

**THE ATONEMENT, ITS
RELATION TO
PARDON: AN ARGUMENT
AND A DEFENCE**

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The Atonement, Its Relation to Pardon: An Argument and a Defence by E. Mellor

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BY THE

REV. E. MELLOR, M.A.



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PREFACE.

THE ARGUMENT, which constitutes the first part of this Book, was read before the Congregational Union of the West Riding of Yorkshire in the spring of 1858. It was of course never designed to be exhaustive. Its appearance, in its present form, in connexion with a defensive Appendix, is owing to the publication of three Discourses which were delivered in reply by the Rev. T. Hincks, B.A., Unitarian Minister of Leeds. If the interests of Divine truth are advanced by a controversy which the Author has not courted, but dare not shun, he will be satisfied.

HALIFAX, *August* 1859.

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The Atonement ;

ITS RELATION TO PARDON.

I AM not quite sure that I have rightly understood the precise idea of those through whose kindness I find myself in this position to-day. The subject on which I was requested to prepare a paper for this, our annual gathering, was conveyed to me in this broad and naked form—Sacrifice,—and for a while I was not unnaturally thrown into considerable bewilderment. Was I intended to bring before you an elaborate investigation into the origin of Sacrifice, with the view of adjusting the claims of rival theories which assert it respectively to be from heaven or of men, and to trace its various modifications among the different nations and tribes of the earth? Or was I to enter into a philosophical examination of the principle of Sacrifice, and attempt a decisive adjudication between the opinions, (if, indeed, their nebulous consistence entitles them to so positive a denomination) of what are styled the advanced school, and the more tangible opinions of those who still “stand in the way and seek for the old paths?” Or was I to present a critical history of the controversy so far as the accessible materials for such a history are sufficiently numerous and exact to warrant the attempt? Or was I to confine myself to the simple object of defending the real, peculiar, substitutionary character of the Saviour's death, from those recent attacks which, with much mysticism, have sought to accomplish the end which a more honest and plain-

speaking Unitarianism has abortively contemplated for centuries? Such was my perplexity, and it was only after prolonged and prayerful consideration that I determined,—without selecting any one of these topics for exclusive and systematic treatment, and thus being seduced into the composition of a lengthened treatise instead of a brief paper,—to bring as far as possible into one view the miscellaneous arguments by which, in my judgment, the death of Christ is avouched to be a real and not a figurative, a divinely intended and not a casual, a vicarious and atoning, and not merely nor chiefly an exemplary and an atoning death.

I am not insensible to the disadvantages connected with such a decision. It sacrifices to a considerable extent that unity which is no mean charm in any production. It bars also thorough exhaustiveness of treatment, and consequently leaves out of account both some objections to the truth and the arguments by which they may be met. But no decision could, in the circumstances, have combined all advantages without any drawback; and, unless I greatly misinterpret the spirit and convictions of my brethren, they will find in the aspect of the times ample justification of the form which this paper assumes. Unity of one kind it *will* possess. Its *object* is one, and that is to indicate both by considerations familiar, and by considerations less trite, but of immense and, I believe, conclusive value—the redemptiveness of our Saviour's death. And if the object is one, so too is the *spirit* in which I write, for words can but feebly embody my desire that we may all be mercifully preserved from false and shadowy apprehensions of this fundamental doctrine. For apprehensions such as these cannot fail (such is the constitution of the human mind) to thaw down the sinews of all earnestness, to make the lan-

gauge of Scripture, if we use it, a mere jugglery on our lips, to dwarf into comparative unimportance every other vital doctrine, and to alienate so fearfully from our work the Spirit of God, that there will neither be heard in our churches the cry of sinners for salvation, nor the song of the saints on their pilgrimage to heaven.

There is a wonderful confraternity in error, because there is a wonderful unity in truth, and hence it is that when a man rejects a central and controlling verity he cannot long (except by a strange inconsistency) maintain his faith in other and related truths. He has thrown one truth away, and then those which lay next to it, which were fitted into it, are seen to have significant shapes which have no meaning, unless they are attached to the rejected truth, and as that is gone, they too must go. But still the process of abnegation is not ended, for other truths remain to be accounted for. *They* indicate by *their* forms that they are but parts of a great whole, but as the most important part of that whole has been flung away, it is inconvenient to retain them, and thus quickly or slowly, according to the rapidity with which the man sees the logical consequences of his position, he becomes the victim of universal scepticism. These remarks have peculiar force in their application to truths of a spiritual character, and which bear upon the heart, for in such a case they have to encounter a depraved opposition which feels a special interest in closing the door against every doctrine which tends to humble the pride and self-sufficiency of man. The doctrine, then, to the elucidation and enforcement of which the present paper is devoted, is not of a secondary and unimportant character. Nor is it a matter so purely speculative that it exerts no influence on our life and destiny. And as little is it a

truth which has no traceable articulations with other truths revealed in Scripture. It is the most prominent doctrine of the Bible. It is the central truth, the denial of which throws the whole fabric of spiritual truth into disintegration and collapse.* It sustains the functions of the heart to every other verity in the Christian scheme, giving to it life and power. It is the sun in the heavens of revelation, around which other doctrines revolve, and from which they derive their light. If God has not revealed this fact—that we are saved through the substitutionary work of Christ—he has revealed nothing, or the revelation has been clothed in such deceptive language as to necessitate bewilderment and mistake, and that which should have been a steady lamp to our feet and light to our path, only leads us, like an *ignis fatuus*, into quagmires of error and despair. The great Reformer styled the doctrine of Justification by faith the article of a standing or a falling Church. If one may vary and extend his figure, justification and sanctification are the two glorious pillars which stand at the entrance of Heaven, but the atoning death of Christ is the foundation on which both, and both equally, rest. Without this they stand on air. They are empty theories, about which men may speak, but which can never come into actual existence in a world of sin. The Divine philosophy of the Word of God is this,—without redemption there is no forgiveness, without forgiveness there is no sanctification of character and life, for there is no root of gratitude from which it can grow.

The first argument we shall present with the view of establishing what I do not shrink from characterising as the orthodox notion of the Scripture doctrine of sacrifice

* See note (A) Appendix.