AN ESSAY, ON THE QUESTION "WHETHER THE BRITISH DRUIDS OFFERED HUMAN SACRIFICES."

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JOHN WILLIAMS

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Trieste

AN ESSAY,

ON THE QUESTION,

"WHETHER THE BRITISH DRUIDS OFFERED HUMAN SACRIFICES."

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TO

JOHN HENRY VIVIAN, ESQ. M. P.

(For Swansea and its Contributory Boroughs)

IN TESTIMONY

OF HIS PRIVATE WORTH,

AND OF THE INTEREST WHICH HE HAS UNIFORMLY

EVINCED IN EVERY MEASURE CALCULATED

TO IMPROVE WALES,

AND ELEVATE THE CHARACTER OF WELSHMEN,

THE FOLLOWING PAGES

ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR.

AN ESSAY.*

SACRIFICES are known to be nearly coeval with the fall of man; for we read in the Sacred Record, that Abel offered "of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof."† They must also have been appointed by God himself,‡ as it

* It is proper here to state that the Essay in its present form exhibits several features which were wanting in the original composition.

† *Gen.* iv. 4.

‡ The most plausible arguments in favour of the human origin of sacrifices are drawn from the following passages of Scripture:—"For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices." *Jer.* vii. 22.—"I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds.—Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the most High." *Ps.* l. 8—14.—"Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering." *Ps.* li. 16. "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required." *Ps.* xl. 6.—It is replied that the expressions of the Psalmist must be understood either in a comparative sense as importing that sacrifices were not so pleasing to God as moral obedience, or as denoting their insufficiency to make a proper atonement for sin; according to the Apostle, "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats, should take away sins;" (*Heb.* x. 4.) and as reproving, therefore, the vain dependance of those who rested upon them for pardon and divine acceptance, without looking by faith to their great antitype, the sacrifice of Christ. It cannot be supposed that the Psalmist meant that God had never instituted sacrifices, because he had certainly done so by Moses.

is morally impossible that Abel should have possessed a correct knowledge of their nature and intent without an express revelation.

Generally speaking they had a threefold object: first, they were designed as an acknowledgement on the part of men that they received all their good things from God, and that He had a right in the whole of that of which they offered Him a part; secondly, as means of repentance and humiliation for sin, of the desert of which they were reminded by the suffering and death of the victim substituted in their room, and punished in their stead; thirdly, they were

With respect to the passage in Jeremiah, it cannot import that sacrifices were not appointed by God prior to the deliverance of the Israelites out of Egypt; for the paschal lamb, "the sacrifice of the Lord's passover," (*Exod.* xii. 27.) was expressly so instituted. For a better understanding of it, it must be taken in connection with the words immediately following: "But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you." Two senses are therefore attached to the passage: first, that after God had brought Israel out of Egypt he did not *first* speak to them, and command them, concerning sacrificial rites, but concerning moral obedience. It was *before* the new institution of sacrifices at Mount Sinai that God "made for them a statute and an ordinance, and proved them, and said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians." (*Exod.* xv. 25, 26.) Secondly, the words may be taken in a comparative sense: "God did not command the fathers concerning sacrifices, but this he commanded them, to obey his voice:" that is, He did not command them concerning sacrifices, so much as concerning moral obedience; "to obey being better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." (1 *Sam.* xv. 22.) Accordingly, God is said to "desire mercy and not sacrifice;" (*Hos.* vi. 6.) or mercy rather than sacrifice. In this manner negatives are frequently used for comparatives. "It was not you that sent me hither, but God;" (*Gen.* xlv. 8.) not so much you, as God. "Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord;" (*Exod.* xvi. 8.) not so properly against us, as the Lord. "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life;" (*John* vi. 27.) that is, not with so much assiduity and anxiety for the former as for the latter. See *Jenning's Jewish Antiquities*, B. I. c. v.

intended to typify, and to assist their faith in, that promised sacrifice of atonement which the Son of God was to offer in due time.*

That Abel was aware of this general purport is evident from the Divine approbation bestowed upon his oblation. "The Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering."† It will be probably urged, that although Abel could not of himself have discovered the *typical* nature of sacrifices, yet that he naturally discerned in them a part of their proper intent—an acknowledgement of God's dominion and temporal mercies, and the desert of sin, and that his offering was good as far as it went, and proportionably acceptable. If so, then upon the same principle Cain's offering would have been entitled to some degree of approbation, inasmuch as that likewise was correct as far as it went, involving an acknowledgement of the goodness of God, and man's dependance thereon. "Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord." Yet we are told that "unto Cain and to his offering he had *not* respect."‡ Where lies the essential difference? The Apostle furnishes an answer; "By *faith* Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain."§ Now this faith necessarily implies as its ground and foundation some *divine promise* connected with the rite. And what could that promise be but the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God? A religious act typical of such mysteries, and withal so conformable to the Divine will, was indeed "a more excellent sacrifice" than any which could have been invented by man.

As sacrifices were acceptable rites of worship before, so were they after the deluge, and previously to the establishment of the Mosaic economy. Thus Noah when he went out of the ark "builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt

* Ibid. † *Gen.* iv. 4. ‡ *Gen.* iv. 3, 5. § *Heb.* xi. 4.