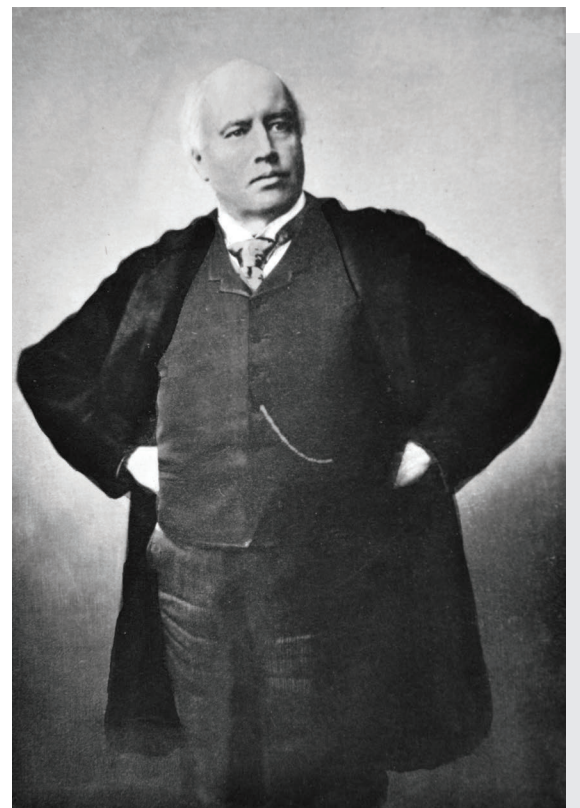


THE IMMORALITY OF ATONEMENT

THE IDEA THAT GOD WANTS BLOOD

[Underlining and bracketed supplied]

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL — 1861



According to the prevailing Christian belief, the Christian religion rests upon the doctrine of the atonement. If this doctrine is without foundation, if it is repugnant to justice and mercy, the fabric falls. [As St. Paul said of the Resurrection, so with Atonement, if it did not happen “your faith is in vain.”]

We are told that the first man committed a crime for which all his posterity are responsible—in other words, that we are accountable, and can be justly punished for a sin we never in fact committed. This absurdity was the father of another, namely, that a man can be rewarded for a good action done by another.

God, according to the modern theologians, made a law, with the penalty of eternal death for its infraction. All men, they say, have broken that law. In the economy of heaven, this law had to be vindicated. This could be done by damning the whole human race. [Bear in mind, God means the Trinity: Father-Jesus-Holy Spirit yet ONE.]

Through what is known as the atonement, the salvation of a few was made possible. [The theologians] insist that the law demanded the extreme penalty, that justice called for its victims, and that even mercy ceased to plead. Under these circumstances, God, by allowing [Jesus] to suffer, satisfactorily settled with the law, and allowed a few of the guilty to escape. The law was satisfied with this arrangement.

To carry out this scheme, God was born as a babe into this world. “He grew in stature and increased in knowledge.” At the age of thirty-three, after having lived a life filled with kindness, charity and nobility, after having practiced every virtue, he was sacrificed as an atonement for man. It is claimed that he actually took our place, and bore our sins and our guilt; that in this way the justice of God was satisfied, and that the blood of Christ was an atonement, an expiation, for the sins of all who might believe on him.

Under the Jewish law, there was no remission of sin except through the shedding of blood. If a man committed certain sins, he must bring to the priest a lamb, a bullock, a goat, or a pair of turtle-doves. The priest would lay his hands upon the animal, and the sin of the man would be transferred. Then the animal would be killed in the place of the real sinner, and the blood thus shed and sprinkled upon the altar would be an atonement. In this way Jehovah was satisfied.

The greater the crime, the greater the sacrifice—the more blood, the greater the atonement. There was always a certain ratio between the value of the animal and the enormity of the sin. The most minute directions were given about the killing of these animals, and about the sprinkling of their blood. Every priest became a butcher, and every sanctuary a slaughter-house.

Nothing could be more utterly shocking to a refined and loving soul. Nothing could have been better calculated to harden the heart than this continual shedding of innocent blood. This terrible system is supposed to have culminated in the sacrifice of Christ. His blood took the place of all other. It is necessary to shed no more. The law at last is satisfied, satiated,

surfeited. The idea that God wants blood is at the bottom of the atonement, and rests upon the most fearful savagery. How can sin be transferred from men to animals, and how can the shedding of the blood of animals atone for the sins of men?

The church says that the sinner is in debt to God, and that the obligation is discharged by the Savior. The best that can possibly be said of such a transaction is, that the debt is transferred, not paid. The truth is, that a sinner is in debt to the person he has injured. If a man injures his neighbor, it is not enough for him to get the forgiveness of God, but he must have the forgiveness of his neighbor. If a man puts his hand in the fire and God forgives him, his hand will smart exactly the same. You must, after all, reap what you sow. No god can give you wheat when you sow tares, and no devil can give you tares when you sow wheat.

There are in nature neither rewards nor punishments—there are consequences. The life of Christ is worth its example, its moral force, its heroism of benevolence. To make innocence suffer is the greatest sin; how then is it possible to make the suffering of the innocent a justification for the criminal?

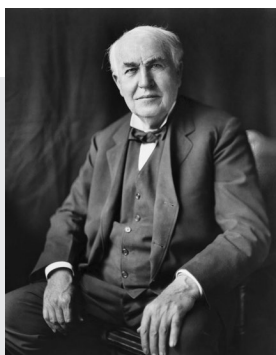
Why should a man be willing to let the innocent suffer for him? Does not the willingness show that he is utterly unworthy of the sacrifice?

Certainly, no man would be fit for heaven who would consent that an innocent person should suffer for his sin. What would we think of a man who would allow another to die for a crime that he himself had committed?

WHAT WOULD WE THINK OF A LAW THAT ALLOWED THE INNOCENT TO TAKE THE PLACE OF THE GUILTY?

IS IT POSSIBLE TO VINDICATE A JUST LAW BY INFLECTING PUNISHMENT ON THE INNOCENT?

WOULD NOT THAT BE A SECOND VIOLATION INSTEAD OF A VINDICATION?



[He] had all the attributes of a perfect man, and, in my opinion, no finer personality ever existed.

– THOMAS EDISON

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