

*THE "CURSING OF THE GROUND" AND THE  
"REVEALING OF THE SONS OF GOD" IN  
RELATION TO NATURAL FACTS.*

II. THE FALL AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

IN the previous article we have considered the natural conditions implied in the Edenic state of man, and the possibility that under favourable circumstances he might have increased and multiplied and replenished the earth as a harmless and innocent being. We have also noticed the remarkable coincidence between the probable condition and environment of primitive man as inferred from geological facts and the statements of the early chapters of Genesis. That something interfered to prevent his development into a high and holy being, a fit ruler and head of creation, and reduced him to that savage and cruel condition in which we find him as evidenced by his remains in the caves and gravels, we too surely know; but geology is silent as to the disturbing cause, and here therefore we may turn to the written record and enquire what light it throws on this difficult subject.

The Book of Genesis presents man to us as having intercourse with his Maker—such intercourse as our little ones still have when they startle us with their realistic utterances as to things to us unseen, or only dimly visible to faith, except when they shine before us in dreams and visions of the night, or in conditions of body when we have nearly shuffled off this mortal coil. We need not doubt this, however difficult it may be for us to think of men communing with God in the rustling of the evening breeze. It is what must have been in the first waking to consciousness of a rational and spiritual being. He is also in a state of probation. There is one tree of the garden of which he must not eat—one poisonous and even deadly fruit. He is like a child turned loose in a garden with permission to eat

every fruit but one, because that is poisonous. Whatever profound questions as to the origin of evil or human responsibility may gather around this prohibition, it represents a condition of existence everywhere and always; for where are there not scattered around our paths, in all climates and states, fruits good for food, and others that are unwholesome and dangerous. It is the one conceivable limitation of human freedom in the Edenic state, and at the same time one that without any warning or command must have existed as a natural fact, so soon as man emerged from Eden.

Thus the religion of Adam and Eve consisted of a communion with God and an understood prohibition which was also a kind warning. This was the primitive embryo of religion in unfallen man. It does not follow, as some now appear to hold, that it will serve equally for man in his present state. Had man adhered to this religion, however, it admitted of a development up to the level of that of unfallen angels.

The disturbing element which deprives man of this covenant is the serpent, and no explanation is given as to the serpent being the agent of a malignant spirit. This could not be known in the first instance to the primitive pair. He is merely indicated as being the most subtle of the animals—more insidious (naked) than any other. Naturally the gliding, noiseless progression and the ability to execute all kinds of movements without limbs, have impressed this idea on man everywhere, and have given the serpent a large place in myths and superstitions, which may however be secondarily derived from his rôle as the tempter, for which these properties so well fit the animal. I may remark here that other peculiarities of the serpent are referred to in the curse pronounced on him after the fall. He is to go on his belly and eat dust. The serpent when about to strike coils his body and erects his head.

When he fails or becomes afraid, he lowers himself abjectly and sneaks away with his head close to the ground. These natural attitudes are those referred to in the curse, and they for the first time suggest to us that the serpent here is the agent of an evil power of whom he becomes the symbol, and who is bold and pretentious in his temptation of Eve, and destined subsequently to occupy an abject and hateful position in relation to man, and especially to the promised seed of the woman who is to crush his head.

The temptation presented to Eve is addressed to her ambitious longing for higher knowledge and power—a longing intended to be gratified in the gradual development of man from stage to stage of divine culture, but not to be prematurely satiated by snatching the forbidden fruit. Whether or not the fruit was one having a stimulating or intoxicating property, as some have supposed, it had the immediate effect of opening their eyes, and the perception to which they attain is one of sexual shame or modesty, the perception of nakedness and the desire for clothing. This might lead to many curious ethnological inquiries. I shall mention here merely the fact that while the skeletons of prehistoric men in bone-caves, give evidence of the wearing both of clothes and ornaments, the tracings of the human figure found on bones, etc., in such caverns, are, so far as known, nude. In other words, the co-existence of clothing on the actual human figure, along with nudity on sculptured representations belongs to the earliest times, and hints to us the fact that man originally had no cause to be ashamed of his want of clothing.

Up to this point the simplicity and naturalness and primitive character of the whole story in Genesis are most evident. Let us now turn to the alleged consequences of the fall in relation to natural facts.

If, as already explained, we are to understand by Eden the "Centre of Creation" prepared for man, in which all

external conditions were favourable to his happy existence, the expulsion from that special district, by whatever means effected, must have been a great and real calamity. It was exile from the environment and natural productions necessary to a happy life. It was throwing man into a struggle for existence under unfavourable conditions, and exposing him to dangers and sufferings before unknown.

