

# Original Sin

THE DEFENCE OF AN UNPOPULAR DOCTRINE.

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(Continued from the July number.)

## III

**I**NEXTRICABLY associated with the doctrine of Original Sin is that of the Fall. Now the lower his original status is presumed to be, the shorter the distance the First Man had to fall. Hence some evolutionistic theologians do their best to represent the Adam of the Garden as something not too far above the level of the brutes. The idea, apparently, is to hunt with the Darwinian hounds and at the same time to enable the Genesis hare to get away without too much loss of fur. To change the figure, let us see what success they have in their attempts to save something from the wreck of Eden.

The view of Augustine, called by Emil Brunner "the classical doctrine," regarded Adam "as a mature, highly developed being, with a soul endowed with original righteousness, endowed with the *liberum arbitrium* (free choice), a perfect creature." We are told that natural science has destroyed this picture. But the Bible is not responsible for the pictorial flights of St. Augustine.

Dr. Hitchcock reminds us that Irenæus described Adam as *nēpios infans*,<sup>1</sup> regarding him as "in a child-like, undeveloped condition"; that Clement of Alexandria said that "he was not made perfect in respect of his constitution, but in a fit condition to receive virtue"; and that Adam is nowhere represented as perfect in canonical or patristic writings. This is certainly nearer the truth of Scripture than is the Augustinian doctrine. We shall see presently that Adam was hardly child-like as we understand the term.

<sup>1</sup>*nēpios* is the word used in Gal. iv. 1-5 of the child under age, not yet enjoying the status of a "son"—not "on his own," but in the tutelage of guardians "appointed of the father."

But "perfect" in the Scriptural sense of "mature," "of full spiritual growth" (*teleios*) he certainly was not; nor had he, strictly, "original righteousness." We cannot regard as "perfect" or "righteous" an untried being, a being to whom good and evil are terms of no significance. He is rather "innocent" than righteous, like a child before the age of responsibility. At the same time, having been created by God "upright" (Eccl. vii. 29) and "very good" (Gen. i. 31), and therefore destitute of all bias towards evil, he differed to that extent from every "child" that has lived since then. But he has the *liberum arbitrium*, the free choice postulated by Augustine, upon which, indeed, the story of the Temptation hinges.

"It is clear," says Dr. N. P. Williams, "that the physical and mental state of the first man is not conceived as being very far exalted above that of the beasts."

To most readers of the first two chapters of Genesis this will seem anything but "clear." It may seem even less "clear" when they learn that it is based on the story of the animals being brought to Adam to be named (Gen. ii. 19). True, Dr. Williams omits to mention that that was the purpose of the gathering. Instead, he states that "the sole object of the creation of the animals, according to the Yahwistic narrative" (but might not E or P or some ingenious combination of E or P with R, or possibly R<sub>1</sub> or R<sub>2</sub>, furnish an equally reliable source?) was to provide Adam with a suitable companion. The fantastic suggestion seems to be that the beasts did not look so different from Adam and that one of them might have "done." "The various existing species of brutes," says Dr. Williams, "represent so many unsuccessful experiments made to this end by the Creator." But Adam was apparently hard to please. It was as if a man wanting a pair of shoes had been shown by his bootmaker a large assortment of hats and fancy goods, and after trying to adapt them to his feet had insisted on a pair made on his own last. Dr. Williams's Yahweh must have been the most incompetent demiurge ever dreamed of in the wildest mythology. He even brought the "fowls of the air" (v. 19) if haply Adam might find a likely consort among them.

But let us consider seriously what Genesis tells us about Adam's status. What he was like physically, we are not

told; we are merely told that God created him a man. Concerning his mental and moral status we are entitled to make several inferences. He was made "in the image of God"—an expression which, taken in conjunction with the incidents of the story, must connote (whatever else may be implied) the capacity of the man to hold converse with his Maker. This surely is an indication of a mental status far above the highest of the beasts.

