

From the same Word we learn that sinners who suffer for their sins "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." If, then, the penal sanction of the law is everlasting destruction, and the law itself is holy, just, and good, everlasting destruction is, in the judgment of the Just One, a righteous award. From this, then, we may learn what, in the judgment of God, is the demerit of sin.

Any man therefore, who believes in God needs not to seek a further reason at present, nor so long as he can only "know in part," for the everlasting punishment of the wicked. He may also very profitably abandon all his apologetic, but quite unsatisfactory, reasonings on the perpetual sinning of the wicked, and their perpetual suffering in consequence thereof. He may also give up the equally apologetic and unsatisfactory reasoning of the sinner's punishment being, as Dr. Owen puts it, "*a natura subjecti, not a natura causæ*;" that is, it is from the nature of the subject punished, not from the nature of the cause of the punishment, that it happens the wicked are punished for ever. God declares in unmistakeable terms that sinners are punished for ever, and that they are punished for their sins; and as it would be impious to suppose they are unjustly punished for their sins, we are irresistibly brought to the conclusion that the demerit of sin is such as, in the sinner himself, to deserve the everlasting punishment awarded.

But it seems nevertheless to be of more than very doubtful propriety to speak of the *infinite* demerit of sin. All those who have so spoken of the demerit of sin have, when questioned, felt the necessity of qualifying what they have said. What they have meant, we learn, is a *qualified infinity*, which is very much like informing us they did not mean what they said. It should be enough for man, in a matter of this kind, to speak after God only,—to say, "The wages of sin is death;" and that this solemn award is by interpretation, a being "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord."

If men, feeling the unspeakable mischief of sin as to

its principle, practice, and consequences, are pleased in a popular discourse to speak of the infinite evil of sin, it ought to be known that they are speaking rhetorically. God is, indeed, infinite, and it is impossible to speak duly of the evil of sin as done against him; but if disobedience to God is to be regarded as an infinite evil because it is a disobedience to the Infinite One, it must follow that obedience to God will be an infinite good because it is an obedience to the Infinite One. This, however, as must be obvious to all, is, rhetorically speaking, infinite nonsense. We have seen some objections to this necessary conclusion, but they have proceeded on a confusion of ideas relative to duty and merit, and from shifting the ground of the argument in the case of obedience from that which was taken in respect of the disobedience. Thus, obedience cannot be an infinite good, because the person obeying is finite; but disobedience is an infinite evil because the Being disobeyed is infinite.

It is thought that where a commutation is admitted retribution is destroyed; but this seems to us a baseless notion. It is certain that in the atonement of Christ a penalty and a ransom were exacted, and the penalty suffered and the ransom paid. But it is objected that the penalty was not precisely what the offenders would have suffered in their own persons. True; but was it not a just equivalent in the judgment of justice? And if so, is not this, in the fullest sense of the term, retribution? Is it on any consideration to be inferred that justice did not proceed against the Substitute with a just balance and a just weight? Let us look a little further into this matter. Its importance cannot be overrated.

It will be conceded that "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities."—That he "Suffered for sins, the just for the unjust."—That he "His own self bare our sins."—That he "Was offered to bear the sins of many."—That he "Was delivered for our offences."—That "He gave himself for our sins." The cause for which he was delivered, for which he was offered, for which he was wounded and bruised, for which he suffered, and for

which he gave himself, was specific, then, if any combination of words can certainly specify anything. If, then, the procuring cause of his sufferings was our sins, was not the object of his sufferings to make an atonement for the cause of the sufferings? Was that object really accomplished according to the judgment of justice or not? Surely there can be but one answer. If this object, then, was really accomplished, was there not a repayment, and was not retribution actually established?

Retribution, in reference to the atonement, is altogether necessary to the satisfaction of all parties concerned therein.

