

# THE FALL OF MAN.

A LECTURE


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Sydney:

"EVENING NEWS" OFFICE, PITT STREET.

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GEN. III.

This account is accepted as a history and not as an allegory for the following reasons :—It is found in a book, Genesis, in which all the other parts are pure history. There is no indication in the narrative to induce us to believe that this is different. It is presented as history all through the Bible. It coincides with the facts of human life. It is referred to as historical by our Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles, and it is made the basis of Christianity as a religion of redemption.

If we are asked if there are no difficulties in the history we answer that there must be such from the nature of the case, from the imperfection of our faculties, and from the bias of our moral nature. But as "probability is the very guide of life" it belongs to us to show that the probabilities in favour of its simple literal truth, infinitely outweigh any probabilities which may be urged against it. In doing so we shall look at the narration itself, examine the witnesses to its truth borne by the facts of life, consider some further testimonies to the same effect, and answer some objections which have been urged against it.



Let us look at this great and clear tradition of the origin of sin. The account is simple, intelligible, and full of the highest truths belonging to our common human nature. It traces back the origin of sin to the free will of man, acting without restraint, though not without temptation, in opposition to the will of God.

Man, God's crowning work in creation, had been formed a moral agent. Moral goodness can only be found in voluntary obedience to God. This obedience could only be shown in the face of prohibition. The later commands of the Decalogue were inapplicable, because man had only one earthly relation. Hence the single prohibition, "Thou shalt not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden," with its terrible sanction, "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." One positive, external trial, by which his allegiance could be fully tested, his freedom exhibited, and his capacity for and destination to righteousness realised.

The tree was called "the tree of knowledge of good and evil," teaching that in some way or other it had the power of imparting knowledge. This is shown by the statement of the tempter—by the expectation of the woman—by the word of God, and by the realised fact. Before he sinned, Adam had the ignorance of the happy and of the innocent. The happy are ignorant of sorrow, and the innocent are ignorant of sin. After the transgression he knew both. The tree made its appeal to the whole nature of man—to the taste and smell—to the sense of beauty—to intellectual curiosity, and to ambition; for it promised to make him independent of God. Yet the command was not too severe for man to obey. It was absolute, plain, and relatively easy. The privation was small. The threat was definite.

Man knew God's kindness by happy experience, and gratitude and love conspired to preserve him from disobedience. Thus was he launched a free moral agent, perfect in principle, but needing conflict to manifest and to develop him. This the trial command was well fitted to accomplish.

As one of God's creatures already named by man Eve would not fear the serpent. Its possession of the power of speech would not occasion her great surprise at this early stage of the world's history, when the powers and faculties of the various creatures were only in process of discovery, yet no mere creature pronounced good by God could have placed itself in such direct antagonism to His will. The malice to conceive and the skill to manage such an assault on the first pair, points clearly to a higher evil power who is for the time being using the serpent as an instrument of deception. (Have spirits access to the bodies of animals and men? The New Testament asserts that they have, and our modern necromancers the spiritists, who commonly deny the fall of man, are constrained to agree with us here). Allowed to use no nobler creature, Satan, called from this fact "that old serpent, the devil," proceeds to tempt the woman as the weaker and more unsuspecting of the newly created pair, and then attacks Adam through his wife.

Satan began with the expression of surprise in order to evoke distrust of the divine goodness. By the addition—neither shall ye touch it—which Eve makes to the divine command, she shows that the poison injected has begun its work. Thus Satan challenges the divine veracity, charges God with envy of His creature's happiness, and incites her to emulate the divine greatness. He



first aims a death blow at filial confidence in God, then removes the fear of punishment from her path, and at length fires the soul with ambition's lust. Thus tempted, Eve looked upon the tree, admired its beauty and desired its fruit. "And lust, when it had conceived, brought forth sin." She eat, and as so often since, the victim became the tempter, she gave unto her husband, and he did eat with her. But Adam was not deceived. With clear knowledge, he used his freedom to disobey God. Then were their eyes opened indeed. The eyes of their mind to see their sin. The eyes of their body to see their nakedness. They knew good and evil—the former by its loss, the latter by disastrous experience. The soul alienated from God is already dead in sin, and now separated from the tree of life, the body, possessing no natural immortality, must go on its way to death. Their children, by the laws of hereditary descent, become partakers of a like nature, alienated from God, and disorganized by sin, with conscience, the voice of God, speaking within and testifying of their evil deeds. Covered with shame and burdened with a sense of degradation, they made to themselves aprons. Filled with a dread of God's displeasure, induced by a sense of guilt, they seek to hide from His presence, sure sign that the soul's life was lost.

