

earliest one in the history of man's redemption. The story of original sin is a very difficult one, thanks, no doubt, in a great degree, to Milton's *Paradise Lost*; but what if that story is to be understood as the representation of a moral fact, and as illustrating the condition of man under the consciousness of sin? The immediate effect of sin is to shut man out from the enjoyment of that true spiritual condition which is expressed by access to the tree of life. The whole history of man illustrates the truth of this condition—all heathen worship has been a fruitless attempt to regain a lost inheritance, or, at all events, an inheritance which is felt to be within the grasp of man if he could but lay hold of it. The altar to the unknown God is but one instance of the same inability to get at the object which, though earnestly desired, is felt to be unattainable. Not seldom this inability assumes to itself the terrific form of a flaming sword which turns every way and effectually bars the way to the tree of life, and then the worship expresses itself in the terrible form of human sacrifices and the like; but, at all events, and as a matter of sober and solemn fact, the way into the Holiest was not made manifest either to Jew or Gentile, and neither Socrates nor Plato could rejoice in the assured favour of the living God. Now, why was this? The story of the cherubim declares it. There was an objective barrier entirely independent of all man's efforts. The way to the tree of life was not only unrevealed, but it was hopelessly and effectually barred as a simple matter of fact. But this condition was not intended to be a final one; on the contrary, it was intended to be only for a time; and the whole after course of revelation was but the gradual unfolding of the purpose and method of God in taking the barrier out of the way, and when He who was the tree of life was revealed and had accomplished that work of redemption for which He was sent, then the flaming sword in the hand of the cherubim fell from them, and they delivered up their guardianship of the way to the tree of life. And so the great truth of the Gospel is that man, as redeemed by Christ his great High Priest, has access free and full to the fountain of life which wells up in the