He was put in charge of a large and beautiful garden, "to dress it and to keep it." This surely implies a status far above that of the most intelligent of the anthropoid apes. That the animals were brought to Adam to be named, implies in him an intelligent insight into the habits, powers and uses of the various species, which enabled him to give them appropriate names. The use of appropriate language, of course, presupposes the faculty of speech.

Adam, then, was made by God "very good"—of good understanding, endowed with the faculties of speech and language, untainted by evil, unbiassed towards sin, able to commune with God, but indiscriminative of good and evil—a being of high excellence in an order not the highest.

All this clearly lifts the Adam of the Bible immeasurably above the beasts and reveals the gulf that yawns between him and that Adam of the evolutionists after which these theologians would seem to hanker.

The modernizing views of the Fall and of Original Sin have plainly been formed under the influence not of a closer study of the Bible, but of the teaching of evolution. No philosophical theory has done so much to disintegrate the Christian faith as the doctrine of the evolution of man from the lower animals. The doctrine of sin, under its onslaught, is the first to suffer, and is in danger of an almost complete eclipse. Oliver Wendell Holmes, for example, a theist and a religious man in his way, inferred from Darwin's theories that man's responsibility and consequently man's sin had greatly shrunk from what they had been thought to be. "Original" sin, in particular, has disappeared altogether, camouflaged as the survival of animal propensities.

There is, however, another reason than the pseudo-scientific for the revolt against "original sin." It is thus expounded by Dr. Hitchcock: "This doctrine has weakened the sense of responsibility for sins we have actually

committed. For if the evil that is in us can be even partially traced back to some universal moral catastrophe, moral evil, which is thus attributed to an inherited bias, is extenuated."

Dr. N. P. Williams (*op. cit.*) writes: "The hypothesis of an inbred tendency to sin, with the element of qualified determinism which it must always involve, would have been profoundly uncongenial to them (the great prophets) as apparently offering an easy excuse for continuance in evil-doing to the indolent and the hypocritical."

Dr. Simpson (*Fact and Faith*) speaks of original sin as a condition which "robs those acts that are dependent upon it of a portion of their spontaneity and therefore of their full right to be regarded as sins," though he allows that Christian theology has always refused to regard "original sin" as a mitigation of personal guilt.

The contention, in short, is that the doctrine of original sin tends to deprive man of responsibility by determining his actions. It may be doubted whether any man with an awakened conscience, like David when he wrote the 51st Psalm, ever felt that the sinful bias of which, like David, he was conscious excused the sinful act. It may be doubted whether such an one ever attributed the "moral evil" of his conduct to "an inherited bias" or a "universal moral catastrophe" or considered that his evil acts had lacked anything of "spontaneity."

That "the indolent and the hypocritical" and other unconscientious people have often pleaded the original infection of their nature as an excuse for wrongdoing is doubtless true. In ignorance of theological doctrines, they have often pleaded their inherited nature as an excuse for their personal acts.

But can we regard such an excuse as valid? A bias towards evil in our nature provides a test of our virtue. It may not be the only test, but it is a test. Is a man entitled to bar any test of his virtue?

Man, biologically, is exposed to two influences—heredity and environment. If he may bar heredity, may he not equally bar environment? May he not plead that the "moral evil" of his conduct is due to the pressure and bias exerted by an unfavourable environment? May he not claim that an evil environment for which he is not

responsible has robbed his wrong acts "of a portion of their spontaneity?"

As a matter of fact, that is precisely what men are doing every day. They are not only asking, "How can I do right with the handicap of a sinful nature?" but they are asking, "How can I do right when so much in my environment is hostile to the right?" "How can I do right in an office or a workshop where the atmosphere is charged with profanity and obscenity?" "How can I do right when I live in a slum?" And so on, and so forth.

Adam's position was different from ours in that he started without any "original sin," without any bias towards evil. But he became in his fall the father of a race, the members of which were bound to him and to one another by ties that are expressed both in heredity and environment and that make up what we call the solidarity of the race. Dr. Hitchcock seems to admit this when he says, "The human race being one organism there is a racial evil in which the race as a whole is involved and in the effects or liabilities of which it shares." And he adds: "The solidarity of man in sin seems to be the contradiction of personal responsibility."

