

It is fitted, and of course was intended, to afford us motives and encouragements to repentance and holiness. This is true, but it is very far from being the whole of the truth upon the subject. It is likewise true that Scripture sanctions the general idea of Christ—by suffering and dying for the sake of men—doing what was pleasing and acceptable to God,—of His being in consequence rewarded, and raised to a position of high power and dignity,—and of His interceding with God, or using influence with Him, to procure for men spiritual blessings. All this is true, and it is held by those who maintain the commonly received doctrine of the atonement. But neither is this the whole of the truth which Scripture teaches upon the subject. And what in it is true, as thus generally expressed, is not brought out so fully and explicitly, as the Scripture affords us ample materials for doing, by connecting it with the doctrine of the atonement.

Some men would fain persuade us that the substance of all that Scripture teaches us concerning the way of salvation is this,—that an exalted and glorious Being interposed on behalf of sinners,—mediated between them and an offended God; and by this interposition and influence procured for them the forgiveness of their sins, and the enjoyment of God's favour. Now, all this is true. There is nothing in this general statement which contradicts or opposes anything that is taught us in Scripture. But, just as the Scripture affords us, as we have seen, abundant materials for defining much more fully and explicitly the real nature, dignity, and position of this exalted Being, and leaves us not to mere vague generalities upon this point, but warrants and requires us to believe and maintain that He was of the same nature and substance with the Father, and equal in power and glory; so, in like manner, in regard to what He *did* for men's salvation, the Scripture does not leave us to the vague generalities of His mediating or interposing, interceding or using influence, on our behalf, but affords us abundant materials for explaining much more precisely and definitely the nature or kind of His mediation or interposition,—the foundation of His intercession,—the ground or source of His influence. The commonly received doctrine of the satisfaction or atonement of Christ just professes to bring out this more full and specific information; and the substance of it is this,—that *the way and manner* in which He mediated or interposed in behalf of sinners, and in order to effect their deliverance or salvation, was

by putting Himself in their place,—by substituting Himself in their room and stead,—suffering, as their *substitute or surety*, the penalty of the law which they had broken, the punishment which they had deserved by their sins,—and thereby satisfying the claims of divine justice, and thus reconciling them to God. This great scriptural doctrine is thus expressed in our Confession of Faith: * “The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him;” or, in the words of the Shorter Catechism, “Christ executeth the office of a Priest, in His once offering up of Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us.”

Here I may remark, as illustrating some preceding observations,—though this is not a topic which I mean to dwell upon,—that His intercession succeeds, and is based upon, His sacrifice and satisfaction; and that thus distinctness and definiteness are given to the idea which it expresses. When men's deliverance, or their possession of spiritual blessings, is ascribed, in general, to the intercession of Christ, without being accompanied with an exposition of His vicarious sacrifice and satisfaction, *as the ground or basis on which it rests*, no more definite meaning can be attached to it than merely that of *using some influence*, in order to procure for men what they need from God. But when His vicarious sacrifice and satisfaction are first asserted as the great leading department of the work which He wrought for the salvation of sinners, and His intercession is *then* introduced as following this, and based upon it, we escape from this vague generality, and are warranted and enabled to represent His intercession as implying that He pleads with God, in behalf of men, and in order to obtain for them the forgiveness of their sins, this most relevant and weighty consideration,—viz., that He has suffered in their room, that He has endured in their stead the whole penalty which their sins had deserved.

The great doctrine, that Christ offered Himself as a vicarious sacrifice,—that is, a sacrifice in the room and stead of sinners, as

* C. viii., s. 5.

their surety and substitute; that He did so, in order to satisfy divine justice and reconcile them to God; and that, of course, by doing so, He has satisfied divine justice and reconciled them to God,—has been always held and maintained by the great body of the Christian church. It was not, indeed, like the doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ, subjected, at an early period in the history of the church, to a thorough and searching controversial discussion; and, in consequence of this, men's views in regard to it continued always to partake somewhat of the character of vagueness and indistinctness. It can scarcely be said to have been fully expounded and discussed, in such a way as to bring out thoroughly its true nature and its scriptural grounds, until after the publication of the works of Socinus; for Anselm's contributions to the right exposition of this doctrine, important as they are, scarcely come up to this description. It formed no part of the controversy between the Reformers and the Romanists; for the Church of Rome has always continued to profess the substance of scriptural truth on this subject, as well as on that of the Trinity, though, according to her usual practice, she has grievously corrupted, and almost wholly neutralized, the truth which she professedly holds. Socinus was the first who made a full and elaborate effort to overturn the doctrine which the church had always held upon this subject, and which, though not very fully or explicitly developed as a topic of speculation, had constituted the source at once of the hopes and the motives of God's people from the beginning. This he did chiefly in his Treatise, "De Jesu Christo Servatore," and in his "Prælectiones Theologicæ;" and it certainly required no ordinary ingenuity for one man, and without the benefit of much previous discussion upon the point, to devise a whole system of plausible evasions and perversions, for the purpose of showing that the doctrine which the whole church had hitherto believed upon the subject was not taught in Scripture. Ever since that period the doctrine of the atonement or satisfaction of Christ has been very fully discussed in all its bearings and aspects, affecting as it does, and must do, the whole scheme of Christian truth; and the result has been, that the Socinian evasions and perversions of Scripture have been triumphantly exposed, and that the generally received doctrine of the church has been conclusively established, and placed upon an immovable basis, by the most exact and searching

investigation, conducted upon the soundest and strictest critical principles, into the meaning of the numerous and varied scriptural statements that bear upon this subject.