First, it is necessary to the great Fountain of justice, its Administrator, and the Guardian of its rights. If the Sovereign makes a provision for sinners by grace unknown to the law, the Lawgiver will part with none of his claims in favour of the gracious transaction. God, the Fountain of justice, be it reverently spoken, must have his own moral judgment satisfied in any atonement which, as the Fountain of justice, he accepts. If it is the province of justice to give to every one his due, shall not the very Fountain of justice do justice to himself as such, in accepting what is presented to him as right, yea, as the very declaration of his own righteousness? It is not possible to conceive the just God to be contented to accept something not strictly just as and for what is strictly just, and to call that just which he so accepts.

A perfectly just retribution is also necessary to the Administrator of justice. Shall it be said that the Administrator of justice did not lay on the Surety what of suffering was due to the iniquities laid on him? Can it be said of the Surety in this momentous transaction as, through this transaction, his friends worshipfully say to God of themselves, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities?" Did the Administrator of justice deal leniently with Jesus, and the Fountain of justice accept an unreal as a real expiation for an atonement? What of suffering was due to the God-man as the substitute of his people when

charged with the responsibility of his suretyship, it is not for mortal man to say. It is impious for a worm to exalt himself in judgment, and to pronounce on a matter like this. God only is Judge here. But while no man possessing the "meekness of wisdom" will dare to pronounce a judgment on what was due as a just retribution to Christ as the Substitute of his people; and no man in his senses will attempt to gauge the intensity, or to measure the extent of the sufferings of Christ for his people; no man, nevertheless, can think and speak of those substitutionary sufferings according to the Scriptures, who excludes the truth of a just balance being in the hand of the great Administrator of justice in relation to those sufferings. Did chance, or sovereignty, or justice, bear rule in the extent of the sufferings of Christ? Did chance, or sovereignty, or justice wound and bruise the Son of God for his people's offences? If chance had no hand in the awful decision of the extent of the sufferings of Christ, nor in their infliction, and if the part of sovereignty was to deliver up for us all the admitted and provided Substitute into the hands of the Judge, did the Judge assume the rights of the Sovereign, or did he faithfully discharge his own functions as the Administrator of justice? There is but one answer.

As the Guardian of the rights of justice, a just retribution is to God a necessary element of the atonement of Christ. If he surrenders the rights of justice on any conceivable pretence in one case, he endangers, yea, compromises those rights in every case; and if he compromises those rights, he compromises his own honour as their Guardian. But his "name is Jealous." He will as little forfeit his glory as he will give it to another.

Secondly, a just retribution is necessary to the Great Atoner. Shall it be said that the moral judgment of the God-man can be content with bearing that as and for a just retribution which is not so? Impossible.

Thirdly, a righteous retribution in the atonement of Christ is necessary to the guilty person to whom mercy is extended through that atonement. It is gloriously

true that God does clear the guilty, does acquit the wicked, and does justify the ungodly; but it is not true that he clears the guilty, acquits the wicked, or justifies the ungodly, as such, nor without an equitable retribution for their wrongs; for thus he will "by no means clear the guilty," he "will not at all acquit the wicked," and he "will not justify the wicked." Indeed, thus, there could be no moral clearing, or acquittal, or justification at all. Mercy extended thus to the guilty man could afford him no moral satisfaction. In order for him to feel a moral satisfaction in the atonement, he must needs feel that his sins have, all of them, been condemned in the flesh of his precious Substitute. Every soul of man whose sins have been forgiven him for Christ's sake, who has experienced the exercise of judgment and conscience in the matter, must have felt that a real atonement is an indispensable requisite to a contenting pardon. Exoneration from debt can only be morally satisfactory by an actual and full payment. Exculpation from blame only can give a moral contentment as it is justified by a full condemnation of the wrong from which blame arises. Only as the just claims of a moral law are justly met,—in the case of an arbitrary law, matters would be wholly different,—can a moral satisfaction be found in any atonement itself, or in any of its consequences. If the just claims of the moral law of the great Lawgiver are not righteously satisfied in connection with the extension of mercy through the atonement, the moral judgment of the forgiven man will induce in him the feeling that the whole affair of the atonement is at best but a splendid sham, and his whole moral sense will be disgusted. If, from any notion of the dignity of his person, or what not beside, it be said of Jesus Christ that what he suffered for the sins of a forgiven man is accepted as a sufficient retribution in law, without being a righteous retribution in fact, that man, if he worships his God in the matter of salvation as "a just God and a Saviour," will be required to ignore all his moral consciousness. He will be required to feel that he is exculpated from blame; that he is jus-

