

The Spiritual Value of Genesis, chap. iii.

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IN the September number of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES an attempt was made to draw out the permanent spiritual value of the Creation story in Gn 1. It was seen that its value is entirely unaffected by the fact that it contains statements which are not in accord with modern scientific discovery; and that it contains deep truths of religious philosophy concerning the nature of God, of the material world, and of man. The story of Adam and Ève in the Garden of Eden is in some ways more picturesque and fascinating. It is far more primitive in thought and language than the story in chap. 1, having reached its present form some three centuries earlier. The details are wonderfully vivid, and are sketched by a master's hand—the talking serpent, the woman gazing longingly at the fruit, the picking and eating, the shame of the man and woman at the realization of their nakedness, the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, the conversation which ensued, and, finally, the dismissal from the garden, and the cherubim at the entrance with the flaming sword guarding the way to the tree of life. It has all been photographed on our minds since childhood.

It is very probable that this story, like that of the Creation, had Babylonian affinities. A very ancient Babylonian inscription has been preserved, describing a sacred garden with a mystic tree 'between the mouths of the rivers (which are) on both sides.' And Assyrian gems often bear representations of 'a sacred palm tree, with two winged figures, having the heads sometimes of eagles, sometimes of men, standing or kneeling on either side. It is possible that these figures are the prototypes of the Biblical cherubim.'¹ There is, indeed, an ancient Babylonian cylinder on which are depicted 'two figures, seated on either side of a fruit tree, to which they are both stretching out their hands, while behind one of them a serpent is coiling upwards. But as no inscription accompanies it, its interpretation is uncertain; and it is hazardous to suppose it to represent the Babylonian story of the Temptation.' If we possessed more of the Babylonian legends concerning the earliest

¹ Driver, *Genesis*, p. 52 f.

life of man, we should probably see clearly, as in the Creation story, that they were purified by the inspiration of the Hebrew mind, and that primitive Semitic polytheism was replaced by the grand monotheism which it was the function of God's chosen people to teach to the world.

It cannot be necessary to delay long over the picturesque details. In the study of chap. 1 it was said that the Laws of Nature consist in the invariable action of an unswerving Will. But if a serpent really talked articulately, so as to carry on a conversation with a human being, and if there really existed two trees, whose fruit in the one case enabled a man and a woman to realize the contrast between good and evil, and in the other was capable, if eaten, of producing in them unending physical life, and if real visible cherubim guarded the entrance of a garden with a flaming sword—if all these were historical facts, the unswerving, orderly Will of God must have swerved greatly in many particulars from its normal method of working. So that we do Him more honour if we say that the story is allegory, than if we maintain it to be fact. And the allegorical nature of the narrative is further shown by the names of the man and woman. '*Ādām* denotes 'Mankind'—Man in general; it is distinct from '*ish*' ('a man'), as the German *Mensch* is distinct from *Mann*. Eve (*Hawwāh*) denotes 'Life'; she represents women in general, through whom human life is perpetuated.

Now one thing in these early stories is very evident, *i.e.* that they are attempts—simple, child-like attempts, but made with extraordinary artistic skill—to account for facts of everyday observation. The Creation story, of course, accounts for the existence of the world, and the supremacy of man. Our present story has for its object to account for several things. It describes the origin of natural shame and modesty, and of the wearing of clothes; it explains why it is that serpents crawl on the ground, that man must subdue the earth with the sweat of his brow, and that women suffer pain in childbirth; it accounts for the fact that no one has an unending physical life. But above all, it offers an explanation of the origin of sin. It is

here that it deals with things spiritual, and it is here that its permanent value and importance lie.

The story of the Creation led up to the thought that man stands at the head of created things, and that he must strive towards the great climax—the perfection of the perfect Man. And this must in turn be the starting-point for a study of the story of Eden.

In what respect is man so superior to every other animal, that he stands in a category by himself? All animals are possessed of instinct; but that is a vague term, which is apt to be used somewhat too lightly. We see in some animals a certain amount of elementary but real intelligence; a partial power of memory, of calculation, and of deliberate action. We also see among them striking instances of self-sacrifice, and devotion to their young. But there is one thing of which we see no sign—no animal, other than man, shows a conscious wish to become morally better. Man possesses a moral sense, a power of self-determination, a capacity for striving consciously after a moral ideal. Scientific men, however, are largely agreed that this moral sense, though it can only be found in man, must have been evolved. The great majority of them are unanimous that this will some day be proved objectively, although at present the data for proof are lacking. And there is no religious reason why we should not accept their judgment—not grudgingly, but willingly—as a conclusion to which God may be leading men by the advancing study of nature. If at any time their theory were proved to be either right or wrong, the religious position would remain unaltered. We can assume, then, provisionally, that the theory is right, and say that in the course of evolution a creature was born in whom the earliest germ of moral consciousness was to be found. Modern anthropologists are not yet agreed as to whether this occurred only in the case of a single pair of ancestors, from whom all men have been born, or whether it occurred in many instances all over the world. But if at any time either view were proved to be the right one, the religious position, as before, would be unaffected. But here a point of great importance must be emphasized. The dictum that *Natura nihil facit per saltum* (Nature does nothing by leaps) has been challenged by some modern authorities on evolution and heredity. But without attempting to decide upon the matter, let us suppose that the step in advance