To nature in general it was also a grievous loss. Had man continued in his Edenic state, the conditions and the animal species of his new vital centre might have extended themselves widely over the continents, in a manner similar to that which seems to have occurred in the introduction of other types in previous periods. Under his new circumstances, if he is to maintain his dominion and even his existence, he must declare war against the other parts of organic nature, must invent weapons of destruction, and by virtue of his higher mental powers must become the tyrant of the world, more dreaded than any wild beast, and must destroy vegetable productions hostile or obstructive to him and his industries. Nature in fact must henceforth suffer from the destructive dominance of man.

The sentence of death passed upon man implies that he was originally free from the general doom of living beings. Whether this was to have been by a repeated rejuvenescence or renewal of youth, by a mere interchange of new tissues for those become effete, or by a transition from the natural or psychic body to the spiritual body promised in the New Testament at the resurrection, it is impossible to decide; but there are different ways in which such immunity could be secured, and, as previously stated, it would be an appropriate endowment of man's higher nature and instinctive desire for immortality. Now he falls under the general law, and though his life may at first be very protracted, he must surely die. In experiencing this fate, in so far as his physical frame was concerned, he but returns

to dust out of which he was taken, but in so far as his spiritual nature is concerned, he retains that belief in a future existence, that universal instinct of immortality which is perhaps the best natural evidence of his original unending life. It is certainly as easy and natural to believe in man's primitive immortality as to believe in the doctrine of a resurrection of the dead body, so constantly maintained by Jesus Christ and by Paul.

The penalty of death is not to be immediately exacted, except in its shadow cast over the whole life of man; and hope of a final though distant restoration is held out to him; but in the meantime the ground on which he treads and out of which he is to obtain food, is cursed for his sake. Judging from subsequent references, this would imply want of such permanent fertility as that secured to Eden by its irrigating streams, entailing much tillage and labour;<sup>1</sup> and as in the case of the woe denounced on Cain, this infertility in some cases extending to absolute barrenness.<sup>2</sup> There would seem also to have been a progressive deterioration, perhaps in climate as well as soil, for Lamech, the father of Noah, at the close of the antediluvian period is represented as speaking of it as an increasing evil in his time.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand the blessing to Noah after the flood seems to refer to a partial removal of the curse, and from the terms of the promise to Noah, it would also appear that after the flood there was some restoration of fertility and amelioration of climate.<sup>4</sup> We have already seen that if we identify the antediluvian age with that of the men of the Palanthropic or "Palæolithic" caves and gravels, it is proved by geological facts that they suffered not merely from a retarded development of the organic world, but a gradual deterioration of climate; so that before the great diluvial catastrophe which closed that period set in, there was much difficulty in finding means of subsistence, and many tribes of men

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iii. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. iv. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. v. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. viii. 22.

had to resort to the rudest kind of hunting life, leading probably to much barbarism and violence.

We are further told in Genesis that when men resorted to tillage and subsisted on the "herb of the field," their work would be obstructed by "thorns and thistles." This may appear to some a trifling penalty, but it would not seem such to one familiar with the number and troublesome nature of thorny and prickly plants in some parts of the world, or with the devastation which the thistle and its allies have worked on some of the finest plains on the earth. Like man, the great family of the *Compositæ*, so prolific of troublesome weeds, and including the thistles and their allies, was a new thing on the earth, and may not have found its way at all into the Edenic Garden.<sup>1</sup> It would seem however almost as if produced in order to annoy man, so soon as he becomes a cultivator or even a shepherd. In our own time we have seen the thistles and their allies pursuing men in their new American and Australian homes, following them to the remotest districts, and molesting them in all their attempts at pasturage and culture. It is singular how many things the author of Genesis knew which until the other day were not dreamt of in our philosophy.

The special penalty denounced on woman is one of the saddest parts of the fall. Sorrow in that which was a part of the original blessing, and is the happiness of other living beings, in that childbearing which in Eden would have been a chief joy and the means of replenishing the earth with happy beings, was now in the fallen state to be hers, along with that inevitable submission to marital despotism which in all primitive and rude states of society falls to the lot of the weaker partner burdened with the cares and toils of maternity.

<sup>1</sup> We know of no *Compositæ* until the Tertiary age, except uncertain fragments. The family seems to be a new one, scarcely older than man himself, but gifted with remarkable powers of extension.