tified from wickedness; that he is called righteous; that he is taught to triumph in the absence of all condemnation; that he will lift up his head in the judgment of the great day at the tribunal of God as a just man; that he will, as righteous, by the sentence of the Judge, with the acquiescence of the unjust, and with the acclamations of the holy angels, pass from the judgment-seat of the Just into eternal life; and that he will be eternally without blame, and happy in his condition by—revolting and abhorred thought—a fiction of law! Are these things possible? What! is heaven to be peopled with released bankrupts and enlarged criminals, who have obtained a right to freedom in law by favour, but who are nevertheless under a moral obligation to pay and to suffer? Rejoice, believer in Christ, that all thy sins were equitably condemned—damned—in the flesh of thy Substitute; that the holy, just, and good law of the great Lord of all is, on thy behalf, magnified and made honourable; and that, whatever thy ungodliness, thy God is just in thy justification and salvation.

Fourthly, there exists also a great public necessity, wide as the existence of moral beings in the universe of God, that a righteous retribution should be found in the atonement of Christ. Every moral agent in the creation is amenable to law. This accountability must not be shocked by judicial proceedings which might awaken suspicions of their righteousness. It is not speaking with an unwarranted boldness to say that, it is due from the Fountain of justice to all who are amenable to law, that every judicial decision shall be such as shall not weaken the authority of the law in their mind, nor, therefore, relax a sense of obligation, nor justify a slight thought of sin. It is necessary, therefore, that in God's acceptance of the atonement of Christ, and in his extending pardon to the guilty through the atonement, there should not be so much as the very thinnest cloud of a suspicion of his justice overshadowing the throne of his righteousness. Since man sinned, there has been a strong propensity in the human mind to lessen the evil of sin. On every hand we hear of this, and the reason

for it is not far to seek. From this very propensity, as it seems to us, the enemies of the atonement of Christ vituperate the doctrine of the cross as *the abominable doctrine of a sacrifice for sins*. Hence it is that all the resources of sophistry have been, and are, employed to make men believe that the penal sanctions of the law will not be executed. But all that think slightly of the evil of sin, the dupes and the duped, are perpetually unsettled and uneasy. And no wonder. In order to bolster themselves and others in their wretched hope, they have to pervert the testimony of truth itself, to subordinate their steadily-refusing conscience into a slavish subserviency to a corrupt will, and to hold a silencing authority over a self-accusing power which is as little subject to their control as is the wind. Miserable men! while the moral sense of man abides, it can never be self-evident, and human arguments must fail to prove, that there is a slightness in the evil of the nature of sin; and while facts cannot be disproved, the innocuousness of the effects of sin will never be proved. Against all contradiction, Jesus Christ was holy, harmless, and undefiled. Without controversy he suffered. According to the testimony of truth, he suffered for sins. In his sufferings there were the retributions of justice. By those retributive sufferings an unanswerable denial is given to all sophistical arguments against the evil of sin; an irrefragable confirmation is given to the convictions of man's moral conscience concerning its iniquity; an everlasting infamy is broadly and indelibly stamped on its badness; and upon the divine law there is written a signature of honour, which is legible to every intelligent beholder, and is lasting as eternity. Go, ye disputers, to the cross, and learn there that God is just. Come, ye enquirers, to the cross, and learn here that God is just, and the Justifier of the ungodly.