Our position, then, is different from Adam's at the time of his fall, in that he was an unrelated individual, whereas we are members of a race, inheriting, along with all manner of physical, mental and temperamental tendencies and aptitudes, the testing handicap of a sinful bias. It is the height of ineptitude to quarrel with the constitution of nature. When Margaret Fuller announced, with strange lack of humour, her intention to "accept the universe," Carlyle said, drily, "'Gad, she'd better." Heredity is there, and we must "accept" it. The principle was familiar to those of old who said that "the fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children's teeth are set on edge."

The fact that the greater prophets, whom Dr. N. P. Williams quotes, laid "insistence upon individual freedom and responsibility" in such sayings as "In those days they shall say no more 'The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge,' but . . . 'every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge'" (Jer. xxxi. 29), does by no means disprove the saying that the children's teeth are set on edge by the action of their

fathers—does by no means prove that the prophets themselves denied the truth of the saying.

The Jews of Jeremiah's day were doing what the carnal of all times have done and are doing—seeking a shelter for their carnality in inherited predispositions, the grapes that their fathers had eaten. The scourge of the prophets fell upon them, reminding them with imperious force of the twin truth that the carnal were themselves eating sour grapes and setting their own teeth on edge.

#### IV

The reconciliation of the solidarity of the race with the full responsibility of the individual is an old problem which is ever with us ; but it is a problem that certainly cannot be solved by getting rid of original sin. Paul teaches individual responsibility with unsurpassed directness and power. He also teaches, as we are about to show, our moral solidarity in the sin and death of the First Adam, and not only, in Dr. Hitchcock's words, " our moral solidarity in the righteousness and life of Jesus Christ."

One last word before passing on to the direct witness of Holy Scripture. The apostle speaks of those " who had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression," meaning those who, not having received a formal and explicit law, could not be regarded as law-breakers. But Adam's sin was in another respect unique and even miraculous—in that, having a sinless nature, a nature unbiassed towards evil, he embraced the evil when it presented itself. To reject Original Sin means that that miracle must be repeated in every son and daughter of Adam to remotest time. From such a multiplication of miracle the reason revolts.

*The Witness of Scripture.* What is the Biblical evidence of the doctrine of Original Sin ?

Dr. Hitchcock says : " The Scriptural warrant at present of the ecclesiastical doctrine seems to be an erroneous rendering of two Greek words."<sup>1</sup> But this is to underestimate very gravely the Scriptural warrant.

That the Old Testament contains no direct reference to the story of the Fall is the old argument, always precarious,

<sup>1</sup> The reference is to the words *eph' hōi* in Rom. v. 12, correctly translated (A.V. and R.V.) " for that " : mistranslated (margin) " in whom."

from silence. It might similarly be argued that the Jews had no knowledge of Adam himself, because he is not referred to at all after the early chapters of Genesis (except in the doubtful instance of Job xxxi. 33). But if the Old Testament makes no reference to the Fall, it certainly refers several times to that "fallenness" which implies a Fall.

"Who," asks Job (xiv. 4), "can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" So defiled, through and through, is the nature of man that a clean thing cannot be got from it. Again (xv. 14, 15), "What is man that he should be clean? And he which is born of a woman that he should be righteous? . . . The heavens are not clean in his sight." And again (xxv. 4), "How can he be clean that is born of a woman?" Jeremiah, too, says (xvii. 9) that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked."<sup>1</sup>

Of Psalm li. we have already spoken.

The often-quoted passage from the second book of Esdras does not carry canonical authority, but it points to the prevalence of the belief amongst the Jews that sin is an hereditary transmission from Adam. "A grain of evil seed was sown in the heart of Adam from the beginning, and how much wickedness hath it brought forth unto this time!"

Allusions of this sort are all that we should have any right to expect from the Old Testament. Only after the coming of the Second Adam can we look for a formulated doctrine to show that, as the sin of the race is related to the disobedience of the First Adam, so the redemption of the race from that sin is related to the obedience of the Second Adam.

