

of hatred and obloquy—as to render a direct assistance to the emancipation of the human soul in the days wherein his lot was cast.

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ADAM'S GOSPEL.

GENESIS iii. 14, 15.

IN his Epistle to the Galatians (Chap. iii. 17) St. Paul argues that the Gospel is older, as well as better, than the Law; and that the law, “which came four hundred and thirty years after,” could not disannul the gospel given to Abraham, or make “the promise of none effect.” Had he been arguing with Gentiles instead of Jews, he might have contended that the Gospel was more than sixteen hundred years older than the Law, and that the promise given to Adam could not be disannulled by a law which came sixteen centuries after it.

We had some trouble to discover what Abraham's Gospel was;<sup>1</sup> but it will cost us no trouble to discover the Gospel given to Adam. *That* was long since determined for us. There has never been any doubt or question about it. With one consent the Church, whether speaking by the early Fathers or the most modern [of Divines, proclaims the two verses now before us to be the first Evangel, the first Gospel given to man.

The difficulty, here, lies in determining—not what the Gospel is, but—what it means, what it conveyed to Adam and what it should convey to us. For no passage in the Old Testament has been more frequently, or more variously, handled; as, indeed, was quite inevitable, since few passages legitimately convey more and larger meanings. Only two interpretations seem to be wholly inadmissible: (1) that which reduces it to a nature-myth, invented to account

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. vi. of *THE EXPOSITOR* (New Series), pp. 98 ff.

for the instinctive repulsion of man from the serpent; and (2) that which finds in "the seed of the woman" so clear and distinct an indication of the Son of Man as enabled Adam to foresee Him and the work He came to do. The first of these is an impertinence; the second, an anachronism. But between these wide limits I know of no interpretation of the passage which may not be reasonably drawn from it by those who set themselves to exhaust all that it contains and implies.

To say that his Gospel enabled Adam to look through the ages and behold the conquest of the serpent by the Son of Man, is plainly an anachronism and something more; for it is to affirm that he saw what our Lord Himself declares that "kings and prophets," who lived long after Adam, desired, but were not able to see. To say that his Gospel is simply a nature-myth, invented to explain man's instinctive abhorrence of the serpent, is plainly an insult both to reason and to Scripture. For throughout the East—by virtue of an emotion with which even we of the West can sympathize, by an instinctive symbolism which even we can apprehend—the sinuous and poisonous serpent is, and always has been, a recognized emblem of the evil principle or power. How should it not be when, in India alone, more men are slain by the serpent every year than by all the carnivora put together? This emblematic use of the serpent was familiar to the Jews, who called the evil one *hannachash hakkadmoni*, "the old serpent." It is sanctioned by Holy Writ, where we read (Wisdom ii. 24), "By the envy of *the devil*, death entered into the world;" where our Lord Himself (John viii. 44) affirms that "the devil was a murderer *from the beginning*;" while the Apocalypse expressly identifies the two in the phrase twice used (Rev. xii. 9, xx. 2), "*the old serpent which is the devil and Satan.*"

No doubt we may honestly take the narrative of the Fall in the Book of Genesis in various ways. We may hold it to

be a sober chronicle of the act by which the first man fell from his first estate ; or we may take it as a philosophic myth intended to account for the complex moral condition of the human race ; or we may regard it as a parable of the mode in which all men fall away from their original innocence, by permitting the lower appetites and desires of their nature to override its higher dictates and affections. There is much to be said for each of these views—so much that each of them has taken root in good and honest hearts. But, take it how we will, we *must* take it as charged with a moral and religious intention ; the serpent must be something more than a serpent ; the narrative must, in some form, convey the story of a mortal struggle between the powers of good and evil in the soul of man. Neither reason nor Scripture will suffer us to see less in it than this ; while, if we see in it so much as this, it matters comparatively little what else we fail to see in it.

