

# ASPECTS OF THE REDEMPTIVE ACT OF CHRIST

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## INTRODUCTION

WE Christians have a wonderful and astonishing belief, that a certain act, accomplished by a certain Man at a certain point of time, had and has significance for all men at all times. We allude to the life and death and rising again of Jesus Christ, an act which was accomplished nearly two thousand years ago.

Now if this act, of which the central and supreme consideration is the death, really had such cosmic significance, it is clear that we must not over-simplify it. It must, on the contrary, have numerous facets or aspects from which it may be studied, and which are capable of being studied and profited from separately. Only so shall we discover all the richness of the contents of that act. But over-simplification leads to a certain impoverishing of the same. And we are inclined to believe that in this respect an error has often been committed by Christian expositors of the atoning death of Christ; namely, that in trying to pierce to its deepest meaning they have neglected the riches of other aspects of it, and so sometimes nearly reduced it to a formula. Such a proceeding was all the more mistaken in that that deepest meaning itself cannot be understood except through the help of those other aspects; for it is not to be supposed that in any act of God one aspect alone is essential, and other

aspects are unessential, uncontributory appendices to it. No; all the aspects are knit together, and the deepest of them is woven into the other ones.

In these pages therefore we shall seek to study these aspects separately, beginning from the simpler and proceeding to the profounder. The full significance of the act will appear in the combining of all the aspects. And this plan has another advantage: those who through training, prejudice, or spiritual inexperience are unable to compass a belief in the profounder aspects, may be enabled to fix on to the simpler ones. Even to do this (they will find) will profoundly alter and influence their ideas—their faith—their life. And thus they may be brought gradually on into the fulness of faith.

## ASPECT I

### The Death of Christ as Fulfilment of the Law 'Death the Gateway to Life'

ONE of the profoundest sayings of Christ—a saying of literally infinite application and unfathomable depth—is the following:

'Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.'

The importance of this saying can be gauged by the fact that it is the sole solitary saying which is recorded in all the four Gospels; and by the further fact that it is recorded as having been said on four different occasions. We shall mention these all the more because the saying was not used by Jesus Christ as a stereotyped formula, but was expressed from time to time in most instructively different terms.

The version already given occurs in Luke xviii. 33, in a discourse about the end of the world, and how it will take men unawares. We give it first because it affords the most general expression of the law, 'death the gateway to life'.

Another version occurs at the end of the charge Christ gave to the twelve apostles as He sent them out for the first time (Matt. x. 39):

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'He that findeth his life shall lose it: and He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.'

Again, just after He has warned His disciples of His coming death for the first time, and Peter has attempted to make Him desist from His course He gives us another version of it (Matt. xvi. 25).

'Whosoever wills to save His life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.'

And lastly, when the shadow of His immediately impending death and sacrifice was falling on his soul, a day or two before His betrayal (John xii. 25):

'He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.'

The words 'for my sake' in the second and third versions were spoken because the application was then the self-sacrifice demanded of His own followers. But that the law was considered by Him a universal one is evident, especially in the context of the fourth and last version, where Jesus Christ expressly announces that He, first and foremost, came under this law, and then His disciples after Him and in Him. We may therefore take the whole of these four versions as general, ignoring the special limitation 'for my sake', or rather generalizing its meaning to 'for the sake of the highest and best thing in the whole universe'.

We have in these four sayings two great paradoxes each divided into two clauses. Our chief

concern is with the second paradox; but it is best understood by examining the first. The first, then is,

Whosoever shall seek to	}	his life—shall lose it.
save		
He that findeth		
Whosoever wills to save		
He that loveth		

