**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**GENESIS-002. HOW SIN CAME IN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And He said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? and the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the Lord God said onto the serpent. Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field: upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."*

*Genesis 3:1-15*

It is no part of my purpose to enter on the critical questions connected with the story of the fall. Whether it is a legend, purified and elevated, or not, is of less consequence than what is its moral and religious significance, and that significance is unaffected by the answer to the former question. The story presupposes that primitive man was in a state of ignorant innocence, not of intellectual or moral perfection, and it tells how that ignorant innocence came to pass into conscious sin. What are the stages of the transition?

**I.** There is the presentation of inducement to evil. The law to which Adam is to be obedient is in the simplest form. There is restriction. Thou shalt not is the first form of law, and it is a form congruous with the undeveloped, though as yet innocent, nature ascribed to him. The conception of duty is present, though in a very rudimentary shape. An innocent being may be aware of limitations, though as yet not knowing good and evil. With deep truth the story represents the first suggestion of disobedience as presented from without. No doubt, it might have by degrees arisen from within, but the thought that it was imported from another sphere of being suggests that it is alien to true manhood, and that, if brought in from without, it may be cast out again. And the temptation had a personal source. There are beings who desire to draw men away from God. The serpent, by its poison and its loathly form, is the natural symbol of such an enemy of man. The insinuating slyness of the suggestions of evil is like the sinuous gliding of the snake, and truly represents the process by which temptation found its way into the hearts of the first pair, and of all their descendants. For it begins with casting a doubt on the reality of the prohibition. Hath God said? is the first parallel opened by the besieger. The fascinations of the forbidden fruit are not dangled at first before Eve, but an apparently innocent doubt is filtered into her ear. And is not that the way in which we are still snared? The reality of moral distinctions, the essential wrongness of the sin, is obscured by a mist of sophistication. There is no harm in it steals into some young man's or woman's mind about things that were forbidden at home, and they are half conquered before they know that they have been attacked. Then comes the next besieger's trench, much nearer the wall--namely, denial of the fatal consequences of the sin: Ye shall not surely die, and a base hint that the prohibition was meant, not as a parapet to keep from falling headlong into the abyss, but as a barrier to keep from rising to a great good; for God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods. These are still the two lies which wile us to sin: It will do you no harm, and You are cheating yourselves out of good by not doing it.

**II.** Then comes the yielding to the tempter. As long as the prohibition was undoubted, and the fatal results certain, the fascinations of the forbidden thing were not felt. But as soon as these were tampered with, Eve saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes. So it is still. Weaken the awe-inspiring sense of God's command, and of the ruin that follows the breach of it, and the heart of man is like a city without walls, into which any enemy can march unhindered. So long as God's Thou shalt not, lest thou die rings in the ears, the eyes see little beauty in the sirens that sing and beckon. But once that awful voice is deadened, they charm, and allure to dally with them.

In the undeveloped condition of primitive man temptation could only assail him through the senses and appetites, and its assault would be the more irresistible because reflection and experience were not yet his. But the act of yielding was, as sin ever is, a deliberate choice to please self and disobey God. The woman's more emotional, sensitive, compliant nature made her the first victim, and her greatest glory, her craving to share her good with him whom she loves, and her power to sway his will and acts, made her his temptress. As the husband is, the wife is, says Tennyson; but the converse is even truer: As the wife is, the man is.

**III.** The fatal consequences came with a rush. There is a gulf between being tempted and sinning, but the results of the sin are closely knit to it. They come automatically, as surely as a stream from a fountain. The promise of knowing good and evil was indeed kept, but instead of its making the sinners like gods, it showed them that they were like beasts, and brought the first sense of shame. To know evil was, no doubt, a forward step intellectually; but to know it by experience, and as part of themselves, necessarily changed their ignorant innocence into bitter knowledge, and conscience awoke to rebuke them. The first thing that their opened eyes saw was themselves, and the immediate result of the sight was the first blush of shame. Before, they had walked in innocent unconsciousness, like angels or infants; now they had knowledge of good and evil, because their sin had made evil a part of themselves, and the knowledge was bitter.

The second consequence of the fall is the disturbed relation with God, which is presented in the highly symbolical form fitting for early ages, and as true and impressive for the twentieth century as for them. Sin broke familiar communion with God, turned Him into a fear and a dread, and sent the guilty pair into ambush. Is not that deeply and perpetually true? The sun seen through mists becomes a lurid ball of scowling fire. The impulse is to hide from God, or to get rid of thoughts of Him. And when He is felt to be near, it is as a questioner, bringing sin to mind. The shuffling excuses, which venture even to throw the blame of sin on God (the woman whom Thou gavest me), or which try to palliate it as a mistake (the serpent beguiled me), have to come at last, however reluctantly, to confess that I did the sin. Each has to say, I did eat. So shall we all have to do. We may throw the blame on circumstances, weakness of judgment, and the like, while here, but at God's bar we shall have to say, Mea culpa, mea culpa.

The curse pronounced on the serpent takes its habit and form as an emblem of the degradation of the personal tempter, and of the perennial antagonism between him and mankind, while even at that first hour of sin and retribution a gleam of hope, like the stray beam that steals through a gap in a thundercloud, promises that the conquered shall one day be the conqueror, and that the woman's seed, though wounded in the struggle, shall one day crush the poison-bearing, flat head in the dust, and end forever his power to harm. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning, and the Christ was promised ere the gates of Eden were shut on the exiles.