

ceiving and bringing forth the doubt which when it is finished brings forth disbelief, there is generally one particular form of it that takes the lead in disturbing sincere minds. This remark, however, must be taken with some qualification. As the surrender of any one truth carries with it the surrender of others on which it depends, so strong doubts on any particular point may generally be traced to vacillation on some other more obviously fundamental doctrine. Speaking to you in all simplicity, I should say that the special difficulty on your mind at the present moment—if happily not on your mind as a difficulty, yet pressing on it for others' sake as a vital question—that of the eternal penalty of sin, is closely connected with a more or less implicit or explicit misconception of the Atonement. The root of most of the present distress is there. Time was when the Incarnation was specially assailed; and that assault was felt to be so vital that the whole Church of Christ arose to the defence against antichrist. But now many who accept the Divinity of our Lord—that is, His Incarnate Person—yield to the pressure of human reasoning or sentiment upon the vicariousness of His suffering for our race. We have to decide between two doctrines concerning the great Reconciliation: one which makes it a Divine expedient for moving upon man's enmity and removing his selfishness by giving him a Divine-human Exemplar of the evil of sin; and the other which makes it also the revelation of a process of unsearchable mystery in the heart of the Holy Trinity, a reconciliation of God to man rendering possible the reconciliation of man to God: in short, an Atonement in heaven before the Atonement on earth.

Between these two theories—if the word may be allowed—there is a difference the results of which are

all-pervasive and incalculable. I need only refer to the effect of the former type of doctrine, which is traceable in too much of the theology now counted orthodox. It insensibly but surely lowers the whole tone of the New Testament, while seeming to raise it: and in particular gives an undefinable unreality to its current language concerning the Saviour's relation to human sin and Divine justice. That He was made a curse, that He was made sin for us, that He bore the iniquities of the world, that He suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust; all these are phrases that have lost their deepest meaning. The cross is the beautiful symbol of self-sacrifice; but it is not also the awful scene of the condemnation of sin in the flesh. Hence this view of the Atonement affects deeply the theological estimate of the nature of the Supreme. The Being who is finally and fully revealed in Gethsemane and Calvary is not the God of this type of modern theology. Its God is not the God of the Holy Scriptures. In His government evil should never have existed at all; or, if it existed, must have been visited most tenderly, if not suppressed by instant omnipotence. I put it to you, my reader, whether the gentle Father about whom enthusiasts declare so much is the Very God of the providence of this world of sorrow and of the process of Christ's redemption. Sin itself is, in this theology, something very different from the abominable thing that God hateth, towards which He is a consuming fire. For my own part, I cannot understand this imaginary Judge to whom appeal is made against Himself. But I do find—though I exceedingly fear and quake at finding—in all the Scriptures a Being whose love and whose holiness are one and equal, and who does not “deny Himself” when He separates the wilful sinner for ever from His presence.