The more we ponder on the few but graphic touches of the primitive painter of Eden and the Fall, the more must we recognise their truth to nature and the certainty that they must truly represent the experience of the earliest human beings, and the reason of that degraded condition in which we find the oldest tribes of men yet known to us. Before going farther, however, there are a few features of the old story in Genesis which may merit a short consideration, in addition to that which we have given to the main features of the narrative. Was the tree of life an actual tree, or kind of tree, seen by primitive man? This, I think, we can scarcely doubt, though the study of ancient mythology shows us that in different times and countries it may have been represented by different species, as the palm, the banyan, the persea, the oak or even the mistletoe.<sup>1</sup> Had it any natural power to cure disease or injury, or to prolong life? Were its leaves literally "for the healing of the nations"?<sup>2</sup> This we cannot know, unless we could find means to identify the species. It may have been merely a symbol or pledge of the "immortality" promised to man, though the words of the record would seem rather to imply a physical property. What were the cherubim and flaming sword which prevented access to it? The former are represented to us not only in the Bible but in the pictured and sculptured symbolism of all the old idolatries, as animals or complex monsters, compounded of animal forms, sometimes with the human head superadded. Naturally interpreted, and in connection with later mythological and Biblical ideas, this might mean primarily the irruption of formidable beasts into Eden to replace man; and its later symbolic use may refer to the injury inflicted on creation by the fall, and that restoration of freedom and progress predicted by Paul in a passage to be referred to in

<sup>1</sup> In Chaldea, India, Egypt, Greece and Western Europe respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. xxii. 2.

the sequel. In this case the heavenly "animals" or living creatures of Revelation chapters iv. and v. are representatives of the redemption of the creation as distinguished from man. Hence when "every created thing" ascribes honour and glory and blessing to God and to the Redeemer the four cherubim or living creatures say "Amen."

As symbols therefore throughout the Bible and in the ancient idolatries, the cherubim represent the copartnership of animated nature with man in his fall and final restoration—a great and glorious doctrine deserving of more attention than it receives, more especially in relation to our duties toward the lower animals. But this is too large a subject and too frequently referred to in the Bible to be discussed here, except to say that the Bible, while it lends no countenance to the doctrine of human descent from animals or to idolatrous veneration for them, fully recognises our relations to them, God's care of and for them, and our duty of mercy to them. The flaming sword, if we are to take Isaiah's description of the Sword of Jehovah<sup>1</sup> or Ezekiel's of the fire accompanying his cherubim<sup>2</sup> as referring to it, must have been some bituminous or volcanic fire or eruption striking terror into the human spectators. The symbolism in both cases would be the sympathy of nature with man in his fall, like the earthquake and eclipse at the death of Christ, or the rejoicing of nature in the revelation of the Sons of God in the Psalms and the Apocalypse. The immediate object is stated to have been the exclusion of man for the time from his lost paradise.

For our present purpose all these features of the narrative in Genesis serve to emphasize the conclusion that the present relations of man to other parts of nature are not normal or in accordance with the usual arrangements of the Creator in the introduction of new types, or with the position of man as the culmination of the animal kingdom and

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xxxiv. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. i. 13.



the introducer of a higher type of rational existence. Consequently, that any system of theology or philosophy which takes it for granted that the present condition of the world is merely "a natural result of its whole previous development," or that "no important change took place at the time of man's first transgression," must necessarily lead to false conclusions.

We may, it is true, admit that in a certain sense the present state of things is a result of the previous development from the beginning, and that the fall itself must have entered into the original plan of the Creator as an episode in that development. Yet the introduction of man was in itself a new feature, and one implying the risk that any false step taken by a free rational agent might produce an effectual and perhaps ever-increasing derangement of the whole course of organic nature, not to be inferred at all from its previous tendencies. Paul grasps this fully when he says, "the creation was made subject to vanity," that is to failure or unprofitableness. Ellicott and Macdonald have also seized the significance of this possibility, but it has been missed by the greater part of modern commentators and philosophers. It is, in short, an inevitable conclusion of science that when a rational and moral being has been introduced into the world with power to assume mastery over it, and with capacity for multiplication and extension, any aberration on his part must subvert the ordinary operation of natural laws, and interrupt the progress of nature. Even evolutionists like Mivart and Wallace, have perceived this and have taken some account of it. It was also well known to naturalists in what have been called "pre-Darwinian" days, before the whirl of the evolutionary cyclone had carried so many naturalists off their feet. In 1860, in my work entitled *Archæia*, I discussed this subject and continued its consideration in *The Origin of the World*, published in 1877. The conclusion had then been fully