As though to say: 'It might have been expected that a man's life—the most valuable thing he has in the world, and, further, a thing of which he only possesses one—should be kept at any price. It might have been expected that at any cost a man should "seek to save it", "find it", "will to save it", "love it". How startling then to be told that those who do this just defeat their own object and only succeed in losing that same life!' Why is this? The very variations of the text help us to the answer. All life is only valuable for that which it accomplishes; for the way in which it is lived; for the end to which it is directed. And so a man's life, even though it is his 'only one' (Ps. xxii. 20) is only valuable for these things. If then he 'loves' it for itself, irrespective of these things; if he 'wills to save it' for itself; 'seeks to save it' for itself; yea, even if he 'finds it' and misses these things; then, in finding it, he loses it; for he discovers that he has 'found' something not worth the finding; has 'saved' something not worth saving; has 'loved' something not worth having or keeping. Not even our only life is worth seeking to save at any cost.



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Even so was it with the Spartan soldier who alone fled from the defence of the pass of Thermopylæ against the Persians. He loved his life and sought to save it, and he did save it. But at the expense of all that makes life valuable—love of country, esteem of others. For on his return he found himself boycotted, dishonoured. He discovered that the life he had saved was more than lost. And speedily he himself destroyed with his own hand that which had become less than valueless.

When this is understood, the second paradox becomes understood also :

Whosoever shall lose his life	} shall	{	save it
Whosoever wills to lose his life			find it
He that hateth <sup>1</sup> his life			keep it

The outward expression of this paradox is still harsher than the former one. But the clue we have found guides us to its meaning. He who prefers principle to life—saves—principle; he who fixes his eye on the aims of life and the objects for which alone it exists, and holds on to these even at the cost of abandoning life itself—such a one in losing finds—saves—keeps his life. Even as those heroes of Thermopylæ, because they sacrificed their lives for Sparta, enjoyed the testimony of a good conscience then and immortal fame thereafter.

How did Jesus Christ himself apply this law? It is true that the applications of this law are in-

<sup>1</sup> A hyperbolical expression for 'giving something else an absolute preference'.

finite, and that not all of them involve physical death. For example, the man who refuses a good post to which some disgraceful condition is attached has damaged himself—has appeared to ‘hate his life’ in neglecting a great, perhaps an apparently vital, good. But really he has kept it, saved it. For after such a trial, his life itself, his soul, shines forth with tenfold intensity and waxes strong and rich much more than before. Whereas had he taken the post, his life, his soul (for whose sake he took it) would have been impoverished—smitten unto death. And so the preacher who prefers popularity to sincerity and faithfulness; the conqueror who prefers conquest to justice; the merchant who prefers lucre to humanity. At the end of it all these men feel they have lived for nought. They have gained the whole world, yet lost their soul—the very life for which they sacrificed those higher ends.

Physical death, therefore, does not necessarily enter into the application of this universal law. But in its highest application it does. In the ultimate application of the law a man must be willing to lose not something vital only but *vita* itself. He must prefer principle, the *summum bonum*, God, to physical life itself.

Clearly therefore Jesus Christ, if He is the supreme example, and if He wished supremely to exemplify this fundamental law which He first laid down, must not only exemplify it metaphorically but really, He must give the supreme exemplifica-

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tion of it, namely, the preference of physical death rather than the abandonment of His highest aim. And He must not only will that preference and be sincerely ready to die. He must die actually.

Else how would He have proved to us the supreme truth of the other half of the paradox, that he who does actually die—lose his one life—in the cause of God, saves it as actually and as truly? He must die ere he could rise again. It was His dying and *rising again in glory* that certified to us for ever this truth.

For Him then these texts, this law, spelt death, actual death, and the death too of apparent failure and disgrace. Otherwise He would not have been our supreme exemplifier. Why thus cavil at the death of Christ, and say that it misbeseemed His dignity as prophet? On the contrary. . . .!

But the context of these texts itself bears out our point.

### ASPECT II

#### The Death of Christ as Fulfilment of 'Love unto Death'

WE need not prove that self-sacrifice on behalf of others is the highest thing in the world, ethically, and is so considered by all men. This is that love unto death which is the noblest thing that characterizes and distinguishes humanity.