In considering this subject, I propose to advert, in the first place, to the doctrine of the atonement or satisfaction of Christ in general, as held by the universal church,—by Papists, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Arminians,—in opposition to the Socinians and other deniers of our Lord's divinity; in the second place, to the peculiarities of the Arminian doctrine upon this subject, as affected and determined by its relation to the general system of Arminian theology; and in the third place, to the doctrine which has been propounded, upon this subject, by those who profess Calvinistic principles upon other points, but who, upon *this*, hold views identical with, or closely resembling those of, the Arminians, especially in regard to the extent of the atonement.

Sec. II.—Necessity of the Atonement.

In considering the subject of the atonement, it may be proper to advert, in the first place, to a topic which has given rise to a good deal of discussion,—namely, the *necessity* of an atonement or satisfaction, in order to the forgiveness of men's sins. The Socinians allege that a vicarious atonement or satisfaction for sin is altogether unnecessary, and adduce this consideration as a proof, or at least a presumption, against its truth or reality; while the advocates of an atonement have not been contented with showing that its non-necessity could not be proved, but have, in general, further averred positively that it was necessary,—have undertaken to prove this,—and have made the evidence of its necessity at once an argument in favour of its truth and reality, and a means of illustrating its real nature and operation. The assertion, as well as the denial, of the necessity of an atonement, must, from the nature of the case, be based upon certain ideas of the attributes and moral government of God, viewed in connection with the actual state and condition of man as a transgressor of His law; and the subject thus leads to discussions in which there is a great danger of indulging in presumptuous speculations on points of which we *can* know nothing, except in so far as God has been pleased to convey to us information in His word. It can scarcely be said that the Scripture gives us any *direct* or *explicit* informa-

tion upon the precise question, whether or not the salvation of sinners could possibly have been effected in any other way than through an atonement or satisfaction; and it is not *indispensable* for any important purpose that this question should be determined. The only point of vital importance is that of the *truth or reality* of an atonement, and then the consideration of its true nature and bearing. We have just to ascertain from Scripture what was the true character and object of Christ's death, and the way and manner in which, in point of fact, it bears upon the forgiveness of men's sins, and their relation to God and to His law; and when we have ascertained this, it cannot be of fundamental importance that we should investigate and determine the question, whether or not it was *possible* for God to have forgiven men without satisfaction.

Had the materials for determining the question of the truth and reality of an atonement been scanty or obscure, then the presumption arising from anything we might be able to know or ascertain as to its necessity or non-necessity, might be of some avail in turning the scale upon the question of its truth or reality. But when we have in Scripture such explicit and abundant materials for establishing the great doctrine that, in point of fact, Christ did offer up Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, we are entitled to feel, and we ought to feel, that, in stating and arguing this question, we are wholly independent of the alleged necessity or non-necessity of an atonement; and having ascertained what God *has* done,—what provision He *has* made,—what scheme He *has* adopted,—we need not be very anxious about settling the question, whether or not He *could* have accomplished the result in any other way or by any other means. But while it is proper that we should understand that this question about the necessity of an atonement is not one of *vital* importance in defending our cause against the Socinians, as we have full and abundant evidence of its truth and reality; yet, since the subject has been largely discussed among theologians,—since almost all who have held the truth and reality of an atonement have also maintained its necessity,—and since the consideration of the subject brings out some views *which, though not indispensable to the proof of its truth or reality, are yet true and important in themselves, and very useful in illustrating its nature and bearings*,—it may be proper to give a brief notice of the points that are usually introduced into the discussion of this question.

Let us first advert to the ground taken by the Socinians upon this department of the subject. They deny the necessity of an atonement or satisfaction for sin, upon the ground that the essential benevolence and compassion of God must have prompted, and that His supreme dominion must have enabled, Him to forgive men's sins without any atonement or satisfaction; and that there was nothing in His nature, government, or law, which threw any obstacle in the way of His at once exercising His sovereign dominion in accordance with the promptings of His compassion, and extending forgiveness to all upon the condition of repentance and reformation.

Now, in the first place, an allegation of this sort is sufficiently met by the scriptural proof, that, in point of fact, an atonement *was* offered,—that satisfaction was made, and that forgiveness and salvation are held out to men, and bestowed upon them, only on the footing of this atonement. And then, in the second place, if we should, *ex abundanti*, examine the Socinian position more directly, it is no difficult matter to show that they have not proved, and cannot prove, any one of the positions on which they rest the alleged non-necessity of an atonement. As they commonly allege that the doctrine of the Trinity is a denial of the divine unity, so they usually maintain that the doctrine of the atonement involves a denial of the divine placability.* That placability is an attribute or quality of God, is unquestionable. This general position can be fully established from revelation, however doubtful or uncertain may be the proof of it derived from reason or nature. Independently altogether of general scriptural declarations, it is established by the facts, that, as all admit, God desired and determined to forgive and to save sinners who had broken His law, and made provision for carrying this gracious purpose into effect. But there is no particular statement in Scripture, and no general principle clearly sanctioned by it, which warrants us to assert that God's placability required of Him that He should forgive men's sins *without an atonement*, and upon the mere condition of repentance. Placability is not the only attribute or quality of God. There are other features of His character, established both by His works and His word, which, viewed by themselves, are manifestly

* Priestley's History of the Corruptions of Christianity, P. ii., Introd., vol. i., p. 146.

fitted to lead us to draw an opposite conclusion as to the way in which He would, in point of fact, deal with sin and sinners,—well fitted to excite the apprehension that He will inflict upon them the punishment which, by their sins, they have merited. In these circumstances, it is utterly unwarrantable for us, without clear authority from Scripture, to indulge in dogmatic assertions as to what God certainly will, or will not, do in certain circumstances.

