

## SERMONIC SECTION.

THE DEMAND OF HUMAN NATURE  
FOR THE ATONEMENT.BY J. C. JACKSON, D.D. [METHODIST  
EPISCOPAL], JERSEY CITY, N. J.*How should man be just with God?—*  
Job ix. 2.

I. OUR subject is the Atonement, and facts in human nature which demand it. For many Christians religion is full of joyful shocks and glad surprises. We at first receive its doctrines upon the authority of the Scriptures and the Church. Our beliefs have not the happy strength which comes from seeing either how or why they are true. But when, to aid our faith, we inquire after the philosophy of doctrines, we are agreeably surprised to find that they finally and fairly rest upon the conscious realities of our own nature. Religion can account for all its principles and doctrines by an appeal to the facts of our being. Whenever we hear a "Thus saith the Lord," we may read its answer upon the pages of the spirit's consciousness, and, glancing upward into the face of God, pronounce, as did the well-instructed scribe to Jesus. "Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth."

The doctrine of reconciliation with God through the atoning death of Jesus is confessedly the chief and, in some respects, the most obscure doctrine of the Christian religion. Nevertheless, belief in its general features is essential to any honest acceptance of the Gospel. Without discussing obscurities, I wish, in aid of faith, simply to point out how true it is to all the facts of human nature. And as I attempt to do so, we may all well utter the prayer of Milton in beginning his "Paradise Lost:"

"... Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer  
Before all temples the upright heart and  
pure,  
Instruct me, for thou knowest ...  
... What in me is dark,

Illumine; what is low, raise and support;  
That to the height of this great argument,  
I may assert eternal providence,  
And justify the ways of God to man."

II. "How should man be just with God?" It is not a question that is raised by recent ethical culture or by the progress of man in moral development, as some have thought. It is as old as the human soul, as ancient as the sense of sin, as universal as humanity, and is heard in all the religions. Here in this Book of Job—written in no one knows what far-off age, or where, or by whom, distant amid the mists of antiquity—we have its full statement. Beneath the burning skies of primeval Arabia, this mighty problem is debated by an Arab sheik and his three friends.

First, (1) Bildad, the Shuhite, states the incontrovertible premise from which the discussion starts—a premise grounded in universal consciousness, and axiomatic in its truth: "Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil-doer." That is to say, God makes an everlasting distinction between and a difference in His treatment of righteous and unrighteous men. The prophecy and the philosophy of eternal heaven and hell is there, germinal in the word of a Bildad.

(2) Then up speaks Job: "I know it is so of a truth. But how should man be just with God? If he will contend with Him, he cannot answer Him one of a thousand!" Oh, measureless depth, and truth, and pathos of that confession! "All we, like sheep, have gone astray, and turned every one to his own way." "Where is the righteous man?" "There is none that doeth good; no, not one."

(3) Despondently, Job continues: "If God will not withdraw His anger, the proud helpers do stoop under Him. How much less shall I answer Him, and choose out my words to reason with Him?" That is to say, all our repent-