Such being the case it was inevitable that the Son of Man, the pure and perfect ideal, should manifest this virtue. This consideration is similar to what has been already referred to in a previous section, namely, that the ideal man must manifest the highest aspects of virtue; for else, how can He be an ideal for all times and places? It is very strange and sad that some should deny this very thing to the Perfect Man—Jesus; and stranger still that they should do this as champions of His honour.

Again, love is the greatest thing in the world; and its highest grade and supremest manifestation is love unto death. It was therefore possible, nay to be expected, that the ideal man should manifest the love that does not stop short of death. And now that that the *possible* has become realized we can but bow down our heads in worship and adoration.

Christ Himself endorsed this truth in one of His greatest words, for He said, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'

And in another place He says, 'I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep. He that is a hireling, and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, beholdeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth, and the wolf snatcheth them, and scattereth them: he fleeth because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and know

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mine own, and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep' (John x. 11-15).

These words recall to our memory the exploits of heroes all down the ages. The father who entered a burning house to save his children; the clansman who preferred death to betraying his chief; the youth who leaped into the waves to save the drowning; the soldier who stood firm at his post to save his company--these and a thousand other like deeds are examples of the highest characteristics that man can manifest. And the more terrible that voluntary death is the greater the glory of it. How much more when that death is long drawn-out as well as voluntary? Nay, when it is possible to avoid it, to be saved from it, at any moment? Do we not say that love is then at its greatest? Do we not offer to such a hero the crown of all crowns of glory?

It is with this in mind that we consider Christ's death a glory—the thing which is denied by those who ignore the true meaning of glory. And so the Bible says: 'We see Jesus crowned with honour and glory that he should taste death for every man.'

Nay, it would be true to say that the world only discovered the meaning of the word 'love' in the sight of Jesus thus crowned: 'Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren' (1 John iii. 16).

And there is one more unique thing about this love of Jesus—that it makes each man think that it is personal, that He sacrificed Himself for him personally. Thus St. Paul says: 'I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me' (Galatians ii. 20).

Now if a man's self-sacrifice for loved ones, for 'his friends', is the highest grade of love, what shall we say of self-sacrifice, for his enemies? Truly such love is beyond human power, for Romans v. 7 says: 'For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.'

There are two noteworthy things in this verse; the first we have seen to be the assertion of self-sacrifice for the *enemies*, the second shows that Christ's self-sacrifice for the evil and the hostile was a revelation of God's love. But how could this be, what meaning would the words have, were not God and Christ somehow essentially one; were it not that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself'? (2 Cor. v. 19). Truly the self-sacrifice of Jesus is the act of divine love and this is one of the strangest things in the world. God's love and Christ's love are one and the same thing; and Christ's love-unto-death for sinners is the measure of God's love for them.

So then self-sacrifice is a possible thing with God; and the divine self-sacrifice was accomplished

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through the redemptive act of Christ. Had it not been accomplished God would have remained lower than man in the ethical scale, for love is the greatest thing in the world. Would that have been tolerable?

But we must not diverge too far from our subject, namely, that love unto death is the greatest phenomenon of human life, especially when lavished upon one who does not merit it nor appreciate its value. If this is true, then it was inevitable that the greatest of the sons of men, the Ideal Man, the prophet who spoke through His life and works as He spoke by His mouth, should die to win this brightest crown of glory. From this point of view alone one feels and sees that the life of Jesus would have been imperfect if the Muslim version of its close were true. Whoever denies the death of Christ on the ground that His death bedims the glory of Christ misunderstands the whole truth of things. Let us rather declare with the apostle that this is the true and incomprehensible love, and bow down adoring.