It has been said by an able writer on the Christian atonement, "It would seem to be correct to regard justice, when considered as a binding power, as having reference to the faithfully granting what is due in the form of benefit, but not as absolutely obliging to inflict

merited evil. We will not charge insidiousness on this writer, but we hold his notion to be unphilosophical, unscriptural, and dangerous. Unphilosophical as confounding expediency with justice in the government of God under the plausible name of wisdom. Unscriptural as being against the entire voice of the Scripture on this subject. And dangerous, as helping to delude those that are labouring to delude themselves into the notion that God may clear the guilty, and that it may be well with the wicked. When human wisdom points one way, and divine wisdom another, a wise man ought to feel no difficulty in shaping his course. That God punishes for sin is clear; that he punishes for sin proportionately to its evil is equally clear; that he will not, as bound by the claims of his own moral nature, acquit the wicked, seems no less clear; and that when he pardons a sinner, the pardon is extended only through the sins of that sinner having been adequately condemned in the flesh of his great Substitute, is clear as words can declare.

In the sufferings and death, then, of the "Man of Sorrows," the Surety was punished, wounded and bruised in the stead of his friends, and retribution was established in righteousness. Justice, therefore, hides not, nor blushes when Mercy forgives for Christ's sake; and Mercy, not with furtive shame in a corner, but with unconcealed publicity from the throne of righteousness, gives remission of sins to penitent sinners. Jesus, conscious that he has paid their debt, is not ashamed to receive the worshipful ascriptions of his ransomed ones. The forgiven sinner, assured of the expiation of his crimes by the sufferings and sacrificial death of his great Substitute, exults from a moral satisfaction in the justness of his pardon. In this establishment of retribution, the moral government of God is exhibited with an untarnished lustre to the view of all moral beings. Those that suffer in hell for their sins have no suspicion of an uneven balance against themselves, nor have they the least mistrust of an unjust weight on the behalf of those whose sins have been condemned in the

flesh of Jesus. In heaven the spotlessly white garments worn by the redeemed are the truthful symbols of a moral reality acquired by Jesus being made sin for those who wear them, which receives the exalted designation of the righteousness of God. From a moral consciousness of the righteousness displayed in the wondrous transaction, when redeemed sinners in heaven ascribe with acclamation salvation to God and to the Lamb, all the angels unite with them in a rapturous chorus of praise.

Retribution is established in hell, and a moral conviction of unrighteousness silences every soul under the execution of judgment. Retribution is established in heaven, and a moral conviction of righteousness inspires a satisfaction in every soul with the safety and bliss. In each case justice repays what is due.

We may now pass to the consideration of the next branch of our subject.

CHAPTER III.

JUSTICE REWARDING THE MERITORIOUS.

If it be the province of justice to give to every one his due, to reward the meritorious must be one of its obligations. The reward of Christ, as the atoning Substitute of his people, comes within this province of justice, and presents the most illustrious example of its giving to the meritorious his due. But before entering on this subject, it seems necessary we should try to understand the meaning of the word merit, and how merit itself arises.

“Those deeds are meritorious which, without or beyond personal obligation,” are performed for the sake of the benefit of others. But meritorious deeds may be of merely moral value, or they may have the additional excellency of a legal value. Morally meritorious deeds may be estimated from the person meriting, from the moral value of the thing merited, from the moral worth, or from the unworthiness of the person for whom the

meritorious deeds are done, and from the moral consequences resulting. If what is morally meritorious is required to have the additional excellency of a legal value, either the law must sanction the deeds done, or they must have the sanction of the supreme power. Noble, generous, heroic, self-sacrificing, and the like deeds, are spoken of as being meritorious. In a moral sense all such deeds ought to be so regarded; but can any man fail to see that any number of such deeds might be done by one person on the behalf of another under conditions which would render them, in a legal sense, null, and therefore as to any beneficial result, wholly worthless? Manifest, however, as this truth seems to be, it is taught by an able writer on the atonement of Christ, that meritorious deeds are such only "in proportion to their proper moral influence." Such an influence as arises from the accomplishment of what is not only just and good, but arduous, dangerous, painful;—from the respect conciliated to the laws through the splendour of the deeds performed;—from presenting such a pre-eminent example of virtue as must provoke to imitation, and the like. "Socinian notions of merit!" we think we hear exclaimed. Nay, these notions are entertained of the merits of Christ by one who, in some respects, ably combated Socinianism.