Neither Scripture nor reason warrant the position that repentance is, in its own nature, an adequate reason or ground, ordinarily and in general, and still less in all cases, for pardoning those who have transgressed a law to which they were subject. It is in entire accordance with the dictates of reason, and with the ordinary practice of men, to inflict the full penalty of the law upon repentant criminals; and there is no ground on which we are warranted to assert that God cannot, or certainly will not, follow a similar course in regard to those who have transgressed His law. The Socinians are accustomed, in discussing this point, to dwell upon the scriptural statements with respect to repentance, its necessity and importance, and the connection subsisting between it and forgiveness. But there is nothing in these statements which establishes the position they undertake to maintain upon this subject. Those statements prove, indeed, that sinners are under an imperative obligation to repent; and they prove further, that, according to the arrangements which God has actually made, an invariable connection subsists between forgiveness and repentance, so that it is true that without repentance there is no forgiveness, and that wherever there is real repentance, forgiveness is bestowed; and that thus men are commanded and bound to repent in order to their being forgiven, and are warranted to infer their forgiveness from their repentance. The scriptural statements prove all this, but they prove nothing more; and this is not enough to give support to the Socinian argument. All this may be true, while it may still be false that repentance is the sole cause or condition of the forgiveness,—the sole, or even the principal, reason on account of which it is bestowed; and if so, then there is abundant room left for the admission of the principle, that a vicarious atonement or satisfaction was also necessary in order to the forgiveness of sin, and was indeed the true ground on which the forgiveness was conferred.

But while it is thus shown that this may be true, in entire consistency with all that Scripture says about forgiveness, and the connection between it and repentance, and while this is amply sufficient to refute the Socinian argument; we undertake further to prove from Scripture, that the atonement or satisfaction of Christ is indeed the ground on which forgiveness rests, and that this principle must be taken in, and must have its proper place assigned to it, if we would receive and maintain the *whole* doctrine which the word of God plainly teaches us in regard to this most momentous subject. But, more than this, the advocates of the generally received doctrine of the atonement not only deny and disprove the Socinian allegation of its non-necessity,—not only show that Socinians cannot prove that it was not necessary,—they themselves, in general, positively aver that it was necessary, and think they can produce satisfactory evidence of the truth of this position. There is, at first view, something repulsive—as having the appearance of unwarranted presumption—in asserting the necessity of an atonement or satisfaction, as it really amounts in substance to this, that God *could not* have pardoned men unless an atonement had been made,—unless a satisfaction had been rendered for their sins; and it may appear more suited to the modesty and reverence with which we ought to speak on such a subject, to say, that, for aught we know, God *might* have saved men in other ways, or through other means, but that He has adopted that method or scheme which was the wisest and the best,—best fitted to promote His own glory, and secure the great ends of His moral government. We find, however, upon further consideration, that the case is altogether so peculiar, and that the grounds of the assertion are so clear and strong, as to warrant it, even though an *explicit* deliverance upon this precise point is not given us in Scripture.

As to the general position, that an atonement or satisfaction was necessary,—or rather, that God could not have made provision for pardoning and saving sinners in any other way than that which He has actually adopted,—this seems fully warranted, independently of any other consideration, by the Scripture doctrine of the proper divinity of the Saviour. The incarnation of the eternal Son of God,—the assumption of human nature by One who was at the same time possessor of the divine,—the fact that *this* Being, who is God and man in one person, spent a life on earth of obscurity and humiliation,—that He endured many sufferings and indigni-

ties, and was at last subjected to a cruel and ignominious death ;—all this, if it be true,—if it be an actual reality,—as Scripture requires us to believe, is so peculiar and extraordinary in its whole character and aspects, that whenever we are led to realize it, we feel ourselves at once irresistibly constrained to say, that this would not have taken place if it had been possible that the result to which it was directed,—namely, the forgiveness and salvation of sinners,—could have been effected in any other way, or by any other means. We feel, and we cannot but feel, that there is no unwarranted presumption in saying, that if it had been possible that the salvation of guilty men could have been otherwise accomplished, the only-begotten Son of God would not have left the glory which He had with His Father from eternity, assumed human nature, and suffered and died on earth. This ground, were there nothing more revealed regarding it, would warrant us to make the general assertion, that the incarnation, suffering, and death of Christ were necessary to the salvation of sinners,—that this result could not have been effected without them. This consideration, indeed, has no weight with Socinians, as they do not admit the grand peculiarity on which it is based,—namely, the divinity and the incarnation of Him who came to save sinners. Still it is an ample warrant for our general assertion, as being clearly implied in, and certainly deducible from, a doctrine which we undertake to prove to be plainly revealed in Scripture.

It ought, however, to be noticed, that the precise position which this general consideration warrants us to assert, is not directly and immediately the necessity of an atonement or satisfaction, but only the necessity of the sufferings and death of Christ, *whatever may have been the character* attaching to them, or the precise effect immediately resulting from them, in connection with the salvation of sinners ; and that, accordingly, it was only the warrantableness of introducing the idea, and the expression of necessity, as applicable to the subject in general, that we had in view in bringing it forward ; and we have now to advert to the indications supposed to be given us in Scripture, of the grounds or reasons of this necessity. Scripture fully warrants us in saying that there are things which God cannot do. It says expressly that He cannot deny Himself ; that He cannot lie ; that He cannot repent (though there is an improper sense in which repentance is ascribed to Him) ; and He cannot do these things,

just because He is God, and not man,—because He is possessed of divine and infinite perfection. And if it be in any sense true that an atonement or satisfaction was necessary,—or, what is in substance the same thing, that God could not have pardoned sinners without it,—this must be because the attributes of His nature, or the principles of His government,—in other words, His excellence or perfection,—prevented or opposed it, or threw obstacles in the way, which could not otherwise be removed. Accordingly, this is the general position which the advocates of the necessity of an atonement maintain.