### ASPECT III

#### The Death of Christ as an Act of Heroic Leadership

THE primary condition of a good officer is that he shall share with his men the perils, troubles, dangers, and pain of the war. In the great war of 1914-15 it was remarked in the British trenches

how completely one the officers were with the men; how they shared everything with them and exposed themselves even more than the men to danger and death; and how they had their reward in the unmeasured devotion of the men whom they led, and their willingness to follow anywhere, however great the danger, even to death. Nor were the British officers alone in this. On the other hand, at the fall of Przemysl, the world was scandalized to hear that while the men of the garrison looked war worn and miserable, the officers seemed lusty and strong; and that while the former were subsisting on rats and mice, the latter were living in good hotels on excellent food. It was not wonderful that with such officers nothing notable was done by the garrison in the actual fighting whether of defence or offence. Every successful leader has made his men feel that, however much they suffered, he suffered most of all. When Alexander the Great was on the return march from India to Babylon they were passing through the deserts of Baluchistan and suffered awfully from lack of water. One day, when all were undergoing torture of thirst, a miserable little spring was discovered. With difficulty a cupful of water was collected, and it was brought to the general. As he raised it to his lips, hungry, wistful, yet honest eyes were raised to it. He quietly poured it out on to the ground. 'I will not spare myself,' said he, 'any suffering which my men have to undergo.' No wonder with such a leader his men would go anywhere! Similarly



David poured out a certain cup of water 'before the Lord', and a famous British general, wounded to death in the Napoleonic wars, insisted that cup of cold water presented to his burning lips should be given to a nameless comrade lying wounded near at hand.

Now the Lord Jesus Christ was nothing less than a leader in a gigantic campaign; a campaign involves toil, hardship, suffering, and frequently also danger and death; a campaign against the devil, the worldly spirit, sin, and death itself. We say He was the leader in this campaign, both in the sense that He alone could do the initial salvational work, and also in the sense that the carrying out of the work involved (by the will of God) the association of an army of His followers. Do you not therefore see how morally inevitable it was, how absolutely necessary from the point of view of fitness, that this leader should *suffer*; should be a 'man of sorrows and acquainted with grief'? Else how could He possibly expect His followers to be willing to suffer? And so we find it written:

*'It became Him (God) for whom all things and by whom all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation (Christ) perfect through sufferings'* (Heb. ii. 10). 'Perfect,' that is to say, 'fully qualified'; i.e. *quâ* leader in such a campaign. His highest qualification consisted in His supreme undergoing of supreme suffering.

Thus our brethren who cavil at the record of the terrible events contained in the closing

chapters of the Gospels should try to look at the matter from this point of view, and if they did so they would not see shame in those indignities and unspeakable sufferings, but rather would agree that just in them and by them Jesus (in the words of the same passage) is 'crowned with honour and glory' (Heb. ii. 9). On the contrary they made Him, or make Him, the supremely-qualified leader in this deadliest of campaigns.

But if so, must not these sufferings from this point of view alone include *death*? For death is the supreme suffering and the supreme act of sacrifice which a soldier is called upon to make. It is the stories of soldiers who have been faithful unto death that most of all thrill. If the poet Horace could sing, 'It is sweet and gloriously fitting to die for one's country,' how much more if for 'country' we read 'the kingdom of God'?

In the name of what then do the cavillers cavil when they learn that the supreme man and the supreme leader died a hero's death, falling in the breach, in the forlorn hope, a death of awful suffering, yet by its heroism and its voluntariness fruitful, an inspiration to all ages? Rather should we say: 'Yes, I see that morally this was inevitably necessary.' And so the book has it that 'Jesus was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of *death*' (Heb. ii. 9): for angels could not suffer such a thing; therefore, for physical reasons if for nothing else, the word took *flesh* and so became susceptible of this very thing. And

so it goes on (verse 14), 'Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood' (remember that in many armies the leader addresses his men as 'children') 'he also himself in like manner partook of the same'. And why? Just in order 'that through death he might bring to nought him to that had the power of death and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.'

Yes; the leader in that campaign must be a leader into and through death.

But one will say: A great general does not so expose himself; we need a live general to carry through the campaign!

