

ON TRIAL

To find the answer to this question, we must go back a long way—before that time, nearly six thousand years ago, when human history began—right back to the Eternal Years.

From all eternity God had lived alone; alone, but not lonely; One God in Three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. No sound broke the stillness of His Life; no events came, and went, and brought a change. He was infinitely happy; for in Himself He had all things. If there was to be life, beauty, joy, outside of Him, from Him it must come.

And God willed these things should be. He would not keep always to Himself the happiness He could share with others, but would pour it out upon creatures able to know and love and enjoy Him.

He created the Angels, noble and beautiful spirits, not made to be united to bodies.

He created man, a being in some respects more wonderful than the Angels, because of the union of an immortal spirit with a body formed of the dust of the earth. And because God saw it was not good for man to be alone, He gave him a companion worthy of him. We are now so spoiled by sin that we can form no idea of those beautiful creatures of God in their state of innocence. We have never seen anything so noble and so lovely as Adam and Eve; and what was hidden within was nobler and lovelier still. There was no darkness, nor ignorance, nor weakness. They understood the laws by which this world is governed, the secrets of Nature which men are puzzling out now bit by bit. They had no evil passions, no liking for what is wrong. Their hearts were pure and loving; their wills were strong and right.

They were perfect, then, in their human nature; but God was not yet satisfied. He loved them so much that He enriched them with a gift altogether above their nature, with a supernatural gift called sanctifying grace, which made their souls beautiful in another and far higher way, and gave them a right to see Him face to face one day. They were to pass from a fair home on earth to the one prepared for them in Heaven, not by sickness and through the gate of death, but gently and painlessly as a child is carried in its father's arms from one room to another.

Meantime He placed them in "the paradise of pleasure," a garden stored with everything that could serve them for use or enjoyment. No plants or flowers, no birds or beasts that we have ever seen can compare with those of that garden of theirs. The animals great and small revered and obeyed them, came at their call, gambolled about them, ate from their hand. All was in order there. The irrational creatures were subject to Adam and Eve, and they themselves were subject with joy and gratitude to the God who had given them all.

Here, then, in "the paradise of pleasure," the father and mother of us all were placed on trial.

Yes, on trial. For it was the Will of God that both Angels and men should have the happiness which was prepared for them increased by meriting or deserving it. Therefore He gave them free will, or the power to

choose good or evil. He loves a cheerful, loving service, and He determined that by an act of obedience His reasonable creatures should win their everlasting reward. What the trial of the Angels was we do not know. All we know is that one-third of them were unfaithful to God, and, with full knowledge of the wickedness of their act, rebelled against Him and were lost forever.

Like Adam and Eve, the Angels were created in a state of sanctifying grace. They were very dear and precious in the sight of God. But sin is so hateful to Him, that for that one deliberate act of rebellion against Him He took from them that priceless gift of grace, and drove them from the brightness of His Presence into everlasting darkness.

But He did not take from them their natural gifts, their clear intellect, their strong will. And these they now determined to use against Him by leading into their own rebellion those favoured children of His in Paradise. Thus it was more hatred of God than envy of these heirs of Heaven that led Satan to plan the destruction of Adam and Eve. It would never do to tempt them openly, for sin had made him so ugly that they would have been frightened of him. So he disguised himself, and fitly took the form of a serpent.

See Eve in her beauty and innocence walking alone through the garden. She is supremely happy. She is the dear child of God ; she has all she can desire. Suddenly she comes upon the serpent coiled round the foot of a tree, " the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." It is a mysterious name and reminds the owners of this fair garden that God who has given it to them is Master still. For He has said:

"Of every tree of Paradise thou shalt eat. But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death."

A simple command, but a very solemn one. Disobedience to it would make them lose the grace and favour of God, and deserve His most dreadful punishments in this world and in the next. They know, then, all that depends on that tree, and never pass it without a feeling of awe.

Eve is surprised to see the serpent there and stops to look at him. The serpent begins to talk and she listens:

"Why do you not eat of the fruit of this tree ? " he asks.

Notice how he begins his first temptation as he has begun so many since, by trying to make God appear hard.

