

## Our Contributors.

### Historical Criticism V. \*

#### Genesis, chapter 3. (continued)

First, some words of explanation to remove misapprehensions.

When we speak of Genesis as a "late" book, we mean that it assumed its present form at a late date. It is part of a compilation, known now as the Hexateuch. The compilers of the Hexateuch had before them several documents of different origins and different dates. The Priest's Code, of which the first chapter of Genesis is a sample, was a late document; the Jehovistic which we are examining at present was an earlier document, composed about 850 B.C. But even the Jehovistic document is late in comparison with the traditions upon which it is based, not to compare it with the even s which it records, some of which are pre-historic.

Again, Babylonian influence, though never absent in Jewish history, was particularly strong at two periods, viz at the very beginning of their history, and at the time of the exile. The question has been raised, to which of these periods of contact are we to trace the Babylonian elements in the story of the Fall. The great majority of critics think that these elements, e.g., the serpent, the cherubim, and the flaming sword, come not from Babylon of the Exile, but from ancient Babylonia; that they belong to a tradition common to all the races of mankind, which has been worked up into different shapes by different peoples. Among these different versions, that of the Jehovist is unique. It was, as we believe, written by a Jew writing under the guidance of God's spirit, after the time of David, with a full knowledge of the history of his people, and seeing in that history the love and the goodness of God; and as he weaves together the old records, he fills them with a spiritual content such as no Egyptian, no Assyrian could give us; and in this spiritual content, we find the proof of the writer's inspiration.

Again, the word 'myth' is misunderstood. In the popular sense a myth means a nonentity, something purely imaginary. But it has also a technical sense. The first efforts of the human mind were directed to the task of explaining the phenomena of Nature, which were conceived of as spiritual forces. These first efforts to interpret the spiritual significance of the universe through the phenomena and contents of Nature, are called 'myths' or collectively, 'mythology'. Mythology is therefore the beginning of theology.

Now this third chapter is the work of a man who took the first thoughts, the myths of his people, and re-wrote them in the light of fuller knowledge, giving them a richer content but (so skilfully is it done) without destroying their primitive freshness and simplicity. It is, therefore, not to be read literally but as a poetical, symbolical, or mythological representation of moral processes, a pictorial history or epic of the inner life.

The interest of the story turns on man's

\*Notes of the fifth of a series of sermons by Rev. G. M. Milligan, D.D., of Old St. Andrew's Church, Toronto.

attaining to a knowledge of good and evil, and so taking the first step towards gaining a sense of the obligation to choose the good, and to reject the evil, which is the mark of a fully developed moral character.

The writer would teach us that sin is alien to man's nature. Man was innocent at the start. So sin is not something physical as the Persians thought, nor is it a limitation or defect of being as some evolutionists say. But, as this story plainly tells us, sin is a perversion of the will, the placing of self gratification before the pleasing of God. It is in the language of St. Paul "a law in the members, warring against the law of the mind."

Men have laughed at the tree. But this springs from superficial literalism. The tree does not stand for the cause of the Fall, but for the occasion of moral testing. And many occasions of moral trial are commonplace. Animalism or spirituality may be shown in such commonplace things as eating and drinking.

What lesson is there in the cherubim and the flaming sword? The word 'cherubim' seems to mean the dragon or viper of the sky. Some say that it symbolizes the sandstorms of the desert. At any rate it stands for awful doom, and so likewise does the flaming sword, which probably was suggested by the lightning. Remember that we are dealing with a childlike primitive age, whose theology took the form of mythology. We must read poetically, not literally. God saw that man had advanced to such a point that the old life would not satisfy him; he was now conscious of something lacking in himself; he would reach out after a fuller life. And lest man should seek to realize himself through the life of the flesh rather than through the life of the spirit, God has made carnal indulgences terrible. In the nightmare of the opium-eater, the delirium tremens of the drunkard, the fearful punishments of those who abuse the body in any way, we recognize the cherubim and the flaming sword. Thus He protects man from what would ruin him. The story of man's disobedience ends in the redeeming love of God.

So this chapter bears out the claim which we made for it, that it has all the characteristics of an inspired literature as set forth by Paul in 2 Tim. 4: 16, 17.

#### Notes by Nemo

At the present season the following wise, well balanced words seem to be worthy of careful consideration. They are taken from "Social Aspects of Christianity" by the late Dr. B. F. Westcott.

We turn then to the problems of our own age and country and ask how we can meet them with the help we may draw from this teaching of earlier experience. In seeking for an answer it is something that there is a general agreement as to the source of our characteristic dangers. We are suffering on all sides, and we know that we are suffering, from a tyrannical individualism. This reveals itself in social life by the pursuit of personal pleasure; in commercial life by the admission of the principle of unlimited

competition; in our theories of life by the acceptance of material standards of prosperity and progress. Nor is it difficult to see why this should be so. The silent revolution which has taken place within this century in the methods of production and distribution has terribly intensified the evils which belong to all late forms of civilisation. The "great industries" have cheapened luxuries and stimulated the passion for them. They have destroyed the human fellowship of craftsman and chief. They have degraded trade, in a large degree, into speculation. They have deprived labour of its thoughtful freedom and turned men into "hands." They have given capital a power of dominion and growth perilous above all to its possessor.

So it has come to pass that in our fierce conflicts we are in peril of guiding our conduct by a theory of rights and not by a confession of duties; of losing life in the search for the means of living; of emptying it meanwhile of everything which gives dignity to manhood, though stripped of the accidents of outward dress, and hope to sorrow, though it must be borne in loneliness even to the end. We need therefore in order that we may hold our faith erect in our day of trial to deepen in ourselves the sense of responsibility. We need to show to the world the reality of spiritual power. We need to gain and to exhibit an idea which satisfies the thoughts, the aspirations, the aims of men straining towards the light.

1. We need, I say, to deepen in ourselves the sense of responsibility, the sense of responsibility proportioned to our endowments. The first words attributed to man born outside the Paradise of God, are words which disclose the secret of all social evil. "Am I," said the earliest murderer, "my brother's keeper?" And the answer came from the unfruitful earth, silent witness of the deed of violence; came from the soul filling with remorse the fugitive who could not flee from himself.

Yes; and the same answer must come as often as the thoughtless, the self-indulgent, the idle, propose the question now. We are our brothers' keepers even as they are ours; and unless we accept the charge the scene of our toil and the inexorable sovereign of our hearts will condemn us to unsatisfied desires.

But let us not be mistaken. What we need is a grave sense of responsibility, and not that generous impulsiveness which is swayed this way and that by successive courses of suffering; we cannot with impunity treat the miseries, the crimes, the vices of men, as excitements, spectacles, tragedies, to stir our emotions. They are our grief, our reproach, our shame, because we too are men; and as men we must take them to ourselves. They cry to us with the voice of an awakened conscience, which knows the temptations with which we have dallied and the safeguards by which we have been protected. They bid us ask with persistent resolution till some reply is gained, what means for us that tending of the leper by Francis of Assisi which was for him the revelation of the Lord? What means for us that a peal of Geo. Fox to the drunken rustic which was for him the revelation of the Light, the true Light which lighteth every man?

2. We need to quicken our sense of responsibility and we need also to shew to the world the reality of spiritual forces.