And so we have a live general. The Christian religion is perpetually uniting impossible opposites. We have a leader who sacrificed himself even unto death; we have that fruitful example of uttermost sacrifice. And we have a living leader whom death can no more touch with one of its fingers, for He says: 'Fear not, I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of life and death.'

So this leader in being overcome by death conquered death. And death, in conquering him for a moment, destroyed its own power for ever.

## ASPECT IV

The Death of Christ as Overcoming Death by  
Meeting it

IN the last aspect we were considering the general appropriateness of the death of Christ from the view point of the leader who undergoes in his own person all that his followers are called upon to undergo, even unto death. It was 'seemly' (says God's book) that the captain of our salvation should be made 'perfect through sufferings'—including death as the rest of the passage shows (Heb. ii. 10). But we now proceed to enquire, what was the campaign, and against what enemy, that this captain fought, He and the army of His followers? The answer to this question will make the necessity and appropriateness of His death still more evident.

The campaign was against the Lord of Sin and Death on behalf of a humanity in captivity to the law of sin and death.

Consider the following: 'But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man' (Heb. ii. 9).

Humanity had tasted death, nay had drunk deeply of its cup. This death, as the Bible teaches, was the result of sin, and sin was introduced through the agency of the power of darkness. There comes a captain—a deliverer—from the realms of light to

deliver His captive race; and He therefore must 'taste death for every man' of those captives. Now it makes no difference whether one believes: (1) that mere physical death was only introduced at the fall, and that but for it the fate of mankind would have been translation to the glorified world after the apprentice life on earth; or (2) that mere physical death is not intended but death with its terrible accompaniments of disease, pain, darkness and terror; in which case the alternative missed by humanity would have been the bright, happy, death of euthanasia, full of certainty, faith, hope and joy. In either case the point is that this captain had to taste the bitter cup of death for every man, in order to overcome death and rescue humanity from its terrors. And this of course explains to us why Christ drank such a bitter cup of death, a death surrounded with every terror, every pain, and all spiritual darkness, even to the sense of separation from the heavenly Father! It was because he wanted to drink to the full the cup of not merely physical death but death with the concomitants due directly to human sin—the death of which Satan, not God, is the Lord.

But why? Could they not have been rescued by a mere fiat of will? Well, we can only reiterate that love impels every saviour to undergo the woes from which he is rescuing the endangered one. If that one is in the dust down to the dust his rescuer stoops; if drowning, he leaps into the sea; if in the fire, he exposes himself to the flames.

But why die? The rescuer must, in commonsense, preserve his own life! No, not always. Many a rescuer has had to lay down his life in saving the endangered ones, and he knew that he was sacrificing his life. And there are the cases in which love is seen at its highest, as we have already remarked; so putting it at its lowest, Jesus 'had to' die in that war of rescue. And again, a moral and spiritual rescue is not the same as a purely physical one. In the former, the whole virtue resides in the fact that the rescuer goes through the whole of the danger and trouble and affliction from which he rescues, for the moral defeat of that enemy resides in letting him do his worst, effect all his will, and then showing him and that he is nevertheless defeated. Otherwise (1) that enemy would claim that he still had something in reserve which would have defeated the rescuer, and (2) those groaning under the trouble would say that their would-be rescuer had never suffered as they, and the moral back of the trouble would therefore remain unbroken. For both these reasons Jesus had voluntarily to pass clear through the dark valley of the shadow of death with all its pain and all its physical, moral and spiritual horrors, and so out into the sunshine and light again. The enemy was only finally defeated by being allowed to triumph for a moment! A thing strange but clear enough to one who thinks and reflects.

As it is the lord of death has done his worst against this captain and failed. The followers can

now follow through the breach thus made. The representative of humanity has tasted death 'for all men'. So all men by faith in Him can overcome death. And so the passage goes on: 'Since the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.'