in the evolutionary process was very minute indeed. Yet for all that, it is certain that the change in the creature would be so momentous that he would at once stand on a footing far ahead of his progenitors. To take an illustration. In a chemical combination, say, of oxygen and hydrogen in a certain proportion, the result is not simply a mixture of the two, but a third thing—water, which is, for all practical purposes, quite different from either. So the creature that we are imagining, when the germ of moral consciousness first appeared—whether it was in the course of evolution, or by a fresh creative act—must have become a totally distinct being at a leap. For the first time, his thoughts, however elementary, began to reach after an ideal, and he became a man.

From this follows the crucial point in the consideration of the origin of sin. The fact that man felt moved to strive upwards, the fact that he felt moved to take an active and deliberate part in his own evolution, while it was of itself an enormous dignity and honour, involved from the nature of the case a feeling of difficulty. He felt—and realized consciously that he felt—his animal nature pulling at him for the first time, just because for the first time he was striving to rise above it. The step in his evolution which made him a man, was that which caused a stress and strain within his being.

Now, in the picture before us, Adam and Eve (the allegorical representatives of man and woman in general) are in a state of innocence—not moral perfection, but innocence in its strict sense; they had as yet done no harm. It was a mere harmless, natural ignorance. And this ignorance was bliss, symbolically portrayed under the form of a luxurious garden or park, in which fruit trees grew without the toil of man, and abundant streams flowed for their refreshment and delight. As regards civilization, they were in a state of savagery, neither of them feeling the slightest shame in their nakedness. But they were not mere animals. The great step in evolution had already been taken, because they could understand a Divine command: they had just learnt the meaning of the word 'ought.' A simple and picturesque form is given to the command: they were not to eat of a certain tree. The story opens when they had just received the command; and the moment it was realized the stress and strain began.

Man was now in a position to choose deliberately

in any given instance whether he would strive upwards, or obey the animal nature which pulled in the opposite direction. If, for an instant, he chose the lower and refused the higher, sin would for the first time exist in the world. The creature, before he became man, could not sin, because he had no upward striving. Moral evolution made sin possible. How is this pictured in our story? God tries to keep man from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. That is, He wanted man not to experience the meaning of sin. The stress and strain caused by his animal tendencies he must feel; but it was not necessary ever to yield to them where they conflicted with his upward progress. If he yielded, it would for ever be harder to strive upwards, because his will would be weakened. And deliberately and consciously, by choosing the lower and refusing the higher, man created sin.

Notice, then, that our story is completely right in not suggesting that sin was created or caused by God. But neither is it caused or created by any evil spirit or devil. It is important to remember that the Old Testament nowhere makes the serpent equivalent to the devil; that idea is not found earlier than the Book of Wisdom (2²³), a Greek work written about a century and a half B.C. The serpent in the Genesis story, which ever after crawled upon the ground, is the allegorical symbol of man's lower animal desires, which had only come to be recognized as lower when it was seen that they resisted the upward striving towards an ideal. The subtilty of the serpent in its conversation with Eve represents the struggle within man's mind, the wavering between his upward impulses and the insidious attractiveness of his downward tendencies. The eating of the fruit is the deliberate act of choice; and the giving of it by the woman to the man pictures the far-reaching influence which one human being can exercise upon another, and especially the one sex upon the other. The immediate result was a feeling of shame which had never been experienced before. And the expulsion from the garden of delights symbolizes the fact that the former blissful ignorance and innocence had gone for ever.

In other words the story, in all its parts, is an instantaneous photograph of a single moment—the critical moment in the evolution of man. And though it is not, and could not be, in accordance with modern physical science, yet, owing to

Divine inspiration, it contains philosophical and religious teaching on the problem of the origin of sin which has never been superseded.

