions which misrepresent God's grace. For instance, we can no longer treat the Atonement as a deflection of God's anger, as if the flash fell on Christ and was conducted by Him to the ground. . . . We can no longer speak of a strife of attributes in God the Father, justice set against mercy, and judgement against grace, till an adjustment was effected by the Son. There can be no talk of any mollification of God, or any inducement whatever, offered by either man or some third party to procure grace. Procured grace is a contradiction in terms. . . . Farther, we must not think that the value of the Atonement lies in any equivalent suffering. . . . Again, we must speak very differently about the transfer of guilt ; and never as if it were a ledger amount which could be shifted about by divine finance, or a ponderable load lifted to another back. We have to be cautious in using the word penalty in connexion with what fell on Christ. We must renounce the idea that He was punished by the God who was ever well pleased with His beloved Son.[1]

This is a lengthy catalogue of renunciations, and none of them is superfluous ; for all these ideas have been urged and accepted, and some are still accepted, as having the authority of the Word of God. But if we

[1] *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 78.

must abandon all this, as I believe we must, what then is left? There are answers from those who hold in one form or another the expiatory view, e.g. the Lutheran and Calvinistic theologians; Dale, Denney, Forsyth; with further modifications, McLeod, Campbell, Moberly, Scott Lidgett, Lofthouse; and more recently from the Barthian side, Brunner in *The Mediator*. We have reason to be grateful to these writers for the moral passion which kindles in their pages. Their protest against the moral effeminacy of much modern thinking—or talking without thinking—their exposure of the thin idolatry of an amiable God who has no hostility to sin and carries on no terrible war against it; who is pleased when we are good, and no doubt a little disappointed when we are naughty—this protest, unfortunately, was needed, and was welcome. But on the positive side their contribution has not proved satisfying. They have not, I think, enlightened the simple; and they have not persuaded the theologians, because they have not met their difficulties. The simple-minded believer did mean *something* when he sang:

> He knew how wicked men had been,
> He knew that God must punish sin,
> So out of pity Jesus said
> He'd bear the punishment instead.

But his mind is not subtle enough to follow Forsyth's refinement and 'renounce the idea that Jesus was punished by the God who is ever well pleased with His beloved Son,' and yet believe that 'God must either punish sin or expiate it,' that 'He must either inflict punishment or assume it!'[1] And when the same believer has learned that he must not set justice and mercy against each other he must learn next what seems to set holiness and love apart—for 'nothing but holiness can forgive; love cannot.'[2]

Forsyth was presumably addressing theologians when he wrote: 'What Christ presented to God for His complete joy and satisfaction was a perfect racial obedience. It was not the perfect obedience of a saintly unit of the race. It was a racial holiness.'[3] I do not understand this myself. It calls up no affirmative response from my mind. But if it is true, it must be near the very heart of the matter, and therefore of great import to all men, and not merely to philosophic theologians. But can it be so vital a truth if it can only be expressed in terms quite beyond the reach of a plain mind—in other words, if it cannot be preached? The same difficulty

[1] Op. cit., p. 205. [2] *Positive Preaching*, p. 333.
[3] *The Work of Christ*, p. 129.

recurs in Moberly's book *Atonement and Personality*, when he comes to the crucial point. Christ's confession of sin avails for us because 'Christ was not generically, but inclusively, man.'[1] I do not attempt to discuss here the legitimacy of such expressions on philosophical grounds. But if this is the 'combination' which unlocks the mystery, then ordinary sinners must be content to remain outside so far as their minds are concerned. And this, it seems to me, is a fatal conclusion.

Moberly's special contribution, so far as it offers an interpretation of the Atonement, has, I believe, been weighed and found wanting. The argument runs : (1) God requires a perfect penitence ; (2) Sinners, because they are sinners, are incapable of a perfect penitence ; (3) Christ the Sinless One offered it in our stead. But (1) is seen to be gratuitous assumption if we read : God requires perfect penitence *from some one*, for this is by no means self-evident. We know that He requires sinners to repent, but we do not know that He requires, either in this life or any other, a perfect penitence, if that penitence must be of the kind which the author

[1] *Atonement and Personality*, pp. 86, 88.

describes.[1] God will have us holy at last. But we do not know in the least that we shall reach that goal by undergoing the agony of rehearsing all the past. In any case, vicarious penitence does not, I think, speak to the conscience of mankind.

In Moberly's familiar illustration, the sympathy of a mother with her fallen daughter seems to end in something like a merging of personalities. But this is a psychological mistake. It is the parodox of personality that the closer we come to each other the more we are distinct.