How clear this now is. The children<sup>1</sup> partook of flesh and blood with all the ills they are heir to; therefore their captain must partake of the same and thus 'through death'—this is the great paradox, but we have now explained it—He might bring to nought the great lord of death, break his authority, show that his utmost strength was less than the power of God, and less than the potential might of believing humanity; and so deliver those groaning in lifelong bondage to that dark potentate. How clear it all appears. How unwise to deny the death of Christ on the score of the weakness it seems to show. We see clearly now how utterly superficial this view is, and we have also seen that to deny it as disgraceful shows equally want of insight and perception. No, rather we see Him who dared and suffered these things 'crowned with glory and honour' and 'given a name that is above every name'.

<sup>1</sup> In many armies a captain calls his followers 'my children'.

## ASPECT V

The Death of Christ in Relation to the  
Fight against Sin

IN our last section we saw how inevitable it was that the supreme Man should, in fighting death and the lord of death, die himself.

Now death is only bitter because of sin. 'Oh death where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin.' The campaign against death was, as we saw, a campaign against sin and all unrighteousness—all rebellion to the holy laws of God. And this involved the death of the Saviour, and that from more than one point of view.

**i. A Righteous Man Contra Mundum**

We know very well what is frequently, nay usually, the fate of those who follow righteousness at all costs in this world. They sacrifice gain, they incur loss, they incur ridicule, they get boycotted, persecuted, cast forth from family or society; sometimes they suffer violence, and sometimes death. This last is only the climax but it shows the character of the whole process. The world hates the righteousness that makes it feel its own evil, and goes as far it dares in opposing it. Death is the logical end. The man who is made to sacrifice even a little for righteousness, therefore, undergoes a death from this view-point. But the man who is the ideal man must demonstrate in himself the



end of the process—he must die actually. What, shall the martyr die for conscience sake, and the ideal righteous man not be the martyr of martyrs? Impossible! and so we always come back to the same point; Christ, from this view-point alone had to die.

It is not only the Bible and experience that have made clear this point. In a remarkable passage, which reads almost like a prophecy, Plato shows what must happen when a perfectly righteous man sets himself clean across the unrighteousness of the world, conceding nothing and flinching from nothing. There will be a tug-of-war in which the moral victory will be to him, but the physical victory to the multitude of his opponents. These will stick at nothing, and finally nothing will satisfy them but his ignominious death. Socrates the philosopher had already by his life and tragic death for conscience sake suggested this train of thought to Plato. But it remained for Jesus Christ to fulfil the prophecy fully. Here is the passage:

‘Let the just man be the best of men and be esteemed to be the worst; then let us see whether his virtue is proof against infamy\* and its consequences. And let him continue thus to the hour of his death. . . . They will tell you that the just man who is thought unjust will be scourged, racked, bound, will have his eyes burnt out, and at last, after suffering every kind of evil, will be crucified.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Republic* Book ii § 361.

[\* should be "infamy"]

The reader will have grasped instinctively without waiting to be told that, in this contest between the Righteous One and an unrighteous world, the whole essence and secret of the matter is that the former shall be armed with his righteousness only. The instant he adds other weapons to that one, that instant the spell is broken. The moral palm (which is all he is fighting for) remains unawarded. If he resorts to physical violence or to supraphysical defence he has left the purely moral sphere and the spell is broken. This is why it was so utterly impossible for Jesus Christ to support His conflict with this world's unrighteousness by an army (as Satan tempted Him to do on the mount) or by a miracle (as he tempted Him to do in the garden and as the Jews tempted Him to do on the cross itself). No, He met that horrible current of the world's hatred with a blameless life and a perfectly truthful testimony. Physically the world could kill Him for it, and did kill Him. But He rose again to show that the moral victory is a total victory and that the soul which thus wins itself is indestructible. But the reader sees clearly that the physical death was inevitable to Jesus as the ideal Righteous One.

