

THE ATONEMENT

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The Atonement by Leighton Pullan

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LEIGHTON PULLAN

THE ATONEMENT

The Oxford Library
of
Practical Theology

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THE ATONEMENT

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EDITORS' PREFACE

THE object of the Oxford Library of Practical Theology is to supply some carefully considered teaching on matters of Religion to that large body of devout laymen, who desire instruction, but are not attracted by the learned treatises which appeal to the theologian. One of the needs of the time would seem to be, to translate the solid theological learning, of which there is no lack, into the vernacular of everyday practical religion; and while steering a course between what is called plain teaching on the one hand and erudition on the other, to supply some sound and readable instruction to those who require it, on the subjects included under the common title 'The Christian Religion,' that they may be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh them a reason of the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear.

The Editors, while not holding themselves precluded from suggesting criticisms, have regarded their proper task as that of editing, and accordingly they have not interfered with the responsibility of each writer for his treatment of his own subject.

W. C. E. N.
D. S.

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CHAPTER I

SIN

§ 1. *The Existence of Sin.*

ATONEMENT is reconciliation between God and man after previous estrangement, an estrangement caused by sin. And unless a man is wholly persuaded that there is nothing sacred and nothing shameful, and that such words need no longer be employed even as bogeys to frighten children, the problem of sin will appear to him to be a problem worth considering. It is not a Gothic shadow cast over the world by a designing Christian priesthood, nor a fiction invented by Semitic savages who felt that their worship was improved in quality when they gashed their breasts with knives. Sin is spoken of by Seneca as well as S. Paul, Ovid as well as Milton, Cicero as well as S. Augustine. The early Buddhists, who were very far from being fanatics, knew something about sin when they spoke of the 'three fires' of lust, ill-will, and stupidity, the 'obstacles' which hinder man's entrance into the haven of calm. Plato knew that a strong overmastering passion, gaining strength with years, will sometimes grasp the reins which should be held by illuminated reason, and drive desperately, like Phaethon, down the steep of heaven into some abyss of sensuality or crime until the soul is flung to the earth in the paralysis of death. If the idea that there is such a thing as sin be an illusion,

it is at least an illusion which is so widespread that it demands a scientific explanation and a scientific remedy. It ought not to be ignored.

It is the refusal to recognise the existence of sin in a courageous manner which is at the root of that melancholy dissatisfaction with life, that disgust with self and with the world which was known both in Roman and in medieval literature, but has found a fuller expression in the more flagrant types of modern Pessimism. There has been no more ghastly failure than the resolve to attain happiness by assuming that there is no such thing as moral evil. The modern pagan character starts with the belief that the Cross is foolishness, as the ancient Greek was apt to think. But it goes beyond the ancient Greek by preaching a 'rehabilitation of the flesh,' which means getting as much sensual pleasure as possible in life, by holding that nature when beautiful and healthy requires no law, and by accusing Christ of the supreme felony of introducing melancholy into the world. It would be both profitable and interesting to show how much melancholy, mystical or morbid, can be discovered in pagan literature, both European and Oriental, and also to show how the New Testament and other early Christian books are really brimming over with a new sense of joy. If ever a new light came to wistful eyes, it came to those who saw the dawn of the kingdom of God preached by Jesus Christ. But the irony of modern unbelief is that by denying the existence of sin it has blinded itself to the existence of goodness, and has turned its own vaunted sweetness into a cup of gall. And the drinking of that cup means intellectual and moral suicide. A typical but by no means extreme instance is afforded by the writings of Renan, whose intellectual grasp lost touch with reality in exact proportion as it relaxed its moral earnestness. Life is not true life, nature is not true nature, realism