established by geology that the introduction of a rational and inventive being, unarmed, unclothed, and subsisting on the spontaneous productions of nature, must mark a new departure and require important changes in the progress of the world, and that the conversion of man into a savage creature, inventing weapons of destruction, would necessarily introduce the most serious disturbances. In studying the subject however at that time I was not aware of certain important facts discovered later, such as the following—(1) The deterioration of climate in the Northern Hemisphere which occurred in the early human period. (2) The probable identity of the so-called "Palæolithic" men of Europe with the Antediluvians, and of the catastrophe which swept them away with the historical deluge. (3) The magnitude of the geographical and vital changes connected with the diluvial catastrophe. Wanting these important data, the following sentences express the conclusions attainable at that time.

1. Every large region of earth is inhabited by a group of animals, differing in the proportions of identical species and in the presence of distinct species from the groups inhabiting other districts. There is also sufficient reason to conclude that all animals and plants have spread from certain local centres of creation, in which certain groups of species have been produced and allowed to extend themselves, until they met and became intermingled with species extending from other centres. Now, the district of Asia, in the vicinity of the Euphrates and Tigris, to which the Bible assigns the origin of the human race, is the centre to which we can with the greatest probability, trace several of the species of animals and plants most useful to man, and lies near the confines of warmer and colder regions of distribution in the Old World, and also near the boundary of the Asiatic and European regions. At the period under consideration it may have been peopled with a group of animals especially suited to association with the pro-

genitors of mankind. 2. To remove all zoological difficulties from the position of primeval man in his state of innocence, we have but to suppose, in accordance with all the probabilities of the case, that man was created along with a group of creatures adapted to contribute to his happiness and having no tendency to injure or annoy; and that it is the formation of these creatures—the group of his own centre of creation—that is especially noticed in Genesis ii. 19 et seq., where God is represented as forming them out of the ground and exhibiting them to Adam. 3. The difficulty attending the early extension of the human race is at once obviated by the geological doctrine of the extinction of species. We know that in past geological periods large and important groups of species have become extinct, and have been replaced by new groups extending from new centres; and we know that this process has removed, in early geological periods, many creatures that would have been highly injurious to human interests had they remained. Now the group of species created with man, being the latest introduced, we may infer, on geological grounds, that it would have extended itself within the spheres of older zoological and botanical districts, and would have replaced their species, which, in the ordinary operation of natural laws, may have been verging towards extinction. Thus, not only man, but the Eden in which he dwelt with all its animals and plants, would have gradually encroached on the surrounding wilderness, until man's happy and peaceful reign had replaced that of the ferocious beasts that preceded him in dominion, and had extended at least over all the temperate region of the earth. 4. The cursing of the ground for man's sake, on his fall from innocence, would thus consist in the permission given to the predaceous animals and the thorns and the thistles of other centres of creation to invade his Eden; or, in his own

expulsion, to contend with the animals and plants which were intended to have given way and become extinct before him. Thus the fall of man would produce an arrest in the progress of the earth in that last great revolution which would have converted it into an Eden; and the anomalies of its present state consist in a mixture of the conditions of the Tertiary with those of the human period. 5. Though there is good ground for believing that man was to have been exempted from the general law of mortality, we cannot infer that any such exemption would have been enjoyed by his companion animals; we only know that he himself would have been free from all annoyance and injury and decay from external causes. We may also conclude that, while Eden was sufficient for his habitation, the remainder of the earth would continue, just as in the earlier Tertiary periods, under the dominion of the predaceous mammals, reptiles and birds. 6. The above views enable us on the one hand to avoid the difficulties that attend the admission of predaceous animals into Eden, and on the other the still more formidable difficulties that attend the attempt to exclude them altogether from the Adamic world. They also illustrate the geological fact, that many animals, contemporaneous with man, extend far back into the Tertiary period. These are creatures not belonging to the Edenic centre of creation, but introduced in an earlier part of the sixth creative day, and now permitted to exist along with man in his fallen state. I have stated these supposed conditions of the Adamic creation briefly, and with as little illustration as possible, that they may connectedly strike the mind of the reader. Each of these statements is in harmony with the narrative in Genesis on the one hand, and with geology on the other; and, taken together, they afford an intelligible history of the introduction of man. If a geologist were to state, *a priori*, the conditions proper

to the creation of any important species, he could only say—the preparation or selection of some region of the earth for it, and its production along with a group of plants and animals suited to it. These are precisely the conditions implied in the Scriptural account of the creation of Adam. The difficulties of the subject have arisen from supposing, contrary to the narrative itself, that the conditions necessary for Eden must in the first instance have extended over the whole earth, and that the creatures with which man is in his present dispersion brought into contact must necessarily have been his companions there.