We are taught in the Scripture that, "Peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." Who can fail to feel the moral influence of, or to have his whole moral nature stirred by the example of such a self-sacrifice? But it is nevertheless certain that if this self-sacrifice for another were made, and that other were a prisoner sentenced to death for a capital offence in due form of law, whatever might be the moral influence of the sacrifice on the prisoner's mind, and on the mind of others, no possible legal benefit could accrue to the prisoner through the sacrifice without a legal connection previously established, by permission of the supreme power in the state, between him and his self-sacrificing friend. Whatever the moral merit might be in such a case, the legal merit would be

nothing; the prisoner must nevertheless die. Between a person condemned to die and one willing to be his substitute, a legal connection, that is, a connection admitted by the supreme power, must be established, or else the self-sacrifice of the substitute will not be expiatory, and if made, will be without avail.

Hence, whatever might have been its moral influence wherever heard of by moral beings, if the self-sacrifice of Christ for the benefit of his people had not been vicarious, it would have been wholly worthless as to any legal merit. If he had not been vicariously wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, if he had not been vicariously delivered for our offences, and if he had not vicariously died for us, whatever else his self-sacrificing sufferings and death might have been, and whatever moral influence they might have exerted, no merit for us would have been acquired, and no atonement would have been made for us. We should have been still in our sins and under condemnation. A federal connection between the great Sufferer and the sinner was essential to the Substitute to merit, and to the offender to be benefited by the meritorious sacrifice. One essential element of merit, then, in the legal sense, is that the excellent deeds which are done by one for the benefit of others must be vicarious.

Again, merit is not acquired by the discharge of natural obligation. If in this sinful world a man discharges his duty as a son, a brother, a husband, and a father, he is, and may be, justly commended; but to call a son, brother, father, or husband, meritorious who simply discharges his duty as such, is to force language to express a harsh association of ideas. To speak of a meritorious creature is a harsher association of ideas, is to speak falsehood in fact, and the falsehood is an impious one. A man, as between man and man, may have the right, and may often have the power, to do meritorious deeds; but, as between himself and God he neither has, nor ever had, the right or the power to do more than his duty. In so doing his duty, justice would vindicate him as dutiful, but would

not reward him as meritorious. Even the most exalted personage who only discharges his natural obligation, acquires no merit thereby and is entitled to no reward.

Our Lord Jesus, as has been observed, had a created nature, and it seems congruous that, in respect to his created nature, he should have a natural obligation to discharge, whatever that obligation might be, and whatever might be the defining and binding law of that obligation. But what, if any, seeing his created nature never had an independent existence, may be the law of the natural obligation of Christ, as to his created nature, we know nothing. If, however, such law and such obligation exist, he in the discharge of this obligation acquires no merit for others; but while we know and affirm nothing as to what may be the natural obligation of Christ as to his created nature, it is certain that obedience to the law given to Adam formed no part of that obligation. Being man, he could obey that law, and this obedience was necessary to him and to us as our Surety; but as Adam was not a natural and federal head to him he was not naturally born under our law nor bound by it. He was made under this law by a special constitution for a special purpose. The importance of this distinction will be seen if it is borne in mind that Jesus merited for others by what he did vicariously beyond, not by what he did in the discharge of, natural obligation. If then, as man, he fulfilled the law under which we are bound in discharge of a natural obligation he did his duty, and is entitled to be vindicated as dutiful, but is not entitled to be rewarded as meritorious. If his obedience to our law did not form a part of his official engagement there is no meritorious acquirement in the fulfilment. Hence, then, another element of merit is something done apart from the discharge of natural obligation.

Again, a person who engages to do and to suffer for another, in order to merit something thereby, must possess the right of self-disposal to the extent of what he engages to do and to suffer, and must be a voluntary agent in such disposal. A man, as between man and

man, has but a limited right of self-disposal ; and, as between himself and God, no right at all. Whatever, therefore, a man may merit of men he can merit nothing of God. An original and independent right, however, belongs to the Lord Jesus to do " whatsoever his soul desireth ;" and in the assumption of his inferior nature he did not forfeit his original right to do his pleasure. In the sense of *right* he said, " I have *power* to lay down my life." And that he was a voluntary agent in what he did as the Substitute of his people, the Scriptures abundantly testify by every form of expression which can declare his voluntariness. These necessary elements of merit, then, are found in the mediation of Christ.