Mother and child are two,
If not, where were love?

When, after long being sundered, they meet,
What joy do they feel, the mother and child!
Where were joy, if the two were one?[2]

[1] 'We are trying to think, at this moment, not of an imperfect, but of a perfect penitence. A man has been in the depths, under the slavery of passion, or of drink. Imagine, if only for hypothesis' sake, not so much of penitence as you think you may probably hope for, but a penitence for once quite perfect. Think then of the clearness of his insight into the terribleness of that degradation which has become the very condition of his life. Think of the pain of the struggle against sin, and the anguish of shame because to abstain is so fierce a struggle and pain. He is impotent even to anguish. . . . Every step, every consciousness is a pain. Think of the pain of the disciplinary processes (which, even though pain, are his hope, his strength, his joy), the pain of the sorrow, the depth of the shame, the resoluteness of the self-accusing, self-condemning, self-identifying with the holiness outraged, the self-surrender to suffering and penalty, the more than willing acceptance, and development in the self of the processes of scourging and of dying. . . .' Op. cit., p. 38.

[2] *An Indian Peasant Mystic*, p. 20.

When it comes to the question of guilt, the boundaries of personality are inexorable. Nothing is more isolating than guilt. We may sin in company: conscience isolates us and accuses us alone. The mother may go all possible lengths in sorrow and sympathy and sharing, but she knows all the time that her daughter's guilt is not hers. If the facts are that the mother *was* to blame for her daughter's fall then the whole character of the experience is changed: then with the *mea culpa*, penitence would begin, but it would not be vicarious.

I would not however be thought to linger over any minor issue. One fundamental difficulty emerges sooner or later in every exposition of the expiatory character of the death of Christ. When the preliminaries have been duly set out, subsidiary issues and points of agreement adequately discussed, and we are at last at the heart of the matter, we are met with explanations which do not enlighten. It is not perversity, nor the carnal pride of the unregenerate, which checks so many reverent minds at the idea of expiation. It is the appearance of unreality in precisely that region where unreality is most intolerable. If using the older language, we say that the death of Christ satisfied divine justice, the difficulty is that the justice is

not recognizable as justice, and the only quality that makes it divine is its rigour. If the secret of the Atonement is to be found in something done between the Father and His beloved Son, which, independent of any effect upon men, met the ethical necessities of the case, the difficulty is to conceive what those ethical necessities were, how they could be dealt with apart from the actual persons who sinned against the ethical demand, and how these necessities were met by the sufferings of Christ. If we say that He bore the punishment of our sin because 'God must punish sin' we are aware immediately how inconclusive the argument is if we become explicit and say that God must punish *some one* for sin. If we keep clear the distinction between punishment and suffering, the conscience imperatively rejects the idea of punishing one person for another person's sin. And no pressing of the ineffable relations between Christ and the human family makes it thinkable that God should find 'satisfaction,' or the moral order receive justification from the *punishment* of the Beloved and sinless Son.

If again we say that Christ bore the divine condemnation of sin, and bearing, exhausted it, the same considerations apply, and to me they seem irresistible. God could not

condemn His Son in the hour when at unspeakable cost He was doing the Father's perfect will. Nor could Jesus *feel* as though He were so condemned unless by some tragic mistake He imagined that to be true which was the very opposite of the truth. If it be hard to think of God transferring *punishment* from the guilty to the innocent, it is quite impossible to think of Him condemning One who was utterly to be adored for that which He did.

If, then, we abandon the expiatory theory in any of its known forms, what is the alternative? Modern classifications usually require us to choose between the expiatory theories (in the wider interpretation of the words) and what are known as 'moral influence' theories. I do not myself accept this classification as exhaustive. The interpretation which I endeavour to commend in these pages does not, I believe, fall under either description. No one questions that there is truth in the theories described by the second term: the criticism of them is not that they are untrue, but that they are inadequate to explain either the witness of the New Testament or the Christian experience of the centuries. What elements of truth such theories contain is claimed equally for expiatory

interpretations, and for that which is contended for in this volume.

The 'moral influence' theories do justice to the inevitableness of the conflict between Jesus and His contemporaries, and see it as the typical conflict between the will of man and the will of God. The Cross was at once the supreme revelation of the sin of man and the Love of God. Calvary was the scene of the supreme martyrdom, and Christ was the greatest of all martyrs, dying to witness to the truth which He came to bring. By dying He gave the truth that power of appeal without which it could not penetrate to the hearts of men. I quote from one ancient and one modern expositor. Abelard was the first to give it explicit statement:

> 'It seems to us, however, that we are none the less justified in the Blood of Christ and reconciled to God by this singular grace exhibited to us in that His Son took our nature and in it persevered[1] instructing us alike by word and example even unto death, and so bound us to himself the more abundantly by love; so that kindled by so great a benefit of divine grace, charity should not be afraid to endure anything for His sake.'

