

## ON THE ATONEMENT.

By W. E. DAVIDSON, SANTIAGO, CHILE.

“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,” in David’s lips was hardly true. But his moral instinct taught him that it must be true if God were to forgive him. Only the wronged party might forgive a wrong. If Bathsheba had been sinned against, and Uriah, if David’s own family had been insulted and his kingdom scandalized, God was not the one to forgive the offense. But intuition taught him that the One who forgave him must be God. So he boldly denied that he had wronged any man, affirming that God was the only party injured. He concentrated against God the whole volume of his offense. This shift was not a mere judicial device, but David felt its truth with his whole being. From the beginning of the Psalm (51) to the end, the sin that has befouled him is one between himself and God alone, and it is one that only God can purge away.

### I.

David removed his case from the realm of the judicial to that of the personal. This made mercy possible. Leniency in God as Judge between men would be injustice to the oppressed, but mercy in God as a private Person extended to another for a personal offense would be praiseworthy generosity. There is but one hint of the judicial in the Psalm (v 4), and that is used to bring the Judge down from the bench to treat with the suppliant as man to man, free from the trammels of court requirements. Everywhere else God is appealed to as to a merciful individual for forgiveness or as to a priest for cleansing.

### II.

By what logic did David make God his only victim, and refuse to deal with Him as judge? It was not by

logic, for revelation had not yet brought to light the ground for it. But there had been planted in his conscience the truth that God is free to forgive and that He forgives on a personal rather than judicial basis. Time would bring to light what was to make it possible for God to be both the justifier of the criminal and just to his victims.

### III.

A prisoner was charged with having assaulted several persons, severely wounding one of them, an elderly gentleman. He made various pleas for mercy: that he had been intoxicated and scarcely remembered having done the things charged against him, and that he should be dismissed as not responsible.

That in general he was a law-abiding citizen and a few offenses should be overlooked.

That a few days before he had given a quarter to a blind beggar, and this act of piety should weigh heavily in his favor.

That he was a poor man and had suffered much, and that this ought to satisfy the court.

When none of these pleas was heard, he besought the mercy of the court for mercy’s sake. But the judge said that to extend him mercy would be to fail to give justice to his victims.

Then the prisoner noticed that the judge had his head heavily bandaged, and to his consternation he recognized him as the elderly gentleman he had assaulted, his chief victim.

The judge stepped down from his bench, moved behind the bar to the prisoner’s side, and said, “As judge I could give you only justice, but as your fellow, I can forgive you for having battered up my head.”

## IV.

The Son of God in the days of his flesh transformed himself from Judge of men to man's chief victim. All the crimes men commit against one another they commit against Him. If it were not so, He could deal with us only as our judge, meting strict justice. The wrongs Christ endured at our hands rendered it possible for Him to deal with each man as an offender against himself. Our sins have struck Him so much more heavily than others that their wrongs are nothing beside His. There were our other victims, but He is so much greater a sufferer than they that He becomes our only victim.

The atonement was the means as yet unknown by which David's intuition became true: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned . . . that thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." The atonement was the *desideratum* that should remove our case from the realm of the judicial into that of the personal.

## V.

I offer this not as a new theory of the atonement, nor as a substitute for any theory. For all the theories together do not exhaust the significance of the atonement. I offer it as supplemental to them all, and particularly as supplemental to the substitutionary theory. That theory becomes even more meaningful if the substitute who should satisfy for us is the Judge himself, and if the victim *for* our sins is also the victim *of* our sins. This last truth is prefigured in the Jewish sacrifice by the fact that the sin-offering was slain not by the priest but by the offerer, the sinner himself.

## THE LOST TEN TRIBES OF ISRAEL.

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Every once in a while an author, as unfamiliar with the simple facts of history as the reading public is with his name, produces a book—or a cheap newspaper, short of copy, publishes an article professing to solve the question of what became of the "lost ten tribes of Israel." Few races have escaped identification with the mysterious "lost tribes"—the Anglo-Saxons, the American Indians, the Japanese, and the rest of them. The chief among many difficulties in the way of accepting any of these theories is that the assumption that ten ten tribes were ever lost at all is, like the report of Mark Twain's death, "greatly exaggerated." Few facts of ancient history are more easily explicable than the destiny of the wayward and unfortunate Northern Kingdom.

It should be remembered, in the first place, that tribal lines before the fall of Samaria were not strictly observed. Through intermarriage and other forms of interrelation, as well as through the indifference of many to the preservation of their family records and traditions, the nation as a whole continually approached homogeneity. The tribal divisions were rather geographical than genealogical. It is equally clear that the rigid opposition to intermarriage with the neighboring Shemitic tribes, and even with non-Shemitic peoples, was not widely prevalent before the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, either in Israel or in Judah. Moses is represented as having two wives, one a Midianite, the other an Egyptian. There is no suggestion of surprise or censure caused by the marriage of the sons of Elimelek nor by that of Boaz, a prominent citizen, to Moabite women—if indeed the book of Ruth is not a part of a polemic literature that arose out of the later puritanic prohibition of foreign marriages. David himself did not scruple to wed the