There is one other feature of the story which affords some obvious teaching. If man's fleshly desires have, even once, led him to turn his back deliberately upon his moral aspirations, his physical nature gains a much firmer hold upon him. And the most terrible thing that could be imagined would be for his physical nature to retain its hold over him for ever. Even if man had never sinned, but had steadily continued to mount upward in his spiritual evolution, the stress and strain would always have tried him. It would be nothing but a mercy to him to be released from his body. There is no evidence which necessitates the supposition that if there had been no sin, there would have been no physical death. Hence, in the story, man is prevented from approaching the tree of life, lest he should eat and live for ever. It was not jealousy on God's part, but pure love, that placed the insurpassable barrier at the gate of Paradise.

But at this point a burning question arises, which carries us very deep. If God made the world of such a kind that man—a creature possessed of moral consciousness—was ultimately evolved; and if the very fact of his moral growth occasioned the stress and strain of temptation, so that by yielding to his lower impulses man made sin to be sin for the first time,—God must have foreknown that this would happen. Why did God, who is all-holy and all-loving, make such a world as that? Could He not have made quite a different world, such that sin could not have resulted within it?

We must be very careful when we venture such an expression as that God 'could not' do something. But St. Paul does not hesitate to say that God 'cannot deny Himself.' We can say with certainty, for example, that He cannot make $2 + 2 = 5$. And so with our present knowledge, and speaking always with fear and trembling, realizing that His ways are not as our ways, neither are His thoughts our thoughts, we may say three things: (1) God could not make creatures without making them finite, *i.e.* physically, mentally, and morally limited. (2) He could not make this finite being to partake of His own nature, so as to strive deliberately towards an infinitely perfect moral ideal, without the resultant stress and strain between the opposing impulses. (3) He could not

force man to choose what is good, without *ipso facto* taking away his power of choice, so that man would cease to be a moral being. Or, to put the same in other words: (1) a finite being with unlimited powers; (2) an upward striving without something lower to be striven against; and (3) a free will which is forced, are three self-contradictory and unthinkable propositions.

Thus the question which calls for an answer is not, why did God create a world in which He knew that sin would appear? but, why did God create moral beings? And without pretending to know the full answer, we can say that *He must have felt it worth while*. All the sin and sorrow and suffering were not worthy to be compared with the glorious purpose of producing beings possessed, like Himself, of a moral power of will, whom He could love, and who could love Him, and who would rise towards the ideal of perfection. He foresaw all the sin and suffering that would be created by man's misuse of his free will; but He knew that He had a way by which, in the long run, He could deal with it. There is a single flash of victorious light in the darkness of the picture in Genesis. The serpent would wound man's heel, but man would wound the serpent's head. This, as Professor Driver points out, is not in any full

sense a Protevangelium. The 'seed' of the woman did not, in the mind of the writer of the story, mean an individual, but the whole race of men. The only thing which is definitely taught in the passage is that the struggle between man's lower and higher nature would be fierce and long. But the very contrast between the crawling position of the serpent and the upright position of man implies that man's victory over his lower self is ultimately certain. And we who have been privileged to learn the mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God who created all things, can read the fullest meaning into the story. God foresaw that though man would sin, yet that He could Himself in the fulness of time come amongst men, and in human conditions undergo the same terrible stress and strain, and not give way, 'according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord'—'having fore-ordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed upon us in the Beloved.' And so we reach the greatest of all paradoxes: God created a world in which He knew that sin would appear; but that which led Him to create it was Love.

Recent Foreign Theology.

Dr. Deissmann on New Testament Philology.

A REVIEW extending to eleven columns is a rarity in the *Theologische Literaturzeitung*. But the editors have conferred a boon upon students by publishing (No. 8) an erudite article from the pen of Dr. Adolf Deissmann, dealing with five recently published works on the language and literature of the New Testament. This manifest proof of the flourishing condition of *Philologia sacra* evokes from him an exclamation of joy.

In words of high commendation, Dr. James Hope Moulton's *Grammar of New Testament Greek* is introduced to German scholars. There is grateful acknowledgment of the splendid service rendered to Biblical exegesis in England and America by Dr. W. F. Moulton's translation of

'Winer' nearly forty years ago. 'The son has inherited the *επος* of the true student—zeal in scientific research, blended with ardent love of the New Testament.' Seldom are the pages of this scholarly journal enlivened by such a delightful passage as that in which Dr. Deissmann expresses his appreciation of Dr. Moulton's attractive presentation of recondite themes in the *Prolegomena* which occupy the first volume. 'Before opening the schoolroom door, the author offers us, with a smile, a packet of almonds and raisins.' These introductory chapters are 'eminently readable; we are neither stifled in the oppressive atmosphere of exegetical wranglings, nor drowned in a flood of quotations.'

The new Grammar is seen to be far more than a revision of the earlier work. 'The list of papyri and inscriptions, to which reference has been made, shows how extensive has been the author's