

CHRIST OUR PENAL SUBSTITUTE.

CHAPTER I.

The Rationalistic Objections to Penal Substitution.

THE student of religious discussion finds these objections as varied and pertinacious as though the blessed conception of righteous pardon, grounded in full satisfaction to law, were irritating and insulting to the objectors, instead of being attractive, as it should be, to all of us sinners. This cardinal conception is rejected by the multitudes of rationalizing nominal Christians through every party, from Socinians upward. They say that they must reject it as essentially unjust, as thus obnoxious to necessary moral intuitions, and so impossible to be ascribed to a righteous God. They say they must infer this from the Bible facts, that God strictly prohibits such substitution to civil magistrates judging in his name (see Deut. xxiv. 16), and that he disclaims the usage for himself, as in the famous text, Ezek. xviii. 20.

They claim that, while ancient or pagan peoples, taught by barbarism and debasing forms of religious belief, made constant use of the cruel principle of substitution in their *antipsychoi* and hostages, civilization, Christianity, and correct ethics, have banished these usages from modern christendom. And this, they say, is but the testimony of a more enlightened, a better age, against the cruelty and injustice of substituting the innocent in place of the guilty under punishment.

They argue that, since "God is love," we must not represent his penalties as meaning vengeance on transgressors, or simple retribution for supposed outrage upon his authority and personal honor; to inflict misery upon the transgressor for this purpose would not be holy justice, but malicious revenge; and that this notion has descended from the pagan conceptions of their vindictive gods, who were apprehended rather as fearful demons than as a heavenly Father. Hence their only conception of divine justice is the remedial one. Penalties are but modified expressions of divine benevolence, just like the chastisements and bitter medicines administered by loving parents to erring or diseased children, solely for their good, and as deterrents from future transgressions for them and their brothers and sisters. Hence the objectors infer, with loud triumph, that there can be no imputed guilt and vicarious punishment, because the

sick child must swallow his own physic in order to get any cure. The taking of it by a healthy comrade can do him no good. They charge that the orthodox doctrine of the necessity of a vicarious satisfaction in order to pardon is directly contradicted by the duty of Christian forgiveness, so strongly enjoined upon us in Scripture. To forgive those who trespass upon us, without waiting for compensation for the injuries done us, is the loveliest Christian virtue. The Lord's prayer makes such forgiveness the absolute condition of our receiving forgiveness from him. The apostle commands Christians to forgive their enemies "even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven them." But surely our Christian virtue should consist in our being like God. His perfections, therefore, do not prompt him to exact penal satisfaction in order to pardon. But the orthodox doctrine misrepresents God in an odious light, as a vindictive being who refuses to relinquish his own pique, no matter how penitent the transgressor against him, until his vengeance is satiated; yea, so blindly vindictive, that he can be satisfied only by hurting somebody, though that person be the innocent one.

The more thoughtful objectors also argue analytically, that there can be no penal substitution in God's government, because penalty loses its whole propriety and moral significance when transferred away from the person of the transgressor. They

ask, What is it that *deserves* penalty? Everybody's common sense answers, It is the sin. But sin is not a substantial thing when abstracted from the sinner. In strictness of speech, sin is the sinner acting. The sinfulness and bad desert are nothing more than the attributes of the sinning person. Hence they infer that the penalty must be as inalienable as the personal ill-desert.

Therefore, imputation can be but a legal fiction, and that an immoral one. Passing from abstractions to concrete cases, they cry passionately, "How could any right mind view the punishment of an innocent person in place of the guilty except with righteous and burning indignation?" If you, Mr. Calvinist, were the victim of such a legal fiction, we surmise that all the dogmatism of the orthodox would fail to satisfy you under your unjust sufferings! Therefore, the ground upon which God permitted a holy Christ to suffer and die must be otherwise explained. The places in the Scripture which seem to teach his penal substitution must be so expounded as to expunge that doctrine out of them.

So far as I know myself, I have above given the points and the arguments of the objectors with complete fairness and sufficient fulness. I have set them in the strongest light which their assertors could throw around them. I do not believe that the impartial reader can find any treatise advocating

Socinianism, or the new theology, which makes as plausible a showing as I have now made for them. Does the array appear formidable? Yet if the reader will follow me faithfully, he will convince himself that these seeming bulwarks are built not of stone, but of fog. They owe their seeming strength to half truths, false analogies, and defective analyses of elements.

Now, reader, *audi alteram partem*, "A man seemeth right in his own cause until his neighbor cometh and searcheth him."