The most obvious and palpable consideration usually adduced in support of the necessity of an atonement, is that derived from the law of God, especially the threatenings which, in the law, He has denounced against transgressors. The law which God has promulgated is this, “The soul which sinneth shall die.” If God has indeed said this,—if He has uttered this threatening,—this would seem to render it certain and necessary, that wherever sin has been committed, death, with all that it includes or implies, should be inflicted, unless God were to repent, or to deny Himself, or to lie,—all which the Scripture assures us He cannot do, because of the perfection of His nature. And it is a remarkable coincidence, that the only cases in which Scripture says explicitly that God cannot do certain things, all bear upon and confirm the position, that He cannot pardon sin without an atonement ; inasmuch as to say, that He could pardon sin without an atonement, would, in the circumstances, amount to a virtual declaration that He could lie, that He could repent, that He could deny Himself. Upon this ground, the possibility of men who had sinned escaping death,—that is, everlasting misery,—would seem to be precluded. If such a being as God is has threatened sin with the punishment of death, there must be a serious difficulty in the way of sinners escaping. His veracity seems to prevent this, and to present an insuperable obstacle. In pardoning sinners, or in exempting them from the death which they have incurred, it would seem that He must trample upon His own law, and disregard His own threatening ; and this the very perfection of His nature manifestly forbids.

Socinians, indeed, have been accustomed to allege, that though God is obliged by His veracity to perform His promises,—because by promising He has conferred upon His creatures a right to the

fulfilment of the promise,—yet that His veracity does not oblige Him to fulfil His threatenings, because the party to whose case they apply has no right, and puts forth no claim, to their infliction. But this is a mere evasion of the difficulty. God is a law unto Himself. His own inherent perfection obliges Him always to do what is right and just, and that irrespective of any rights which His creatures may have acquired, or any claims which they may prefer. On this ground, His veracity seems equally to require that He should execute threatenings, as that He should fulfil promises. If He does not owe this to sinners, He owes it to Himself. When He threatened sin with the punishment of death, He was not merely giving an abstract declaration as to what sin merited, and might justly bring upon those who committed it; He was declaring the way and manner in which He would, in fact, treat it when it occurred. The law denouncing death as the punishment of sin was thus a virtual prediction of *what God would do* in certain circumstances; and when these circumstances occurred, His veracity required that He should act as He had foretold.

We can conceive of no way in which it is possible that the honour and integrity of the divine law could be maintained, or the divine veracity be preserved pure and unstained, if sinners were not subjected to death, *except* by an adequate atonement or satisfaction being rendered in their room and stead. No depth of reflection, no extent of experience, could suggest anything but this, which could render the sinner's exemption from death possible. There is much in the history of the world to suggest this, but nothing whatever to suggest anything else. We are not entitled, indeed, apart from the discoveries of revelation, to assert that even this would render the pardon of the sinner possible, consistently with the full exercise of the divine veracity, and full maintenance of the honour of the divine law; and still less are we entitled to assert that, even if an adequate atonement or satisfaction might render the escape of the sinner possible, it was further possible that such an atonement or satisfaction could in fact be rendered. We are not warranted to assert these things independently of revelation; but we have strong grounds for asserting that, if God did threaten death as the punishment of sin, nothing could have prevented the infliction of the threatening, and rendered the escape of the sinner possible, except an adequate

atonement or satisfaction,—that this *at least* was indispensable, if even this could have been of any avail.

But those who hold the necessity of an atonement or satisfaction in order to the pardon of the sin, and the escape of the sinner, usually rest it, not merely upon the law of God as revealed, and upon His veracity as concerned in the execution of the threatenings which He has publicly denounced, but also upon the inherent perfection of His nature, independently of any declaration He may have made, or any prediction He may have uttered,—and more especially upon His justice. The discussion of this point leads us into some more abstruse and difficult inquiries than the former; and it must be confessed that here we have not such clear and certain materials for our conclusions, and that we should feel deeply the necessity of following closely the guidance and direction of Scripture. The representations given us in Scripture of the justice of God, are fitted to impress upon us the conviction that it requires Him to give to every one his due,—what he has merited by his conduct,—and, of course, to give to the sinner the punishment which he has deserved. What God has threatened, His veracity requires Him to inflict, *because* He has threatened it. But the threatening itself must have originated in the inherent perfection of His own nature prompting Him to punish sin as it deserves; and to *threaten* to punish, because it is already and antecedently *right* to do so. God's law, or His revealed will, declaring what His creatures *should* do, and what He Himself *will* do, is the transcript or expression of the inherent perfections of His own nature. The acts of the divine government, and the obligations of intelligent creatures, result from, and are determined by, the divine law, as their immediate or approximate cause and standard; but they all, as well as the divine law itself, are traceable to the divine nature,—to the essential perfections of God,—as their ultimate source or foundation. When, then, God issued the law denouncing death as the punishment of transgression, and thereby became pledged to inflict death on account of sin, because He had threatened to do so, He was merely indicating or expressing a principle or purpose which was founded on, and resulted from, that inherent perfection which, in a sense, makes it necessary for Him,—although, at the same time, He acts most freely,—to give to all their due, and of course to inflict merited punishment upon sin.