But God cannot give them up. Though they have forsaken Him, He will not forsake them. He seeks them out, and constrains them to enter His presence. He questions them in order to convince them of sin, and to get them openly to confess their guilt, for without this it is not possible to do them real good. Into the miserable scene of extenuation and prevarication we need not enter. Each casts the blame

upon another, and indirectly casts it upon God. But the inquiry ends with the confession of guilt on the part of both. Then the Judge proceeds to pronounce sentence.

Condemnation first issues against the serpent, and because it was but an instrument the words include a heavier sentence against "that old serpent, the Devil," who had used its powers for evil. It is cursed above all cattle, condemned to continue a crawler upon the earth for all time, and compelled from this fact to eat some portion of dust with all its food. Enmity is set up between it and the beguiled woman, between its seed and her seed, and the mode in which that enmity will be displayed is then declared.

But the punishment goes beyond the instrument to him who had used its powers. Satan is condemned henceforth to carry out his purposes in the same sly, mean, sneaking manner in which he made his first attack. He is condemned in all his works to constant humiliation and disgrace. The crowning illustration of this condemnation is found in the crucifixion of Jesus. That was especially Satan's work. He inspired the Jews with purposes of murder, for he was a murderer from the beginning. He entered into Judas, and thus brought about the betrayal. But the engineer was hoist with his own petard. He gained his purpose, and in it was made to lick the dust. Christ's death was the death of death, and the overthrow of Satan's kingdom. For Christ was that seed of the woman promised, and the seed of the serpent are such as those to whom our Lord addressed the words, "ye are of your father the Devil." The prophecy has been well explained by Luther: "Christ crushes the Serpent's head, *i.e.*, his kingdom of



death, sin, and hell. The devil bites Him in the heel, *i.e.*, he slays and tortures Him and His in the body."

The judgment passes over to the woman. For her is the endless multiplicity of sorrows in the womanly calling, and the manifold sexual pains of the womanly destiny, and added thereto a constant dependence upon man, and subordination to him.

In the case of Adam the indictment precedes the sentence. His crime was twofold. He had been led by his wife to sin. He had disobeyed his Maker. For this the ground is to become the instrument of discipline, and sorrow is to be his portion in life. Thorns and thistles are to be the spontaneous production of the earth. Herbs of the field instead of the fruits of paradise are to form his sustenance. Food is to be obtained only by hard and continuous labour. The death of the body, the wages of that sin (the death of the soul already experienced) is to follow in its time. Then, as it will be in the last judgment, so was it in the first, when sentence is pronounced the culprits are speechless.

Yet even here God's kindness towards man is seen. He distinctly and avowedly takes man's part against the tempter, and promises a final and decisive victory over him. And because there could be for our race no greater evil than an indestructible life of misery and sin, He places a guard upon the tree of life, lest man should eat thereof and live for ever. This is the history as given in the chapter before us.

Now, is this history corroborated by the facts of human life? If these many particulars all find their correspondences in the world within and around us, and if no other clear and intelligible account can be given to explain these corresponding facts, are we not

justified in concluding that the key which fits all the intricacies of the lock does so because it really belongs to it? That the narrative meets all the circumstances because it is the true account of them?

The record states that man's fall was followed by a sense of shame in nakedness, by the dread of God on account of guilt, and by a general disorganisation of man's moral nature; and that these were further followed by special curses pronounced upon the various agents in the transgression. Our inquiry is—Are these experiences common to the race? Are these curses being accomplished?