A little Spanish girl who heard this story for the first time said : "Eve should not have listened; she should have made the sign of the Cross and gone down another walk." But Eve did listen. She looked up shyly and wistfully at the tree and said:

"God hath commanded us that we should not eat, lest perhaps we die."

"Die!" answered the tempter, "no, you shall not die."

And then he makes a show of trusting her with a secret. There is always something fascinating about a secret.

Eve is curious and draws nearer.

"God doth know," he goes on, " that in what day soever you shall eat thereof your eyes shall be opened and you shall be as Gods."

This was what enticed her. It was not gluttony, but curiosity and ambition that were her ruin. To see what would happen; to be as Gods, this was what she wanted; as to the punishment she would risk it. She stretched out her hand, plucked the fruit, and ate it. Oh, what a change came over her in that moment! When Adam saw her a minute later, the blush of guilt was on her face, her peace and happiness were gone.

She told him what she had done, and at first he was shocked and terrified. At first—and then came his temptation, but in a different form from hers. She was his tempter. She used her influence with him, and his love for her to make him fall. She tempted him even with the appearance of good. " God has given us to each other; we have been so happy together; we must go together now. We must perish—if it is a case of perishing—together."

And she gave him the fruit, and he ate it. In that instant Adam fell from grace and the whole human race fell with him. Had he remained faithful, we should all have come into the world with souls beautiful and pleasing in the sight of God. We should have had our trial, but had we fallen no one would have been ruined but ourselves. Had Eve alone fallen, her sin would not have harmed us. It is because Adam is the father and the origin or head of the race that his fall has hurt us, that we are all born into this world without grace, in disgrace until by Baptism this original sin is taken away.

This is soon said, but it would need Adam and Eve themselves to tell us what it means, to make us understand how miserably unhappy they were after their sin. God used to come and walk with them in Paradise in the cool afternoon air, and they rushed forward to meet Him. Now they trembled when they heard His voice calling them. When people agree together to do wrong, they turn upon one another when the wrong is found out and they are called to account. Adam laid the blame upon Eve, Eve upon the serpent. Then came God's terrible words of punishment:

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return."

Innocence, happiness, freedom from pain and death, the possession of the paradise of pleasure—all lost and lost forever: suffering and death, and all the evils of this life let in upon the earth through them; the gates of Heaven closed, and those of Hell opened by their hands—this was what came of that one sin. For the punishment they deserved was not only the death of the body but the everlasting death of the soul. They had shared the rebellion of the bad angels ; it was just they should share their condemnation.

But God had pity on them and on us. Their sin, though great and inexcusable, was less than that of the angels. They had indeed risen up in rebellion against the Infinite God, yet not with such clear knowledge; and they had

been tempted. Moreover, each of the fallen angels had himself done the evil for which he was justly punished. But Adam's unhappy children had lost all by an act that was not their own.

Perhaps it was for these reasons that God determined to save the race of man. He could have done this by granting a free pardon to us. But to show the hatefulness of sin, and still more His exceeding love for us, He willed that we should be redeemed; that is, bought back; and that our Redeemer should be no other than His own Eternal Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, equal to the Father in all things. It was the Holy Ghost, that a full and perfect satisfaction or compensation for the evil done should be offered to God. Now, for this two things were necessary. He who was to make the satisfaction must be equal to God, or it would not be infinite and enough; and He must be man, too, because man who had sinned must satisfy for sin.

No Angel, however high, nor all Angels and men together, could make this sufficient atonement. God himself must do it if it was to be done. And God was ready. Not counting the cost, thinking only of our misery and of His own love, the Second Person offered Himself to satisfy fully for our sins—for the first or original sin, which was not our own act, but his who was the origin and father of us all, and for those sins, too, which are our own free act.

All this load of sin which men have heaped up from the beginning against the Majesty of God, which we have each of us helped to increase, the Son of God took upon Himself, to suffer for in our stead, and thus reopen for us the gates of Heaven, which otherwise would have been closed against us forever. In place of Adam who had ruined us, another Head was given us in our dear Lord Jesus Christ. He was to put all right. He was to come and live amongst us a hard, suffering Life, and then to die upon the Cross for each of us one by one. Well may the Church cry out:

"O happy fault that has had such a Redeemer!"