This is the substance of what is taught by orthodox divines when they lay down the position that punitive justice—or, as they usually call it, *justitia vindicatrix*—is essential to God. It is a real perfection of His nature, of which He cannot denude Himself, and which must necessarily regulate or determine the free acts of His will.

All this is in accordance with the statements of Scripture and the dictates of right reason; and these various considerations combined, fully warrant the general conclusion, that, since death has been denounced as the punishment of sin, there must be formidable obstacles in the way of sinners being pardoned and escaping from death,—that, if God should pardon sinners, some provision would be necessary for vindicating His justice and veracity, and maintaining the honour of His law;—and that the only conceivable way in which these objects could be secured, is by an adequate atonement or satisfaction rendered in the room and stead of those who had incurred the penalty of the law. Socinians have very inadequate and erroneous views of the guilt or demerit of sin, and are thus led to look upon the pardon or remission of it as a light or easy matter. But it is our duty to form our conceptions of this subject from what God has made known to us, and especially from what He has revealed to us as to the way and manner in which He must and will treat it, or deal with it. And all that God's word tells us upon this point, viewed by itself, and apart from the revelation made of an actual provision for pardoning sin and saving sinners, is fitted to impress upon us the conviction that sin fully merits, and will certainly receive, everlasting destruction from God's presence and from the glory of His power.

Another topic intimately connected with this one of the necessity of an atonement or satisfaction,—or rather, forming a part of it,—has been largely discussed in the course of this controversy,—that, namely, of the character or aspect in which God is to be regarded in dealing with sinners, with the view either of punishing them for their sins, or saving them from the punishment they have merited. Socinians, in order to show that there is no difficulty in the way of God's pardoning sin, and no necessity for an atonement or satisfaction for sin, usually represent God as acting, in this matter, either as a creditor to whom men have become debtors by sinning, or as a party who has been injured and offended by their transgressions; and then infer that, as a creditor may remit a

debt if he chooses, without exacting payment, and as an injured party may forgive an injury if he chooses, without requiring any satisfaction, so, in like manner, there is no reason why God may not forgive men's sins by a mere act of His good pleasure, without any payment or compensation, either personal or vicarious. There certainly is a foundation in scriptural statements for representing sins as debts incurred to God and to His law, and also as injuries inflicted upon Him. These representations, though figurative, are, of course, intended to convey to us some ideas concerning the true state of the case; and they suggest considerations which, in some other departments of the controversy in regard to the great doctrine of the atonement, afford strong arguments against the Socinian views. But the application they make of them to disprove the necessity of an atonement, is utterly unwarranted. It is manifestly absurd to press far the resemblance or analogy between sins on the one hand, and debts or injuries on the other; or to draw inferences merely from this resemblance. These are not the only or the principal aspects in which sins are represented in Scripture.

The primary or fundamental idea of sin is, that it is a transgression of God's law,—a violation of a rule which He has commanded us to observe; and this, therefore, should be the *leading aspect* in which it should be contemplated, when we are considering how God will deal with it. We exclude none of the scriptural representations of sin, and none of the scriptural representations of God in His dealing with it; but, while we take them all in, we must give prominence in our conceptions to the most important and fundamental. And as the essential idea of sin is not, that it is merely a debt or an injury, but that it is a violation of God's law, the leading character or aspect in which God ought to be contemplated when we regard Him as dealing with it, is not that of a creditor, or an injured party, who may remit the debt, or forgive the injury, as he chooses, but that of a lawgiver and a judge who has promulgated a just and righteous law, prohibiting sin under pain of death, and who is bound, by a regard to His own perfections, and the interests of holiness throughout the universe, to take care that His own character be fully vindicated, that the honour of His law be maintained, and that His moral government be firmly established; and who, therefore, cannot pardon sin, unless, in some way or other, full and adequate

provision be made for securing all these objects. The pardon of sin, the forgiveness of men who have broken the law and incurred its penalty, who have done that against which God has denounced death, seems to have a strong and manifest tendency to frustrate or counteract all these objects, to stain the glory of the divine perfections, to bring dishonour upon the divine law, to shake the stability of God's moral government, and to endanger the interests of righteousness and holiness throughout the universe. And when, therefore, we contemplate God not merely as a creditor or as an injured party, but as the Supreme Lawgiver and Judge, dealing with the deliberate violation, by His intelligent and responsible creatures, of a just, and holy, and good law which He had prescribed to them, and which He had sanctioned with the threatened penalty of death, we cannot conceive it to be possible that He should pardon them without an adequate atonement or satisfaction; and we are constrained to conclude, that, if forgiveness be possible at all, it can be only on the footing of the threatened penalty being endured by another party acting in their room and stead, and of this vicarious atonement being accepted by God as satisfying His justice, and answering the claims of His law.*

Whatever evidence there is *for the necessity* of an atonement or satisfaction, in order to the pardon of sin, of course confirms the proof of its truth or reality. It is admitted on all hands, that God does pardon sinners,—that He exempts them from punishment, receives them into His favour, and admits them to the enjoyment of eternal blessedness, notwithstanding that they have sinned and broken His law. If all that we know concerning God, His government, and law, would lead us to conclude that He could not do this without an adequate atonement or satisfaction, then we may confidently expect to find that such an atonement has been made,—that such a satisfaction has been rendered. And, on the other hand, if we have sufficient evidence of the truth and reality of an atonement as a matter of fact,—and find, moreover, that this atonement consisted of a provision so very peculiar and extraordinary as the sufferings and death, in human nature, of One who was God over all, blessed for evermore,—we are fully warranted in arguing back from such a fact to its indispens-

* On the necessity of the Atonement, see G. J. Vossius' Defence of Grotius, De Satisfactione, c. xxviii., xxix., xxx.

able and absolute necessity, in order to the production of the intended result; and then, from an examination of the grounds and reasons of this established necessity, we may learn much as to the true nature of this wonderful provision, and the way and manner in which it is fitted, and was designed, to accomplish its intended object.