## **ii. Sin unveiled and self-judged**

It follows from this that sin unveiled itself and was seen for what it is in its mortal struggle with the Holy One. For so often sin has on a mask. So often it contrives to hide its hideousness, sometimes

even making itself seem beautiful. But in the Cross of Christ the naked truth came out. Then sin tried to destroy Him who was without sin. Unrighteousness tried to kill the Righteous One, and righteousness itself in Him. Thus all the abominable and hideous crimes that ever outraged the universe were summed up in what was done to Christ; and thus sin damned itself by throwing away its mask and letting itself be seen for what it is, foul, murderous, God-hating. And so Christ said, on the threshold of the last mortal bout in the struggle: "Now is the judgement of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John xii. 31).

And this was a self-condemnation, as we have said, effected by merely letting sin show, on Him, what it is: 'He that believeth not is condemned already. . . and this is the condemnation, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.'

Do we not see in this the key to the mystery of God's judgement on sin through and by the death of Christ. We shall pass on to this aspect in the next section, but here we want to suggest that God condemned sin by simply letting sin condemn itself, in wreaking its full spite on the perfectly Holy One; thus (indeed) crucifying itself.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hence, in the type of John iii. 14 it is a *serpent*, the symbol of sin, which is exhibited on the tree; for it was sin that was gibbeted there. Is not this the meaning of that text of supremest mystery, 'God made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin'?

And sin had so to be judged, and in no other way could it have been judged. Therefore once again we are led to see that the Leader of humanity, the Holy One of God, had to die.

### **iii. Sin God-condemned**

We have seen that God's method in judging sin was by letting sin do its worst on His Incarnate Word. We now—and in conclusion—concentrate upon this supreme aspect, that God in Christ judged sin and so made atonement for the race of sinners. 'God, sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh' (Romans viii. 3). Human flesh sinned and human flesh exhibited the condemnation of sin. But as we have clearly shown above, that demonstration of condemnation could only be on holy human flesh, on One who had in His love and pity taken on Himself that flesh, for this very purpose. And God's love in Christ consisted in just this, that He was willing to have demonstrated in Himself this demonstration of His righteousness and sin's sinfulness.

'Hereby know we love because he laid down his life for us' (1 John iii. 16).

'Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.'

'His own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we having died unto sin, might live unto righteousness.'

‘God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.’

Yes, it was supremest love which demanded and which executed on itself this supreme demonstration of holiness. It demanded it:

‘God set forth Christ to be a propitiation, through faith, by his blood, to shew his righteousness, because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; for the shewing, I say, of his righteousness at this present season: that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus (Romans iii. 25, 26).

And it executed it on itself: ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself’.

And our point here is that in the very nature of the case, the demonstration (as we have seen repeatedly before from other aspects) had to be carried to the point of death, for ‘the wages of sin is death.’

And so the love that takes on itself the demonstration of this fact had to be a love unto death.

And herein are God and sinners reconciled; the sinner is justified; and sin is put away. For he who contemplates the cross with awakened conscience realizes in the act wrought out there the true nature of God the Holy and Loving, the true nature of righteousness, the true nature of sin, and the true nature of himself. Therefore he passes on himself and endorses God’s judgement on his sin and on himself, and in so doing is freely forgiven. Why? Because now forgiveness can be in no danger of

being mistaken for indifference; nor is it in danger of injuring him and confirming him in sin. Rather does he adore the holiness thus revealed; and he is melted by the Love thus manifested. He is crucified with Christ, by his faith in Him, unto sin the world and the devil; and rising with Christ, also by faith, he lives henceforth unto God and holiness alone.

And therefore even the chiefest of sinners can find peace in the Cross. For however many and however black are the crimes he has committed, however sore their burden, Christ met them all, and more, when He met sin itself and its prince. The most awful criminal may therefore identify himself by faith with the sin-bearer and be loosed from his sins and leave them for ever. But whoso fails to do this is in danger of identifying himself with the sin which tried to kill the Holy One, and which the Holy One overpowered and will one day destroy, and of himself sharing, therefore, in its destruction.