The sense of shame in nakedness is common to the race of man. We find no trace of it in any other creature. If the other creatures are clothed, it is only for protection, flight, or beauty; otherwise they are all naked, and are not ashamed. Man stands at the head of creation. His form is distinguished for majesty, as that of woman for beauty. The masterpieces of human art, of sculpture, or of painting are but poor copies of the human body. Yet no community, however infidel or beautiful, could endure to live in absolute nudity for a single day. In all ages public nudity has been synonymous with public disgrace. Even the semi-nakedness of fashion or theatrical display is condemned by the public conscience. Whence has this over-mastering instinct for clothing come? It is not for warmth, for it is found in the sunniest lands, and the savage inhabitants of the torrid zone when they become civilised clothe themselves afresh. Let the infidel explain this fact. There is no other solution possible than that of the book before us\*.

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\* This argument is more fully elaborated by the Rev. E. White in the Merchant Lectures for 1883.



Then we are told that the dread of God in man was caused by the consciousness of sin. Is this not so at the present day? Is it not a matter of universal experience that men instinctively turn from God through the sense of guilt and fear of punishment. Or in the case of those who seek His face is not the same fact attested by the universality of sacrifice.

The fall of man was accompanied by the disorganization of his moral nature. Is the nature of man thus disorganized? Is it so universally? What are the facts? On all sides we hear lamentations over the discord in man's nature, and it is the very best of our race who are the loudest in their expressions of grief. Evil shows itself in the child before education and training can operate. Who can remember his first sin? still less can we recall the first sinful thought. Did you ever know an infant grow up to manhood without sinning? Did any man ever know such? History and self-consciousness alike testify that this disorganisation is universal. Even the heathen Horace declares that "no man is born without vices." If you knew a family of which the individuals one after another fell a prey to consumption, would you not say that it was a consumptive family? So when we see that all the individuals of the race of man, generation after generation, fall into sin, are we not justified in saying that the race is sinful—possessor of a disorganised moral nature? What explanation of this fact—the universal sinfulness of men—can be given other than the Scripture account of his fall?

We may rapidly question the facts accordant with the curse.

Does the serpent continue to go upon its belly? Is it compelled to eat dust with its food? Is there

enmity between it and the woman specially? between its seed and her seed?

Does the devil crawl and creep in all his goings? Is he compelled by meanness, trickery and craft to seek the accomplishment of his horrid purposes? In these attempts is he constantly defeated, compelled to lick the dust? Was there enmity between him and the woman? Between Christ, the woman's seed, and all the serpent brood? Did the devil bruise Christ's heel? Has Christ, through death, destroyed him that had the power of death?

Are the sorrows of woman increased by the multitude of petty cares which press upon her? Are the pangs of maternity proverbial? Does the woman's feeling of want and dependence attach her strongly to her husband? And does she commonly find in him a hard and severe master?

Is the ground the instrument of sharp discipline for man who tills it? Is it true that man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward? Does the earth bring forth thorns and thistles spontaneously? Did you ever hear of a farmer who could grow corn without weeds? Does man win his food from the earth by hard and continuous labour? In the sweat of his face does he eat bread? And lastly, is death the common lot of all?

The scripture narrative and that alone solves all these problems of our human life. We are left to choose for ourselves whether or no we will accept this, the only fitting key to all the aspirations of man's external and internal life. If it be refused or destroyed the history of man becomes a labyrinth, without entrance or exit.

Further, the traditions of all nations confirm this record. With variations in detail they all affirm



that man's earlier was his better condition. Even Voltaire was constrained to acknowledge that "the fall of man was the foundation of nearly all the ancient religions." Dr. Kitto, after referring to many of these traditions, concludes that "the nations embodied in these traditions their remembrances of paradise, of the fall, and of the promised salvation." It would require much evidence to overthrow this widely extended belief of the ancient nations, and not a particle of such evidence has ever been adduced.

But take the lowest ground of all. Accept this record with its attendant promise as a mere theory. It forms a good working hypothesis whereby the manifold evils of life are overcome. It leads to a realised reconciliation with God and to victory in the conflict with sin. We accept the testimony of two witnesses in a court of justice. From every land where the Gospel has been proclaimed, and from every rank of life, thousands spring forward with glad alacrity to testify "We know that we have passed from death unto life." "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Could this testimony be so clear and uniform if the record were false? "A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit."