Sec. III.—*The Necessity and Nature of the Atonement.*

The subject of the necessity of an atonement, in order to the pardon of sin, needs to be stated and discussed with considerable care and caution, as it is one on which there is danger of men being tempted to indulge in presumptuous speculations, and of their landing, when they follow out their speculations, in conclusions of too absolute and unqualified a kind. Some of its advocates have adopted a line of argument of which the natural result would seem to be, absolutely and universally, that sin *cannot* be forgiven, and, of course, that sinners cannot be saved. A mode of representation and argument about the divine justice, the principles of the divine moral government, and the divine law and veracity, which fairly leads to this conclusion, must, of course, be erroneous, since it is admitted on all hands, as a matter of fact, that sin *is* forgiven, that sinners *are* pardoned and saved. This, therefore, is an extreme to be avoided,—this is a danger to be guarded against. The considerations on which the advocates of the necessity of an atonement usually found, derived from the scriptural representations of the divine justice, law, and veracity, manifestly, and beyond all question, warrant this position, that there are very serious and formidable obstacles to the pardon of men who have broken the law, and incurred its penalty; and thus, likewise, point out what is the nature and ground of these obstacles. The difficulty lies here, that God's justice and veracity seem to impose upon Him an obligation to punish sin, and to execute His threatenings; and if this position can really be established,—and it is the foundation of the alleged necessity of an atonement or satisfaction,—the practical result would seem to be, that the law must take its course, and that the penalty must be inflicted. The argument would thus seem to prove too much, and, of course, prove nothing; a consideration well fitted to impress upon us the necessity of care and caution in stating and arguing the question,

though certainly not sufficient to warrant the conclusion which some* have deduced from it,—namely, that the whole argument commonly brought forward in support of the necessity of an atonement is unsatisfactory.

I have no doubt that there is truth and soundness in the argument, when rightly stated and applied. The law which God has promulgated, threatening death as the punishment of sin, manifestly throws a very serious obstacle in the way of sin being pardoned, both because it seems to indicate that God's perfections require that it be punished, and because the non-infliction of the penalty threatened seems plainly fitted to lead men to regard the law and its threatenings with indifference and contempt,—or at least to foster the conviction, that some imperfection attached to it as originally promulgated, since it had been found necessary, in the long run, to change or abrogate it, or at least to abstain from following it out, and thereby virtually to set it aside. Had God made no further revelation to men than that of the original moral law, demanding perfect obedience, with the threatened penalty of death in the event of transgression; and were the only conjecture they could form about their future destiny derived from the knowledge that they had been placed under this law, and had exposed themselves to its penalty by sinning, the conclusion which alone it would be reasonable for them to adopt, would be, that they must and would suffer the full penalty they had incurred by transgression. This is an important position, and runs directly counter to the whole substance and spirit of the Socinian views upon this subject. If, in these circumstances,—and with this position impressed upon their minds, as the only practical result of all that they then knew upon the subject,—they were further informed, upon unquestionable authority, that many sinners,—many men who had incurred the penalty of the law,—would, in point of fact, be pardoned and saved; then the conclusion which, in right reason, must be deducible from this information would be, *not* that the law had been abrogated or thrown aside, as imperfect or defective, but that some very peculiar and extraordinary provision had been found out and carried into effect, by which the law might be satisfied and its honour maintained, while yet those who had incurred its penalty were forgiven. And if, assuming

* *Vide* Gilbert on the Christian Atonement, Lecture v.

this to be true or probable, the question were asked, What this provision could be? it would either appear to be an insoluble problem; or the only thing that could commend itself to men's reason, although reason might not itself suggest it, would be something of the nature of an atonement or satisfaction, by the substitution of another party in the room of those who had transgressed. The principles of human jurisprudence, and various incidents in the history of the world, might justify this as not unreasonable in itself, and fitted to serve some such purposes as the exigencies of the case seemed to require.

In this way, a certain train of thought, if once suggested, might be followed out, and shown to be reasonable,—to be invested, at least, with a high degree of probability; and this is just, in substance, what is commonly advocated by theologians under the head of the necessity of an atonement. There is, first, the necessity of maintaining the honour of the law, by the execution of its threatenings against transgressors; then there is the necessity of some provision for maintaining the honour of the law, *if* these threatenings are not, in fact, to be executed upon those who have incurred them; and then, lastly, there is the investigation of the question,—of what nature should this provision be; and what are the principles by which it must be regulated? And it is here that the investigation of the subject of the necessity of an atonement comes in, to throw some light upon *its true nature and bearings*.

