

be taken as precise images of the great transactions of God with the estranged soul. The word which describes those transactions directly—so far as any human word can do so—is the word “atonement” in its original connotation. The God whom we see in the New Testament is one who spends His utmost on overcoming the estrangement of His children, and restoring them to Himself in the harmony of fellowship and co-operation. It is not, be it remembered, a picture of Omar Khayyám’s God who is “a good fellow,” nor of Coventry Patmore’s sentimental Father “who has pity on our childishness.” The Christian God is not represented as taking sin so lightly and as disposing of it by the simple process of ignoring it. Reconciliation is treated in the New Testament as a transaction of infinite costliness; and it is only a shallow view of life and personality that can conceive of it as a facile condonation of offences. It is never that, even in our imperfect human relationships. There is a certain temperamental levity which can shake off the remembrance of injury with a toss of the head, and in a casual moment shake hands and let bygones be bygones. But the restoration of a broken friendship is not so cheaply purchased. Where the offence cuts deepest, forgiveness is most costly—especially if it be carried through to a perfect end. Jesus in one of his parables likens sin to a bad debt, and the forgiveness of sin to the cancellation of the debt; but it is even more than that. It is to restore the debtor to his former position, to resume business with him on the old terms. It is not mere release or absolutism; it is the positive recreation of a disrupted harmony, so