We come now to objections. It was stated recently that while sin, suffering, and evil are admitted to be in the world, these are but lower forms of good, as will be manifest some hundreds of years hence. The prophecy was repeated in substance as follows:—"Evolution shows that man is a risen and not a fallen creature, and this will be seen a thousand years hence." It was an easy thing to say, and, like many similar statements, would not have been

said if the lecturer had not counted upon the ignorance of his hearers and the credulity of unbelief. He rejected the prophecies of the Bible, and turned prophet himself, and found many to applaud him. The fact is significant. However, he invited his hearers to judge from the past, and I hope that they did so, for the experience of the past six thousand years ought to give us some idea of what may be expected during the next thousand, if the world last so long. That experience is all adverse to the theory propounded. Where, apart from Christianity, has this progression (he would call it evolution) from sin to holiness been found? Do we find it among the savage races? Is it seen in the aborigines of this country, in the negroes of Africa, or in the Indians of America? Is it found in the Chinese or the Lascars who visit these shores? Was it found under the civilisations of ancient Egypt, Greece, or Rome? or is it visible amongst the people, whether individuals or communities, who have thrown off the restraints of Christianity and the belief in the fall of man? Let France during the Reign of Terror, or Paris under the Commune, speak. If history testify anything, it is in direct opposition to that which the lecturer wished his hearers to believe.

Having declared that all things material and moral are but the outworking of an innate power originally existent in incandescent matter; in short, that without requiring a God, we may trace all things to evolution, he went on to say that "scientific men are all agreed that evolution is a fact." The statement is amusing for its audacity. Permit a man to manufacture his facts and he may reach any conclusion he desires. Professors Virchow, Barrande, Dana, and Max Muller, to say nothing of Agassiz,



Clerk-Maxwell, Stokes, Beale, and many, very many others, have some claims to be regarded as scientific men. Most persons who are qualified to judge would class them as stars of the first magnitude in the scientific sky. Yet not one of them has expressed himself otherwise than doubtful or disbelieving in the modern teaching upon the subject. Huxley, Lindall, and Asa Gray, who do believe in it, do not assert that it is a fact. They all speak of it as an hypothesis. At the last annual meeting of the Victoria Philosophical Institute, London, held in June, the report stated that "during the session a careful analysis had been undertaken by Professor Stokes, F.R.S., Sir J. R. Bennett, vice-pres. R.S., Professor Beale, F.R.S., and others of the various theories of evolution, and it was reported that, as yet, no scientific evidence had been met with giving countenance to the theory that man had been evolved from a lower order in animals, and Professor Virchow had declared that there was a complete absence of any fossil type of a lower stage in the development of man; and that any positive advance in pre-historic anthropology has actually removed us farther from proofs of such connection—namely, with the rest of the animal kingdom. In this Professor Barrande, the great palæontologist, had concurred, declaring that in none of his investigations had he found any one fossil species develop into another. In fact, it would seem that no scientific man had yet discovered a link between man and the ape, between fish and the frog, or between the vertebrate and the invertebrate animals; further, there was no evidence of any one species, fossil or other, losing its peculiar characteristics to acquire new ones belonging to other species; for instance, however similar the dog to the wolf, there was no

connecting link, and among extinct species the same was the case; there was no gradual passage from one to another. Moreover, the first animals that existed on the earth were by no means to be considered as inferior or degraded." Max Müller declares "there is between the whole animal kingdom on the one side, and man, even in his lowest state, on the other, a barrier which no animal has ever crossed, and that barrier is language! By no effort of the understanding, by no stretch of the imagination, can I explain to myself how language could have grown out of anything which animals possess, even if granted millions of years for that purpose." With such witnesses as these, and the negation which past history gives, we may safely leave the so-called argument from evolution.

Another objection alleged amounted in substance to this: "Evil exists—we do not know how a good God could permit evil to exist—therefore there is no God, or else He is not good." This argument is based upon our ignorance, a very unsafe foundation indeed. The lecturer accepted the former alternative conclusion "There is no God!" and was blissfully unconscious that he was contradicting himself, when in another part of his lecture he said that "it," the course of nature, "was going on as it was intended from the first." If it was intended from the first, there must have been, from the first, One who was able to intend—One who did intend, a living, personal force—an all-powerful, thinking being—God.