The examination of the topics usually discussed under the head of the necessity of an atonement, viewed in connection with the undoubted truth, that many sinners are, in point of fact, pardoned and saved, leads us to expect to find some extraordinary provision made for effecting this result, and thereby gives a certain measure of antecedent probability to the allegation that such a provision has been made, and thus tends to confirm somewhat the actual evidence we may have of its truth and reality; while the same considerations which lead us to the conclusion that some such provision was necessary, guide us also to some inferences as to what it *must* consist in, and what immediate purposes it must be fitted to serve. The general substance of what is thus indicated as necessary, or as to be expected, in the nature and bearings of the provision, is this,—it must consist with, and must fully manifest all the perfections of God, and especially His justice and His hatred of sin; and it must be fitted to impress right conceptions

of the perfection and unchangeableness of the divine law, and of the danger of transgressing it. God, of course, cannot do, or even permit, anything which is fitted, in its own nature, or has an inherent tendency, to convey erroneous conceptions of His character or law, of His moral government, or of the principles which regulate His dealings with His intelligent creatures; and assuredly no sinner will ever be saved, except in a way, and through a provision, in which God's justice, His hatred of sin, and His determination to maintain the honour of His law, are as fully exercised and manifested, as they would have been by the actual infliction of the full penalty which He had threatened. These perfections and qualities of God must be exercised as well as manifested, and they must be manifested as well as exercised. God must always act or regulate His volitions and procedure in accordance with the perfections and attributes of His nature, independently of any regard to His creatures, or to the impressions which they may, in point of fact, entertain with respect to Him; while it is also true that He must ever act in a way which accurately manifests His perfections, or is fitted, in its own nature, to convey to His creatures correct conceptions of what He is, and of what are the principles which regulate His dealings with them. In accordance with these principles, He must, in any provision for pardoning and saving sinners, both exercise and manifest His justice and His hatred of sin,—that is, He must act in the way which these qualities naturally and necessarily lead Him to adopt; and He must follow a course which is fitted to manifest Him to His creatures as really doing all this.

The practical result of these considerations is this, that if a provision is to be made for removing the obstacles to the pardon of sinners,—for accomplishing the objects just described, while yet sinners are saved,—there is no way in which we can conceive this to be done, except by some other suitable party taking their place, and suffering in their room and stead, the penalty they had merited. Could any such party be found, were he able and willing to do this, and were he actually to do it, then we can conceive that in this way God's justice might be satisfied, and the honour of His law maintained, because in this way the same views of the divine character, law, and government, and of the danger and demerit of sin, would be presented, as if sinners themselves had suffered the penalty in their own persons. All this, of course,

implies, that the party interposing in behalf of sinners should occupy their place, and act in their room and stead, and that he should bear the penalty which they had incurred; because in this way, but in no other, so far as we can form any conception upon the subject, could the obstacles be removed, and the necessary objects be effected. And thus the general considerations on which the necessity of an atonement is maintained, are fitted to impress upon us the conviction, that there must be a true and real substitution of the party interposing to save sinners, in the room and stead of those whom he purposes to save, and the actual endurance by him of the penalty which they had incurred, and which they must, but for this interposition, have suffered.

A party qualified to interpose in behalf of sinners, in order to obtain or effect their forgiveness, by suffering in their room and stead the penalty they had deserved, must possess very peculiar qualifications indeed. The sinners to be saved were an innumerable company; the penalty which each of them had incurred was fearful and infinite, even everlasting misery; and men, of course, without revelation, are utterly incompetent to form a conception of any being who might be qualified for this. But the word of God brings before us One so peculiarly constituted and qualified, as at once to suggest the idea, that He might be able to accomplish this,—One who was GOD and man in one person; One who, being from eternity God, did in time assume human nature into personal union with the divine,—who assumed human nature for the purpose of saving sinners,—who was thus qualified to act as the substitute of sinners, and to endure suffering in their room; while at the same time He was qualified, by His possession of the divine nature, to give to all that He did and suffered a value and efficacy truly infinite, and fully adequate to impart to all He did a power or virtue fitted to accomplish anything, or everything, which He might intend to effect.

We formerly had occasion to show, that in regard to a subject so peculiar and extraordinary as the incarnation, sufferings, and death of the Son of God,—of One who was a possessor of the divine nature,—we are warranted in saying that, if these things really took place, they were, strictly speaking, *necessary*; that is, in other words, that they could not have taken place, if the object to which they were directed could possibly have been effected in any other way, or by any other means. And the

mere contemplation of the fact of the sufferings and death of such a Being, independent of the full and specific information given us in Scripture as to the causes, objects, and consequences of His death, goes far to establish the truth and reality of His vicarious atoning sacrifice. When we view Him merely as a man,—but as a man, of course, perfectly free from sin, immaculately pure and holy,—we find it to be impossible to account for His sufferings upon the Socinian theory, or upon any theory but that of His suffering in the room and stead of others, and enduring the penalty which they had merited.

It is not disputed that sin is, in the case of intelligent and rational beings, the cause of suffering; and we cannot conceive that, under the government of a God of infinite power, and wisdom, and justice, and goodness, any such Being should be subjected to suffering except for sin. The suffering,—the severe and protracted suffering,—and, finally, the cruel and ignominious death of Christ, viewing Him merely as a perfectly holy and just man, are facts, the reality of which is universally admitted, and of which, therefore, all equally are called upon to give some explanation. The Socinians have no explanation to give of them. It is repugnant to all right conceptions of the principles of God's moral government, that He should inflict upon an intelligent and responsible being suffering which is not warranted or sanctioned by sin as the cause or ground of it, as that which truly justifies and explains it,—that He should inflict suffering upon a holy and innocent Being, merely in order that others may be, in some way or other, benefited by His sufferings. It is, indeed, very common, in the administration of God's moral government, that the sin of one being should be the means or occasion of bringing suffering upon others; but then it holds true, either that these others are also themselves sinners, or that they are legally liable to all the suffering that has ever been inflicted upon them, or permitted to befall them. The peculiarity in Christ's case is, that while perfectly free from sin, original as well as actual, He was yet subjected to severe suffering and to a cruel death; and this not merely by the permission, but by the special agency and appointment of God. And this was done, according to the Socinian hypothesis, merely in order that others might, in some way or other, derive benefit from the suffering and death inflicted upon Him. There is here no explanation of the admitted