Again, another element of merit in the case of one suffering for the wrong of another is the sanction of the supreme power. For one to suffer for the wrong of another is to suffer something beyond the injunction of the law ; and, therefore, as for such suffering the law confers no reward, such suffering to be meritorious, must have the sanction of the supreme power, and the sufferer and his friend must look for a meritorious recognition of the substitutionary suffering from the supreme power. To go beyond the law in suffering for another, without the sanction of the supreme power, would be a demerit, and only as sanctioned by that power could such suffering be a merit. While, therefore, the Lord Jesus was careful to teach us that he had the right to lay down his life, he was equally careful to say, " This commandment have I received of my Father." This element of merit, then, is found in the substitutionary sufferings of Christ.

Again, it seems necessary in any mediatorial interference of one for another, in order to make such interference something more than a provisional arrangement and a possible advantage,—in order, in fact, to make such interference what it is necessary it should be, namely, the acquiring of a meritorious right and the securing in equity of the benefit intended upon terms, that there should be a contract, and that the contracting parties should be equal. That there should be a con-

tract stipulating what is to be done and for whom, and what shall be the reward; and that the restipulating party to the contract should, on the complete discharge of his obligations under the contract, have the right of suing out his reward. Without such a contract in reality or in effect, whatever might be done by one for another in the way of mediatorial interference could only be provisional; no mediatorial merit would be gained, no federal right would be acquired, no beneficial effect would be secured, all the labour might be wasted, and the whole design might collapse. Moreover, in the case of such a contract being made, it seems necessary that the parties to it should be equal. That on the one hand the stipulating party should be free and have the right to stipulate; and on the other hand the restipulating party should be equally free and equally have the right to restipulate. Absolutely supreme authority, however possessed, when held by one over another, shuts out the person subject to that authority from meriting anything legally by whatever morally meritorious actions he may do. On this matter we have the teaching of the Lord Jesus himself. In his own matchless way he shows the immeritoriousness of the best doings of one who, without being free to contract, served an absolute lord. A servant has been ploughing or feeding cattle all day and returns home weary from labour. His master does not say to him in consideration of his weariness, "Go and sit down to meat," but with the lordliness of absolute authority, says to him, "Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink." Nor having done all this did the master thank his servant for doing it, as for any meritorious work, but made him to know he had but done his duty, and that he had acquired no merit in so doing.

If any object to the notion of a contract, because it may seem to represent the whole business of the mediation of Christ as a merely personal affair between the Father and the Son, wherein the Father is all severity, and the Son is all mercy, the objection will be unjust

and inconsiderate. For, as has been said, as the expiatory sacrifice of Christ was not offered to the Father as and for a personal propitiation, but was offered to vindicate holiness, justice, and goodness, in the extension of righteousness and peace to the ungodly, so the covenant which was confirmed by this sacrifice was made with the same view. It was a covenant of peace as having peace for its object, and each of the contracting parties had an equal concern in that object.

But the best answer to this, as to every other, objection to a covenant, in relation to the mediatorial work of Christ, is the simple fact that there is one, and that the counsel of peace is "between them both," the Father and the Son. According to this economical arrangement the Father contracted in terms to give the Son a kingdom, and the Son accepted the kingdom upon the terms of the contract. When the Son came into the world he came with the law of this covenant in his heart, and delighted to do it; and when he had obeyed so much of the law of this covenant as was required to be obeyed in this world, he pleaded the fact as his right of reward, and was heard. "I have finished the work which they gavest me to do," he said, "and now, O Father, glorify thou me." Hence, then, this seemingly requisite contract in relation to the mediatorial interference of Christ to "save his people from their sins" exists and is acted on. According to this contract, therefore, his mediatorial interference is no uncertain provisional arrangement in which there could be nothing meritoriously done or acquired according to terms, and nothing secured by the meritorious fulfilment of terms; but, being according to this contract, his interference is such as to earn a mediatorial merit upon terms, upon terms to acquire a federal right, upon terms to entitle him to every blessing of peace pledged to him in the contract, and upon terms to put him into a position to sue out in equity everything for which, according to contract, he interfered.

