

—that was the difficulty, but it had to be done, and done to a people newly out of Egypt, with all its corrupting and debasing tendencies, while they lay encamped for a year in the broad plateau of the Sinaitic mountains. It had to be done in a rudimental form, and by a system of symbolic ordinances and an elaborate sacrificial ritual. The fundamental principle of this was that “the wages of sin is death,” and, as follows from this, if sin was to be pardoned and the sinner reconciled to God, the sin must be confessed, a substitute to die for him be provided, and its blood be shed for him to make atonement. All this was accordingly carried out: of course, it was only an external *performance*; “for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin.” It “sanctified to the purifying of the flesh”—nothing more. How far devout Israelites felt the insufficiency of this to purge the conscience we are left to conjecture.

But one thing the grand ceremonial of the Day of Atonement *might* do for the partial relief of the conscience; it enabled the Israelite to know how he stood with God at a given stage of his life. Once a year his account with God was *squared*, and he was *quits*, so to speak. “The books” for the past year were solemnly *crossed*, and a clean page opened for the following one. And as this was the most solemn transaction of Israel’s whole religious life, it was fitting that the ritual of it should be grand and specific in all its details.

The very first thing done is perhaps the most affecting. The high priest, being himself but a poor sinful man, could as such make no atonement for other sinners. Atonement, therefore, for himself had first to be made. A bullock was killed for a sin-offering, and Aaron, taking some of its blood in a basin, carried it into the sanctuary, and drawing aside the thick gorgeous veil that concealed the holiest of all, he went in with the blood, and sprinkled it with his finger seven times in front of the mercy-seat, as his warrant to approach it, and seven times upon the mercy-seat, in token of God’s satisfaction with the atonement made, whereupon the glory of the Lord broke forth, covering the mercy-seat, and Aaron now returned