Dr. Franks, who ranges himself with Abelard, writes:

> 'Jesus died; as millions have died before Him

[1] Opera (Cousin) ii. 767. But see Milne's *Patrologia* clxxvii., col. 835, and reading *perstitit* not *praestitit*.

and millions have died after Him. What is it that lifts this particular event into so supreme a significance? It is the principle of life from which He died, and the power of love that moves from His death upon the world.'[1]

Again:

'The difference between Jesus and others is not that the name of martyr is inadequate to His worth; it is in the principle of love for which He was a martyr. No other ever lived like Him exclusively in the power of the Divine love. His death possesses its unique power because of the life, whose whole impact upon humanity is gathered up in this final act. Because Jesus lived wholly in love towards sinful men, therefore His death concentrates the Divine Love for sinners in one single burning point. An event in history is fraught with the whole power of eternity. The power of the Cross is the power of the love that died.'[2]

Among modern writers, Rashdall in his *Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* maintains a similar interpretation. This view of the meaning of the death of Christ has many modern adherents, perhaps because the difficulties of the expiatory theories seem to drive them to this simpler explanation. It does more justice to the human conditions which made for conflict between our Lord and His contemporaries

[1] *The Atonement*, R. S. Franks, p. 182.
[2] Op. cit., p. 169. So also Rashdall, op. cit., p. 437 ff.

and drew on His death. But it does not help us to understand why Jesus so soon terminated His ministry of teaching, forced the issue, and hastened to death. It has the merit of regarding the life and death of Jesus as a unity, and does not make the life a mere preliminary, whose significance was in its failure, to His death, which was His victory; but it makes no necessary contact with the Resurrection and the ministry of the living Christ.[1] It eliminates some arbitrary elements which cling to the theories reckoned more orthodox, but it does not take account of the mind of Jesus during the last stages of His earthly life, so far as it is revealed to us in the Gospels. Neither does it, I think, sufficiently consider the nature of that burden which was laid upon One whose character and office it was to recover men from sin to God. Further, sin and its forgiveness do not appear in these theories to be the desperate problem which the New Testament and the deepest Christian experience declare them to be.[2] It does not perhaps overrate the effect of the appeal which the martyr death of Christ would make upon those who lived near enough to the time in which it

[1] The copious index to Rashdall's book does not contain a reference to the Resurrection. Cf. Acts i. 1.

[2] True, I think, of many of the expositions of this view, not of all; but the drift of the theory moves that way.

took place; but it does overrate the power of such an appeal when the event has receded far into the past. 'The death of Socrates,' it has been said, 'stopped the moral rot of Greece.'[1] Yes, then; but the knowledge of such an event will not arrest corruption centuries later. What is it that in the single instance of Christ reverses the law of Time's perspective?

It would be necessary to discuss the various forms of the 'Moral Influence' theory at much greater length but for one consideration. If the interpretation which I have urged in earlier pages, and, which I shall now endeavour to restate, is valid, it denies nothing that is true in such an interpretation as that of Dr. Franks (and there is much). But it supplies, I believe, a depth of meaning which is characteristic of the New Testament and of the classical Christian experience to which these theories are unable to do justice.

[1] I owe the phrase to H. G. Wood (*Christianity and the Nature of History*, p. 31), who quotes it from the Master of Balliol.

RESTATEMENT

If to bear sins means to go where the sinner is, and refuse either to leave him or to compromise with him; to love a shameful being, and therefore to be pierced by his shame; to devote oneself utterly to his recovery, and to follow him with ceaseless ministries, knowing that he cannot be recovered without his consent, and that his consent may be indefinitely withheld—if this is to bear sin, then this is what Jesus did upon the cross, and it is the innermost secret of the heart of God.—*The Meaning of the Cross.*

So let us keep the festival
  Whereto the Lord invites us;
Christ is Himself the joy of all,
  The Sun that warms and lights us;
  By His grace He doth impart
Eternal sunshine to the heart;
  The night of sin is ended.
    Hallelujah!

MARTIN LUTHER.

CHAPTER IX

RESTATEMENT

I SHALL ATTEMPT now to gather up the positive contribution of these chapters and to present it, not as a theological argument, but rather as a confession of faith.