I. If, then, we assume that there had been such a strife in the soul of Adam, and that, for a time at least, the serpent in him had conquered the man, the animal life had mastered his proper human life, that the evil in him had overcome the good, we can see at once how the doom passed on the serpent became a veritable gospel to him, good news of great joy ; and not to him alone, but to all who should come after him. For taken at its lowest, in its simplest form, this doom prophesied the degradation of the serpent—“on thy belly shalt thou go ;” his defeat—“thou shalt lick the dust ;” and his defeat by the very race which he had just overthrown—the woman’s seed shall “bruise thy head,” the very seat of life and power. That is to say, if, as we are bound to do, we take the serpent as an emblem of the principle of evil, then the final and utter overthrow of evil was foretold in the very hour of its apparent victory. That old serpent, the devil, may have assumed, despite his subtlety, that, once conquered, men would prove his faithful

servants, his close and attached allies. If he did, he had deceived himself. By the grace of God—for it is God who is to “put enmity” between the woman’s seed and the serpent’s seed—the forces of goodness were to be so revived and invigorated in man’s soul that there was to be a constant antagonism between the two, a constant and un-sparing war, renewed generation after generation, in which indeed the human race might take as well as give many wounds, but of which the issue was never to be doubtful for a moment; the heel, often bitten, and because it was bitten, was at last to stamp out the life from the serpent’s head.

The first, simplest, and largest meaning of these words is, therefore, that the seed of the woman, *i.e.* the human race as a whole, so far from succumbing to, is to overthrow evil and its brood,—is to conquer its secular spiritual enemy. And we arrive at this meaning, so far as I can see, without putting any force upon the words, by merely taking them as we may well believe Adam himself to have taken them. I have endeavoured not to import any modern sense, any theological intention, into them, but to read them in their first intention, in their obvious and original sense. But, taken even in this sense, they yield us this great promise, this divine hope (a hope which has been too much lost sight of in endless wearisome discussions of the mere form of the sacred narrative); that in the everlasting purpose and love of God, the evil that is in the world, and which often looks so inveterate and invincible, is not to overcome in the end, but, after long painful strife, is to be overcome of good.

To Adam, trembling under the burden of his sin, apprehending an eternal loss and shame, as he well might if he and his children after him were to live under the anger of God, there came this gracious promise, that his defeat was not irreversible, that it was to be reversed; that, though the conflict with the forces of evil might be long and sore, it was to issue in a final and complete triumph.

And was not that a veritable gospel to him? a gospel which even *he* could apprehend? a gospel exquisitely adapted to his position and needs? a gospel on which he could rest, in which he could rejoice?

Nay, is it not a veritable gospel to us also, that on the first page of the Bible, the first leaf of the human story—a page else so dark and threatening—this great promise, this comforting and sustaining hope, should be inscribed? When we once comprehend it, if only we believe that, in some form, this prophecy of the victory of good over evil was conveyed to man at the very outset of his chequered career, is it not as if once more the Spirit of God had moved upon the face of the primal darkness, saying, “Let there be light,” and, by that mighty word, had turned the darkness into light?

It is at a heavy cost that we ever lose hold, even if we do not also lose sight, of this ancient gospel, this primitive evangel. *We* fall as *Adam* fell, falling again and again. *We* suffer the baser passions, the animal appetites and lusts, in us to override the promptings and aspirations of our better part. The sting and poison of sin enters into and inflames the soul. We are appalled by the subtlety with which it turns our very gifts and virtues against us, the mysterious energy with which, even when it has been subdued, it renews its force within us. We are the more appalled as we consider our fellows, and mark the same mysterious and ever-renewed conflict in them, issuing too often in the same disastrous result—as we look out into the world and see everywhere around us the tokens of a misery and a defeat like our own. Our fear verges on despair when Theology, with its thin stern lips, instead of comforting us with the succours of charity, or animating us with the hope of victory, and the promise that, if we faint not, the serpent's head shall one day be under our heel, dooms us, or the vast majority of us, to a hopeless strife and an everlasting perdi-

tion. And all because we forget the gospel given to Adam, *i.e. to man*, which no word or law coming after, whether from God or man, can disannul! We could not thus tremble and despair did we but carry in our hearts this sure word of prophecy—that the whole seed of the woman is to triumph over the whole seed of the serpent. Did we but cherish this ancient and confirmed hope, instead of sighing with Job, “Man, born of woman, is of few days and full of trouble,” we should rather sing, “Man, born of woman, is of an endless life; and though he may have much trouble in the flesh, nevertheless walks and strives in the light of an assured victory.”