Once more, merit, in the legal sense, does not arise from any moral meritoriousness previously acquired by,

nor from any superior moral excellence attributable to, nor from any relative superiority belonging to, the substitute doing or suffering, but from the deeds and sufferings themselves. In a moral sense it is otherwise. In this sense, if a person interfere for another by whom he has been deeply injured, his interference will be immeasurably more meritorious than if, instead of being injured, he had been as greatly obliged as he has been deeply injured. So also, if a king take a personal interest in any one to whom he is not personally obliged, so far as to involve himself in personal inconvenience, loss, and suffering, common consent will attach amoral merit to this kindness of a king which it would not, in a like case, to a like kindness done by one of his subjects. But if the sentence of the law against the person for whom the interference is made be twenty shillings or as many stripes, justice will make no difference, supposing a substitution is admitted, whether the substitute be an injured or an obliged person, whether king or subject, whether of great or of small ability, whether a merely righteous man or a great public benefactor. In any case justice requires "the uttermost farthing" of the fine, and the last stripe of the penalty; and whoever is the substitute, it will steadily refuse to liberate the defaulter until a complete equivalent is given for the default.

The sum, then, of our doctrine on merit is,—First, that it is something done for the benefit of others beyond the natural obligation of the doer.

Secondly, that legally to merit anything by suffering for another, a legal connection must be established between the substitute and the offender.

Thirdly, that the discharge of natural obligation merits nothing.

Fourthly, that a substitute must have the right of self-disposal to the extent of his substitutionary engagements.

Fifthly, that a substitute must be a voluntary agent.

Sixthly, that when the law does not provide a substitution the sanction of the supreme power is essential to any merit arising out of any substitution.

Seventhly, that in order to merit upon terms a contract is necessary.

Eighthly, that the parties to the contract must have the right, and be free to contract.

Ninthly, that to merit the release of a defaulter, the claims of justice must be fully met whoever may be the substitute.

CHAPTER IV.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS OF THE ATONEMENT IN ITS RELATION TO DIVINE JUSTICE.

HAVING already, in passing, briefly illustrated these points of our teaching concerning merit in their connection with the atonement of Christ, it will be unnecessary, by any direct reference, to illustrate them any further while pursuing our inquiry about, and advancing our opinions upon, justice rewarding the merit of Jesus Christ.

If it is the province of justice to give to the meritorious his due, it will follow that if Jesus Christ, regarded as a Surety, is dealt with justly, he will receive the full due of his merit. To withhold from him anything which he justly merited, under any possible consideration of his meritoriousness estimated by the rule of justice, would be, precisely to the extent of the withholding, to deal unjustly towards him; just as to reward him beyond what, according to rule, he really merited, would be to extend favour to him.

All that have considered this subject will feel that we are necessitated by these remarks to confront a question which has given rise to, and which continues to be the cause of, considerable vexation to enquiring minds, and of much vexed controversy between minds polemically disposed. A calm consideration of this matter may be helpful.

It is thought and taught that, from the fact that

Jesus Christ is properly Divine, his obedience must needs be infinitely meritorious.

This doctrine of the infiniteness of the merit of Christ is true, and it is not true. It is, as it seems to us, from not distinguishing the truth from the untruth of this doctrine that the confusion in men's minds arises on the whole question. If, as it appears to us, a distinction were clearly apprehended between merit in the moral sense, and merit in the legal sense, all confusion would be cleared away. The realm of ethics and the realm of jurisprudence require to be kept distinct here, although justice presides in both realms. In the realm of ethics, justice always acknowledges merit, but is often utterly unable to reward the merit it acknowledges. In the realm of jurisprudence, justice not only acknowledges merit, but invariably rewards in full the merit it acknowledges. Those that contend for the infiniteness of the merit of Christ, err from estimating his obedience according to the moral judgment, apart from all legal consideration, and as though no law were concerned in the matter, instead of estimating that obedience, as in a case where a binding law is concerned, according to its legal value.