In the seventh edition of Dr. Dale's book on the Atonement there was a preface, well remembered by me, containing, amongst other things, a restatement of the theory developed in the Lectures. I was not able to follow Dr. Dale's own theory then, nor can I now, and it has never, I believe, gained any considerable assent. But in the passage of the preface beginning 'When I, a sinful man, come to God through Christ,'[1] many beside myself have found something that spoke alike to mind and heart. It was right that it should be so. For an interpretation of the Cross of Christ hardly deserves a hearing if it does not insensibly pass into our prayers, to deepen all meanings,

[1] *The Atonement*, R. W. Dale, 7th edition, p. lviii.

to answer all misgivings, and move us to a simpler and humbler approach to God.

Our Lord came into the world to reveal God and to save men from sin. Both by His character and His office as Saviour of the world He was engaged to the help and recovery of every sinful man: and this was an infinite task and of necessity an infinite burden. Moving freely among men and refusing any aloofness, He saw and welcomed whatever was good. But He also saw sin, saw it with pain, in all the ways of men, and wherever He saw it, He saw His own task and felt the weight of the increasing burden. He knew sin as only one who was without sin could know it; and the knowledge remains still His own secret, of which we ourselves can know at the most only a syllable here and there. But we know that He is on our side against the sin that we love.

The enmity which gathered around Him, which compassed and accomplished His death, brought home to His human consciousness the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the terrible hold which it had upon us—and consequently the awful magnitude of the task to which He was committed. The task was indeed too great for flesh and blood, but not too great for His love. His love never failed: His purpose did not falter. But

the bodily frame was breaking under the strain. This was the real suffering of Christ —not the agonies of crucifixion, not the misery of contemplating men's sin, not the sorrow only of boundless sympathy but such bearing of sin as must be the lot of One who engages to deliver men from it. This was suffering unto death.

The recovery of men from sin to God cannot be accomplished by any stroke of power. Moral results must come by moral means. Christ in His saving work will do no violence to the natures He has given us, and His help, infinite as it is, must enter by the narrow door of our consent. Therefore we can still put Him to grief. But no man now is left alone in his sin. It pleased Him to join Himself for ever to our unworthy race and to contend with the sin that we love until we love it no longer. He was from the beginning the Sin-bearer in the deepest sense of the word. Not in the sense that the guilt of the human race or the divine condemnation of sin was transferred to Him, and that He bore it away sacrificially by laying down His life. The blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of an heifer served their time, no doubt, speaking their fragment of truth. But those dumb, unwilling victims provide no real point of comparison with the work of the

Saviour. All sacrificial analogies are passed and left behind. Human relations at their best—that is to say, when love is at its height—carry us further until they too fail. But they point the way and leave us to pursue the 'how much more' that is found in Christ alone. Person to person it must needs be with our salvation.

He died on the Cross, but not of crucifixion. He rose from the dead, and is alive for evermore. He has not deserted His office nor forsworn His name. He means now all that He meant then. His bearing of sin did not cease with His death, and cannot cease until we are delivered from it and are 'holy and without blemish before Him in love.' Not with a Cross and a Victim are we confronted now, not with a deed of the past only, but with a Person, with One who died on that Cross and rose from that grave. All that was in His death and His rising is present in Him now for our salvation, and it is present *only* in Him.

We are bidden to come to Him, not staying for unworthiness. We are bidden to believe on Him who, for the love He bore us, came to our help when we were 'enemies,' when we were 'ungodly,' when we were 'without strength,' and came all

the way. We are not to mistrust that measureless grace or think Him unequal to a Saviour's work in us or in any. Neither are we to count up our resources to see what we can bring. Our part is first to receive, not to give; to take, not to bestow. When we come thus, He is able to take charge of us and of our infected and disordered lives, as He took charge of St. Paul's. He silences the accusations of our conscience and grants us the miracle of His forgiveness—perfect and entire. It is His forgiveness, as given by Him, and mine as given to me. All is utterly personal here. We are not sent to some reservoir of forgiveness where all may come and drink if they will. As my sin is mine and no one else's, so too forgiveness must be mine, and from none but Him, and it brings heart-peace with it.

In that peace is the power of a new life. For, until we are thus reconciled, we can know only a *demanding* God. Since He is God His demands must be absolute, and being absolute we cannot meet them and are therefore always at issue with Him. Therefore we can only know fear or forgetfulness, and cannot know love, and our religion is but legalism, however we disguise it. But when He shows Himself as the *giving* God, and ends our estrangement, pouring His love

into our hearts, an answering love is begotten in us. And love is the fulfilling of the law.

> Blest Cross! Blest Sepulchre! Blest rather be
> The Man that there was put to shame for me!