For, to us at least, not the least valuable part of this ancient Gospel is the clause which affirms that the serpent shall bite or bruise man's heel. It is of immense value to us, because it accounts for the fact by which most of all we are perplexed, and on which we sometimes brood till hope well nigh gives place to despair. It shews that He who promised the ultimate triumph of good in the soul of man was not unaware of, and did not overlook, the long strife with evil in which we find ourselves engaged, the wounds we should receive in it, the weakness and pain and misery it would breed in us and in all men. In Adam's Gospel there is none of that shallow optimism which sees only that which is good in human destiny, because it wilfully closes its eyes on all that is evil in the human lot, and babbles worthless prophecies of hope only because it refuses to recognize the darker phases of human life. On the contrary, it fully recognizes the evil element in man, the corruption of his nature, the disorder of his faculties, the strife to which this disorder dooms him, the subtle burning poison by which his whole frame is infected, the pain and degradation and misery which result from his too frequent subordination of spirit to sense, of duty to pleasure, of conscience to convenience, of the man in him to the beast in him. It

shirks nothing and omits nothing. It holds full in view all the sordid and painful facts of human nature and experience which often move us to fear and hopelessness. And, with all these in view, it nevertheless predicts the ultimate and perfect victory of good over evil—the destruction of all that is evil, the universal rule and triumph of that which is good. And thus it comes to us with an irresistible force, and possesses an unspeakable value. If it simply promised victory, and said nothing about the strife, we might distrust it. But since it insists on the long and cruel warfare, from the wounds of which we are even now smarting, and only promises us victory when that warfare shall be accomplished, it brings its own credentials with it. It tells us what we know to be true, and so encourages us to listen and believe when it speaks of what we do not know as yet. If we accept it as in any sense a word from God, it cannot fail to impress itself upon us as good news of great joy for us and for all people. And hence it will be well for us, so often as we are tempted to doubt the final victory of good because of the present prevalence of evil, because of its strange vitality in our own hearts, or because of the helpless misery to which it has reduced many of our fellows, to recall this Gospel, which, while it predicts that evil shall long bite the heel of man and inject its poison into his very blood, also predicts that man shall at last crush evil in the very seat and fountain of its power.

II. This I take to be the original meaning of the words before us, the meaning in which Adam himself would be able to read them; and I do not see how any man can read them fairly without finding so much as this in them, or how, taking them even in this primitive sense, he can fail to gather courage from them and a great hope both for himself and for the world at large.

But even of those who gladly take them in this sense some may say: "*The end* is still very far off. Must we

wait till then for any fulfilment of this ancient promise? Is there no other meaning in it; no nearer hope?" And happily we can reply, There are other meanings in it; there is a nearer hope, and St. Paul shall guide us to it. Writing to the Roman Christians of his day (Rom. xvi. 20) he took leave of them with this promise: "The God of Peace shall bruise Satan under your feet *shortly*." And whatever may have been the first and special intention of his promise, there is no doubt that it implies a great general truth such as we are now inquiring for, and which our own experience confirms. This truth is that wherever we find a good man, or a company of good men like that at Rome, engaged, as all good men are, in an open warfare with evil, there we may find a partial fulfilment of the promise made to Adam, and *see* good triumphing over evil. Do we not all know such men—men really and genuinely good, in whom all taints of nature, all defects of will, all vices of the blood, are being gradually subdued; to whom all temptations to evil are losing their power; who are daily growing in wisdom, in right living, in sweetness and purity of nature, so that we long to be like them and to share their peace? Talk with them, indeed, and they will still lament the undetected and unsubdued evils of their nature, still condemn themselves as unprofitable servants, still mourn that they are so far from all perfection. But whatever the estimate they may put on themselves, and however just it may be, you no more expect them to speak an untrue word, or to see them do an unjust or unkindly deed, than you expect to see the sun turn to darkness or the moon to blood. No doubt the strife is still going on within them; but none the less you feel that in them the victory is already won in part; that in the end it is assured, at least for them; and you would be as much amazed as grieved were they to fall away from the grace they have attained.