I have quoted the above as legitimate conclusions of science attained thirty-five years ago, and which have not been affected even by the current theories of evolution, except in so far as these occupy the entirely irrational ground of agnostic causelessness. When therefore we find the earliest men known to us, to have been barbarous hunters and manslayers, at war with nature and with one another, and out of harmonious relations with their environment, we may be sure from the deductions of geological and archæological science that there has been "a fall of man."

We should not however omit to notice that according both to geological science and to Bible history, there may have been some mitigation of the cursing of the ground after the Deluge. The great diluvial catastrophe which separates Palanthropic from Neanthropic man,<sup>1</sup> which we can now identify with the historical deluge, greatly altered the physical geography of the Northern Hemisphere, and destroyed or expelled from its temperate regions many species of animals, while the climatal conditions of the previous period were somewhat ameliorated and the diminished size of the continents gave greater facilities for the

<sup>1</sup> See *Modern Science in Bible Lands*, chap. iv.; and *Meeting-place of Geology and History*.

dispersion of men, and for maritime intercourse. So in the patriarchal record we find the promise to Noah that man will no more be destroyed by a diluvial catastrophe, the cursing of the ground shall in some degree be removed, and that seedtime and harvest will not fail. These improved conditions however fell far short of restoring the Edenic happiness, and left untouched all that part of the curse of nature which depends on the tyranny and misconduct of man himself. This, I apprehend, is implied in the singular reason that the alleviation is not given because the survivors of the Deluge have returned to Edenic innocence, but, on the contrary, because the taint of the fall still clings to them, because "the heart of man is evil from his youth," and therefore they cannot help being out of harmony with nature, but they are allowed to enter on the new age with improved conditions.<sup>1</sup>

It results from this, however, that the most important part of the remaining curse is that which arises from the voluntary action of man himself. He continues to be the antagonist and destroyer of the lower animals, the deformer of the fair face of nature. He pursues to extinction the animals which he hunts for his profit or his pleasure. He takes away the food and shelter of other creatures and so causes them to perish. He disfigures with his so-called improvements great spaces of the surface of the earth. He interferes with the nice balance of animated nature established of old, and has introduced struggle, anarchy, violence and misrule. Farther, by his exhaustive cropping he has reduced vast areas of the earth's surface to barrenness. These destructive changes have already spread over much of the habitable land and are rapidly extending themselves; and when he carries his innovations to the extreme we find a "Black-country," a pandemonium of fire and machinery overhung with a canopy of smoke, under which

<sup>1</sup> See Genesis viii. 20, etc.

thousands toil, deprived of the most ordinary requirements of health and happiness, and whence all creatures save man and the beasts he has enslaved are excluded. Finally, we already hear the prediction that the culmination of applied science will be the discovery of means to provide artificially from their elements the food-substances necessary for human subsistence; and then the whole world might be converted into a great congeries of factories without a tree or a green field, or any of the higher forms of animal life, and in which toiling millions of men might grind out painfully the means of supporting a life deprived of the charm of everything that God has made for human enjoyment. This travesty of the New Jerusalem is that to which many eager minds are bending all their energies, and hoping some day to accomplish. It remains to enquire if God has not provided some better way to remedy the Fall of Man.

[NOTE.—Much is said at present of the "Babylonian element in Genesis," as if in some way the Bible history of primitive man had been derived from the Chaldean accounts of creation and the deluge; whereas it is evident that the Chaldean myths are related to the Bible in the same manner in which a historical novel is related to sober history. Maspero, in his recent work, *The Dawn of Civilization* (*Les Origines*, English translation, edited by Sayce), attempts to summarize the Chaldean documents; and it must be obvious to every intelligent reader of his pages, that whatever the original basis of these legends, they have been amplified in a wildly imaginative manner which would render quite impossible the construction from them of the sober prosaic narrative of Genesis. They are deserving of study as showing that the early Chaldeans had access to some of the sources of information possessed by the author of Genesis, and as illustrating the difference between popular legends or poetical myths and inspired history, but nothing more.]

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