

There is positively no indication in the records that the offerings Cain and Abel brought were looked upon as propitiatory, as the sacrifices upon the great day of atonement undoubtedly were; rather that they were simple acts of grateful acknowledgment to the All Father, whom they acknowledged as the author and giver of every good and blessing.

It has frequently been assumed that Abel's offering being of blood was in accord with a divine command, and *therefore* accepted, whilst Cain's being in disregard of that requirement was rejected. Thus a popular commentary: "This element of blood-shedding was that which Cain's sacrifice lacked, and his choice of such a bloodless offering, against the divine requirement, was his open profession that blood-shedding was not requisite, at least for him. He set up his own plan against God's, his own reason against faith, and, of course, he found no room in his system for the gospel of the Old Testament" (Jacobus *in loc.*), all of which is pure assumption, and against the express declaration of our text, "*By faith* Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which (faith) he had witness borne to him that he was righteous" (Comp. Rom. viii. 16): "And through it (that same faith) he being dead, yet speaketh." Here plainly the essential difference between the offerings is declared to be "faith" rather than the matter of the offering, and by that faith, which "is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen," Abel, though dead, from among the "great cloud of witnesses," "yet speaketh."

Revelation was manifestly progressive: to read Leviticus into these earlier records is a pure anachronism; nor can Heb. xii. 24 be read rightly as a parallel to ix. 13, 14.

Of Heb. xii. 24 two interpretations alone are tenable, according as the italicised words "*that of*" are retained or omitted. Retain them, and the contrast stands between the mount that burned with fire and the city of God's own home; between the blood that cried for vengeance (Gen. iv. 10, "the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground"), and the blood which seals the covenant of mercy. Not judgment but deliverance, not wrath but love, the blood of Jesus brings.

"Love that condemns the sinner's sin,
Yet, in condemning, pardon seals;
That saves from righteous wrath, and yet,
In saving, righteousness reveals."

Omit "*that of*" and read "better than Abel," the meaning seems to be that whilst Abel by his faith testifies, and thus strengthens, Jesus stands our *Paraclete*, giving life and power. I have dwelt somewhat particularly upon the interpretation of these few allusions to Abel's history, that we may be freed from those theological conceits which in great measure hide the simple lesson to be gathered by a consideration of him who, though dead, by faith still speaks—a simplicity so simple that our morbid wonder-craving cannot rest therein, and yet, by not resting therein, we miss the practical power of simple truth. For are not great forces also simple? In our school days we have wearied over some problem, the head has ached, the spirit been overtaken—one single word and the problem is solved. We wondered it did not occur to us at once, it was so simple, and yet that very simplicity was its mystery. We sought to fetch from far what was really at hand. Far-fetched theories are very apt to obscure the plain teaching of God's own word. Read in the light of Heb. xi. 4, we learn from Gen. iv. 2-9, that the brothers worship the same God, are under the same revelation of His power and glory; they have, it would seem, the same seasons set apart for worship (for "in process of time" or at "the end of days" apparently points to a stated season—perhaps the weekly Sabbath); their manner of service, too, was the same—each brought of his own an offering to the Lord. We, however, soon trace a difference: Cain brought of the fruit, Abel the *firstlings* and the *fat* thereof. The faithless offerer is the same in all ages, and Mal. i. 8 is anticipated in Gen. iv. 3. It was to Cain a form, to Abel a grand reality, and therein lay the whole secret of the rejection of the one, the acceptance of the other. Cain's faith was a mere *credo*, wanting the living power. Abel *believed unto, on, in*. Cain was a mere ritualist; Abel a believer, and thus found favour with God—yea life—trust *in* Him.

Let us learn, then, the one simple lesson. The spirit in which we perform an act is the test in eternity's light of its acceptance or rejection, and the inward witness to ourselves of God's approving "well done." Even worship is an abomination where faith is not. [Isa. i. 14.]