facts of the case, that is at all consistent with the principles of God's moral government. The doctrine of a vicarious atonement alone affords anything like an explanation of these facts; because, by means of it, we can account for them in consistency with the principle, that sin,—that is, either personal or imputed,—is the cause, the warrant, and the explanation of suffering. The Scripture assures us that Christ suffered for sin,—that He died for sin. And even viewing this statement apart from the fuller and more specific information given us in other parts of Scripture, with respect to the connection between the sin of men and the sufferings of the Saviour, and regarding it only in its relation to the general principles of God's moral government, we are warranted in concluding that sin was the impulsive and meritorious cause of His suffering; and from this we are entitled to draw the inference, that, as He had no sin of His own, He must in some way have become involved in, and responsible for, the sin of others, and that this was the cause or reason why He was subjected to death. On all these various grounds we have a great deal of general argument upon the subject of the atonement, independent of a minute and exact examination of particular scriptural statements, which tends to confirm its truth, and to illustrate its general nature and bearing.

We have seen that some of the attributes of God, and some things we know as to His moral government and law, plainly suggest to us the convictions, that there are serious obstacles to the forgiveness of sin,—that if sin is to be forgiven, some extraordinary provision must be made for the exercise and manifestation of the divine justice and holiness, so that He shall still be, and appear to be, just and holy, even while pardoning sin and admitting sinners into the enjoyment of His favour; for making His creatures see and feel, that, though they are delivered from the curse of the law which they had broken, that law is, notwithstanding, of absolute perfection, of unchangeable obligation, and entitled to all honour and respect. The only thing that has ever been conceived or suggested at all fitted to accomplish this, is, that atonement or satisfaction should be made by the endurance of the penalty of the law in the room and stead of those who should be pardoned. This seems adapted to effect the object, and thereby to remove the obstacles, while in no other way can we conceive it possible that this end can be attained.

And while the holiness, justice, and veracity of God seem to require this, there is nothing in His benevolence or placability that precludes it. The benevolence or placability of God could produce merely a readiness to forgive and to save sinners, *provided* this could be effected in full consistency with all the other attributes of His nature, all the principles of His moral government, and all the objects He was bound to aim at, as the Lawgiver and Governor of the universe; and these, as we have seen, throw obstacles in the way of the result being effected. The actings of God,—His actual dealings with His creatures,—must be the result of the combined exercise of all His perfections; and He cannot, in any instance, act inconsistently with any one of them. His benevolence cannot be a mere indiscriminate determination to confer happiness, and His placability cannot be a mere indiscriminate determination to forgive those who have transgressed against Him.

The Scriptures reveal to us a fact of the deepest interest, and one that ought never to be forgotten or lost sight of when we are contemplating the principles that regulate God's dealings with His creatures—namely, that some of the angels kept not their first estate, but fell by transgression; and that no provision has been made for pardoning and saving them,—no atonement or satisfaction provided for their sin,—no opportunity of escape or recovery afforded them. They sinned, or broke God's law; and their doom, in consequence, was unchangeably and eternally fixed. This is a fact,—this was the way in which God dealt with a portion of His intelligent creatures. Of course, He acted in this case in full accordance with the perfections of His nature and the principles of His government. We are bound to employ this fact, which God has revealed to us, as one of the materials which He has given us for enabling us to know Him. We are bound to believe, in regard to Him, whatever this fact implies or establishes, and to refuse to believe whatever it contradicts or precludes. And it manifestly requires us to believe this at least, that there is nothing in the essential perfections of God which affords any sufficient ground for the conclusion that he will certainly pardon transgressors of His laws, or make any provision for saving them from the just and legitimate consequences of their sins. This is abundantly manifest. And this consideration affords good ground to suspect that it was the flat contra-

diction which the scriptural history of the fall and fate of angels presents to the views of the Socinians, with regard to the principles of God's moral government, that has generally led them, like the Sadducees of old, to maintain that there is neither angel nor spirit, though there is evidently not the slightest appearance of unreasonableness in the general doctrine of the existence of superior spiritual beings, employed by God in accomplishing His purposes.

As, then, there is nothing in God's benevolence or placability which affords any certain ground for the conclusion that He must and will pardon sinners, so there *can* be nothing in these qualities inconsistent with His requiring atonement or satisfaction in order to their forgiveness, while other attributes of His nature seem plainly to demand this. God's benevolence and placability are fully manifested in a readiness to bless and to forgive, in so far as this can be done, in consistency with the other attributes of His nature, and the whole principles of His moral government. And while there is nothing in His benevolence or placability inconsistent with His requiring an atonement or satisfaction in order to forgiveness, it is further evident, that if He Himself should provide this atonement or satisfaction to His own justice and law, and be the real author and deviser of all the plans and arrangements connected with the attainment of the blessed result of forgiveness and salvation to sinners, a scheme would be presented to us which would most fully and strikingly manifest the combined glory of all the divine perfections,—in which He would show Himself to be the just God, and the justifier of the ungodly,—in which righteousness and peace should meet together, mercy and truth should embrace each other. And this is the scheme which is plainly and fully revealed to us in the word of God. Provision is made for pardoning men's sins and saving their souls, through the vicarious sufferings and death of One who was God and man in one person, and who voluntarily agreed to take their place, and to suffer in their room and stead; thus satisfying divine justice, complying with the demands of the law by enduring its penalty, and manifesting most fully the sinfulness and the danger of sin. But this was done by God Himself, who desired the salvation of sinners, and determined to effect it; and who, in consequence, *sent* His Son into the world to die in man's room and stead,—who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. So