But God has not thought good to tell us why He has chosen to create races of free spiritual intelligences. Possibly, if He had told us, the necessary limitations of the powers of a finite creature would have kept us from comprehending the reasons of an



infinite mind. Certainly our ignorance answers the good purpose of testing our faith in Him. We are certain that sin cannot have proceeded from God, because He is the holy and beneficent One. It cannot have arisen from the nature of our body, or matter, or the like, because these are all from God. Hence it must have arisen from man himself, from his own free act, and was a fall from original purity and innocence. But let it be granted that God's holiness permitted the existence of moral agents in the universe (and what would the universe be without man or angel?), then nothing less than a succession of miracles could prevent the necessary consequences of their actions. How was it possible to create such without endowing them with freedom? Can there be morality without the possibility of the opposite? Could a free agent be formed who should not be free?—free to do wrong as well as to do right? Is it said God foresaw? Man need as little sin because God foresaw, as the child need stumble because the mother forewarns. Is God almighty? He does not give up His own omnipotence when he gives freedom which He can limit at any moment for a sufficient reason. Does this make God the author of sin? God has not willed that there should be sin, but only that man should be really free—free even to sin. Only the possibility of sin, and not its reality, is from God. If that possibility were not permitted, then were it impossible that moral agents could exist in the universe of God. That universe would then be but a gigantic machine or a splendid toy. The origin of evil has always been the problem of the human mind, and no simpler solution has ever been given than that which we find in Holy Scripture. The enigma of man is then first

solved when we admit the original better condition of man—that the head of the race is a dethroned king rather than a properly developed animal.

There are some who urge that there could be no great harm in plucking a little fruit, and that the punishment was altogether disproportionate to the offence. Such persons forget that the act involved all sin. It exhibited unbelief, disobedience to God, revolt from His dominion and rebellion against His authority. The prohibition was the test of man's allegiance to God, and if the matter of the prohibition was small then the temptation to disobey was equally small. The smaller the temptation the greater were the guilt, folly, and ingratitude of the transgression. Originally in harmony with God's mind and will, we find man misconceiving God's love, suspecting His purpose, and rejecting His command. He takes his future into his own hands, and fashions it for himself out of the way of disobedience to God. It is plain that the whole disposition of his heart was changed. He had left the child-like relation to God, freed himself from God, and forsaking Him had travelled into the far country of alienation and sin. What wonder that such misery resulted.

Geology tells us that death was in the world before man's advent upon earth, and it is urged, therefore, that death cannot be the result of sin. If this objection mean that the death of man is not the result of sin, we are prepared to dispute it. If there had been no death at all previous to Adam, the penalty attached to transgression would have had little meaning for him, and the threat would thus have lost much of its force. But death was clearly not the absolute, inevitable des-



tiny of man. That his body was formed from the dust rendered it possible, but by the spirit which God had breathed into him, Adam was raised above the fundamental law of the animal world. The tree of life in the garden was his preservative from the law of death. There are those who think that had Adam not sinned, he would without death have been raised to a higher sphere. Certainly Enoch and Elijah were translated without seeing death, and we know that in the future "we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump."

The principal objections to the scripture account of the fall of man have been now considered. All others are small in comparison with these. We have seen that these are as nothing compared with the difficulties which beset the path of him who rejects the narrative. It remains to point out that our trial on earth is similar in principle to the trial of Adam. God showed him kindness, filled his cup with blessings, looked for faith, and demanded obedience, the fruit of faith. So it is with us. God commendeth His love toward us by the gift of His Son. He requires us to believe and to prove our faith by loving obedience to all His will. In both cases unbelief is followed by ruin.

The question which common sense has to answer about the whole matter is intensely practical. If I am seriously ill, wisdom postpones the inquiry "How did this sickness come?" to the more important question for the time "How may the disease be overcome?" lest that disease should run its course, and health be lost for ever. Look at the facts of the case as they are present in the experience of every man. My conscience testifies that I am a sinner.

"I have left undone the things which I ought to have done, and I have done the things which I ought not to have done." I possess a sinful principle within, "for the good that I would I do not, and the evil that I would not that do I." Is there any salvation from this death? And if so where may salvation be found? The history answers. In the seed of the woman is God's remedy for the world's misery. "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him." "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven whereby we must be saved." His command runs—"Look unto Me all ye ends of the earth, and be ye saved." His promises are: "If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or not." "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." To the testimony of every true believer we affix our own seal. We speak from personal experience when we say that we know these promises are true.