On moral grounds, apart from law, many circumstances will go into the account of a meritorious deed in the moral judgment. For instance, the higher in rank the person interfering is above him for whom he interferes, the further removed from him in relationship, the less he is obliged or the more he has been disobliged or injured by him, and the less advantage or service he expects to reap from him, the more merit will be his acknowledged award. So also, the more worthy a person is to have a meritorious deed done for him, the less merit will be awarded to the deed; and the less worthy or the more unworthy a person is to have a meritorious deed done for him, the more merit will be awarded to the deed. And there are many other considerations which will materially regulate, in a moral sense, the merit of meritorious deeds. But where a law exists, and the merit to be acquired is what will satisfy

the claims of justice according to terms of law, the thing is palpably and altogether different. A full payment, and a just equivalent for what would have been the punishment of the defaulter are absolutely essential. Anything less would yield no content to any of the parties concerned, and anything more would be superfluous.

In every view of it, in a moral sense, the interference of Christ for his sinful creatures can only be regarded as boundlessly meritorious. The essential dignity of his person, the wholly incomprehensible attributes of his nature, his absolute independence of the persons for whom he interfered and his boundlessly lofty removal in rank above them, together with their unqualifiable unworthiness, must make his interference for them immeasurably meritorious, and as high above all possible reward, as it is high above all possible praise. Estimated on moral grounds, it will be impossible to set a bound to the merit of a single act done or pain suffered by that peerless person for guilty men. Estimated on these grounds, even the very lightest gracious thought of the Son of God for a sinner must be of immeasurable merit. Estimated thus, the merit of Christ's obedience unto death is as far beyond any reward which justice, presiding in the moral world apart from all considerations of law, can award to it, as he himself "is exalted above all blessing and praise" in the moral judgment of his beneficiaries. Presiding here, justice does not propose to reward, but only to acknowledge his merit. As nothing imaginable could on these grounds, be an adequate reward, so nothing is given for his reward.

It is as presiding, not in the moral realm, but in what may probably be thought an inferior realm, the realm of law, where the exactness of legal injunction, obligation, and sanction obtains, that justice estimates the merit of Christ in the matter of the atonement, and gives to him his due reward. Here it is that the sinners were found for whom he interfered. They were under law. They had violated its injunctions, they had lightly esteemed its obligations, and they were exposed to its

sanctions. In this realm the merit of the Saviour was acquired for them. His merit is appraised at its value in law according to the decision of justice as the administrator of law. What he acquired in law, that he merited; what he did not acquire according to law, he did not merit. If he did not acquire the redemption of all men, he did not merit the redemption of all men. According to justice, presiding here, he is remunerated with his full due. Sin, it must be remembered, is a criminal default, and sinners are criminal defaulters; and he, whoever he be, and whatever may be his rank, his personal dignity, and his moral worth, that interferes for criminal defaulters, must pay the sanctioned fine and bear a penalty for the default to the entire satisfaction of retributive justice in the case. If from any moral consideration of the person interfering for a criminal defaulter retributive justice does not exact what is due in the case for the default, and the defaulter is liberated on that consideration, remunerative justice will reward unduly, the substitute will receive an inglorious recompense, and the defaulter will escape by favour and carry the stigma of an unatoned default upon him. In such a case there will be in different respects, a miscarriage of justice relating to all concerned, and a general discontent will be the unsatisfactory issue.

Those who have entertained the notion that an atonement was made intentionally for all men, and those who have contended for a sufficiency in the atonement for all men, have strenuously clung to the idea of the infiniteness of the merit of Christ as necessary to the support of their respective opinions; but those who have rejected these opinions, and have contended for a limited intention of the atonement, as to persons, but have retained for the same reasons the infiniteness of the Saviour's merit, would have been embarrassed with a wealth of merit of which they would have been at a loss to dispose, but for a need they have discovered for it all in their notion of the infinite evil of sin. A simple regard to the truth would set all right.