Such as they are, such in some measure are all true

members of the Christian Church. I do not say that such are all the members of our several Churches ; for not even in the judgment of charity can all who are enrolled in our several ecclesiastical organizations be deemed men who walk after the spirit and not after the senses, who put duty before pleasure, truth before prejudice, righteousness before success, and the praise of God before the praise of men. But there are such men in all the Churches, and outside them all ; good men, who honestly prefer truth, right-doing, and charity to all the lures and temptations of the flesh, the world, and the devil ; and these constitute the one Catholic Church of God throughout all the world. In these, then, and we all know some of them, there is a *present* victory of goodness, albeit the strife with evil still goes on within them ; and in their victory we may share.

We need not, therefore, strain forward to "the end," to the ultimate and universal triumph, which may be ages and æons off yet, though it is much to know that, even in the end, evil is to be overcome of good. We may see triumphs of goodness around us—only partial as yet, it may be, but nevertheless real triumphs, triumphs so real and so great that we have no doubt what the final issue will be. And on these we may stay our hearts when our hearts grow faint within us, because *our* strife with evil is so painful and the victory still seems so dubious or distant. If men of like passions with ourselves, of the same nature and the same temptations, beset by the same foes, betrayed by the same infirmities, depressed by the same fears, have won what we confess to be a virtual triumph over the forces of evil, and hold the head of the serpent under their heel, the promise which has been fulfilled in them may also be fulfilled in us. We have the same Gospel in which to hope, the same Grace on which to lean ; and if we are sincerely striving against sin, we have the selfsame assurance of victory, whether in this life or in that which is to come.

III. But even if both the final complete victory and the present partial but growing victory of good over evil should fail to reassure us, there is still hope for us. Even the demand for *a complete* victory over evil in this present world has been met—met once for all. There is still another meaning in Adam's Gospel, and a meaning which meets our most exorbitant demand. For if this promise is true of all men, of the whole seed of the woman, of humanity at large, must it not be true of the Son of Man? If it be true of the whole Church, must it not also be true of the Founder and Head of the Church? It may be, and is, a mere anachronism to say that in the Woman's seed Adam recognized Jesus the Christ. But may not *we* see, after the event, what *he* could not see before the event? Must we not admit that the promise of Adam's Gospel was fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ? Did not the serpent bruise the heel of Him who died upon the tree, that He might take away the sin of the world? Did not He bruise the head of the serpent, and attain a perfect victory over evil, who did no sin but always kept His Father's commandment, who clothed Himself with righteousness as with a garment, and on whose sacred head the wreath of thorns was but an outward symbol of the inward crown of an inalienable and all-enduring love?

Even the Jews so read this ancient Gospel when, in their Targums, they affirmed that the victory over the serpent was to be accomplished "in the days of the Messiah." So too St. John read it, when he said that Jesus Christ was manifested "that he might destroy the works of the devil."

How great a gospel, then, have we in the Gospel of Adam; and what various and solid grounds for hope! If, wearied and perplexed by the power of evil in our own souls, or its wide dominion in the world around us, we doubt whether its power and dominion can ever be overthrown—the final triumph of good over evil is assured to

us from the beginning of the world, from the very moment in which sin began to reign; and assured by One who is Himself the very Soul of goodness and the Fountain whence it flows; One who foresaw that very conflict between the two, and those apparent occasional victories of evil which cause us to doubt. It is still further assured to us by those partial, but present and growing, victories which we see and admire in the good men of every Church and age. And most of all is it assured to us by the complete victory of Him who became as we are in this world, that we might be like Him both in this world and in the world to come, and share in his triumph over evil and all its works. The past, the present, the future, all shed influences of courage and hope upon us, and bid us be faithful that we too may bruise Satan under our feet shortly. And with such a stedfast and growing light of hope as this, a light which dawned in Adam's Gospel, has already spread into the day and reign of Christ, and is to culminate in the new day of a new heaven and a new earth, who need tremble or despair? By hope, by *this* hope, are we saved.

S. Cox.

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### JACOB'S PILLAR.

GENESIS xxviii. 18.

THIS is the earliest recorded instance—possibly the earliest actual instance—of a practice which grew to be in one shape or another wellnigh universal. In what it first originated there is nothing to shew; most probably in some traditional example, and perhaps therefore in this very act on the part of Jacob. It is easy to see that in the East rude stone memorials would be at once the readiest and most durable to erect. Coupled with this is the allowed