Dr. Hitchcock asserts that the New Testament does not teach the Fall of Man, and makes play with the fact that St. Paul speaks of a "fall" of the Jews but not of a fall of Eve, whose sin is called a "transgression." But how does this benefit Dr. Hitchcock? If a thing is there, what matter about the name? A fall by any other name will bring a man with just as unpleasant a bump to the bottom. We are wont, quite rightly, to characterize the change from a state of

<sup>1</sup> Dr. N. P. Williams's note on this is curiously unconvincing. He says the verse "does not affirm a radical evil in human nature; it is merely a practical aphorism." Not a radical evil?

innocence to a state of sin as a "fall." And where the state of sin becomes the fixed inheritance of the race, we may well call it the Fall of Man.

That there was such a Fall is the clear—one might almost say, the express—teaching of St. Paul, both in Rom. v. 12-21 and in 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22. The teaching of the second half of Rom. v. is easy as to its main gist, but (largely owing to defective translation from a somewhat obscure original) difficult in its details. This passage teaches quite unequivocally that death came into the world through sin (v. 12, "by one man sin entered into the world, and *death by sin*"). But in vv. 15 and 17 it is stated that "through the offence of one many be dead" ("the many died," R.V.) and that "by one man's offence death reigned by one" ("through the one," R.V.). Death being due to sin, it is clearly implied that "the many" have themselves become infected with sin. As this is through the offence of one, the argument is complete—"the many" have derived their infection of sin from "the one." But it is not only implied that "the many" have been thus infected; it is categorically asserted that "all have sinned" (v. 12).

Let us look particularly at the 12th verse. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon ("unto" R.V.) all men, for that (*i.e.*, on the ground that) all have sinned."<sup>1</sup> The verbs translated "entered into" and "passed unto" are the same except for the prepositions that enter into their composition. "Sin *came into* the world by one man, and death [*came into* the world] through the sin, and so death *came across* to all men." But should a man die for the transgression of another? No, and lest any should think so, the apostle adds "for that all have sinned." If they die, they die for their own transgression.

But what of the words "and so" and the preposition "across"? These words, taken together with the assertion that "all have sinned," show that *sin* "came across" from

<sup>1</sup> "For that . . ." is undoubtedly the correct translation. The marginal reading "in whom," *i.e.*, in Adam [all sinned], on which Augustine is said to have based his doctrine that men were reckoned as having sinned in Adam ("imputed guilt"), cannot be admitted. Dr. Bicknell thinks that "there is little doubt that the words 'in Adam' are to be supplied in thought after 'for all have sinned.'" Our argument shows that such a gloss is destructive of St. Paul's meaning.

Adam to "all men" as well as death, indeed as causing death.

The case is perhaps made even stronger by the fact that "*condemnation*" is substituted for "death" in vv. 16 and 18. This effectually counters those who would allege that Adam's sin merely brought physical death. The death is evidently spiritual death, which is alienation from the life of God.

The clinching text of Rom. v. is v. 19, "By one man's disobedience the many were made sinners." How could the many be made sinners by Adam's sin otherwise than by the transmission of a sinful nature?

I Cor. xv. 22 teaches the same lesson (in a different connection) in the brief statement that "in Adam all die." In the light of Rom. v. this clearly means that in Adam all men become infected with a sinful nature in virtue of which they themselves sin and so incur death.

Paul's teaching is thus not doubtful, and Dr. N. P. Williams, though he does not give his consent to it, candidly admits that the apostle conceived of Adam's transgression as standing in a causal relation to the subsequent death, sin, and condemnation of his descendants. "If, then, death and sin are inseparable associates (as is implied all through vv. 12-14), the Apostle must have held that sin also—in the vague sense of inherent sinfulness or propensity towards evil—is hereditarily transmitted."

We conclude, then, that behind the lines of the clear teaching of Holy Scripture, as well as of the witness of human experience, the doctrine of Original Sin is impregably entrenched.

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