



THE
WORSHIP OF THE SERPENT.
PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON THE FALL OF MAN.

I. THAT man, in his present state of ignorance, infirmity and wickedness, is not the Adam of God's hand--the similitude of his Creator--the being which he was when God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," placed him in Paradise, and pronounced him "good,"--is an observation not resulting from metaphysical research, but obvious to the most simple, unlettered mind. To the truth of it responds every feeling of our nature, and every voice from the Scriptures; and whether we look into ourselves or into them, we read the same writing, indited by the same Spirit: "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not^l."

Whence then this corruption, so great, so universal? Whence this unsparing and appalling ruin? "By ONE MAN

sin entered into the world, and death by sin²." "By the offence of ONE, judgment came upon ALL MEN to condemnation³." "By ONE MAN'S disobedience, MANKIND (οἱ πολλοί) were made sinners⁴."

But consequences so ruinous as the corruption of the body and soul of all his posterity, --the dissolution of the one, and the eternal banishment of the other from the presence of GOD, --could not have resulted from the disobedience of ONE MAN, had the sin which he committed fallen short of the most aggravated which he could commit. Scripture and reason declare GOD to be "just" he would not therefore have "visited the sin of the father upon the children," had not THAT SIN been of a nature THE MOST ODIOSUS in his sight. This necessary conclusion from established premises, has induced many a well-meaning but ill-reflecting Christian to represent the history of the fall of man as AN ALLEGORY. But allegorizing Scripture is at all times a hazardous, and sometimes a dangerous, practice. It is so in the case before us: for if the narrative of the Fall be allegorical, the promise of the Redemption must be allegorical likewise, since the serpent enters personally into the one, as well as the other. But the promise of Redemption, though figuratively expressed, assumes the real agency of the Serpent in the Fall: we conclude, therefore, that not only did the serpent bring about this calamity upon man, but that he brought it about in the very manner in which it is described by the woman: "THE SERPENT beguiled me, and I did eat."

Having stated this, the sacred historian says no more; leaving it to the understanding and common sense of the children of Israel to conclude that the serpent's form must have been assumed by a spirit of extraordinary power and

malignity, the better to accomplish his object of seduction. That this powerful and malignant spirit was the Devil, we are expressly informed by St. John, who calls the dragon of the Apocalypse "that old serpent called the Devil and Satan, that deceiveth the whole world⁵." The author of the *Book of Wisdom* attributes the fall of man to the agency of the Devil: "God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity; but through envy of the Devil came death into the world⁶." St. Paul, alluding to the same event, ascribes it to the serpent: --"But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ⁷."

These incidental allusions to the agency of the Devil under the form of a serpent, are perhaps more valuable in corroborating the account of Moses, than if the whole narrative of the Fall were in so many words recapitulated by the other sacred writers: for these writers, being Jews, had no reason for enforcing the assent of their contemporaries to facts which were universally admitted. Hence incidental allusions as to a fact well known, are all that we can expect to find in the sacred writings respecting the agency of Satan and the Serpent, in the ruin of mankind. These are abundant; and from the event which they assume, arose the metaphor under which the enemies of God and the wicked are described. These are represented under the image of "a serpent⁸," "a dragon⁹," "a leviathan, a crooked serpent¹⁰," &c.; expressions which are strong presumptive evidences of the intimate connexion between the SERPENT and the EVIL SPIRIT.

Though the circumstances of the seduction and fall of man are objects of no difficulty to the faith of a Christian, yet it

must be confessed that an obscurity surrounds them, which is not easily penetrable to the rash or unreflecting. Hence some have argued that the whole is allegorical, and others have pronounced the whole to be an invention: for a sceptical mind solves every difficulty by disbelief. Against either of these opinions I will endeavour to show, that the seduction of man by the agency of the serpent is no allegory; that the fall of man by eating of the forbidden tree is no allegory: that nothing could be more natural than that Adam and Eve should fall by such a simple act: and that no method of seduction could be so effective as the one employed by Satan.

First then, let us consider THE SIN; and secondly, THE TEMPTER.

"The Lord God said unto the woman, what is this that thou hast done¹¹?"--The offence of which she had been guilty was the eating of a tree, of which GOD had said, "Thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die¹²."

Here we perceive, amidst a general indulgence, one particular restriction, and a penalty attached to the violation of it. It is argued against the probability of such a condition.

First, That the restriction is unworthy of God.

Secondly, That the punishment is more than adequate to the offence.

Both of which objections I will endeavour to answer.

1. From the narrative of Moses we learn, that at the time of this sin, Adam and his wife Eve were the only human creatures in existence--that "they twain were one flesh "--

and that they were without those natural propensities to wickedness, which now, unhappily, characterize their descendants. A positive command was given to them, under a very severe penalty in case of disobedience; and this command was, that they should not eat the fruit of a particular tree.

If, instead of so simple a command as this, they had been enjoined, like the Jews and Christians after them, to observe inviolate the Commandments of the two tables, would that have been a more reasonable injunction--more worthy of God--more suitable to the condition of Adam and Eve? We apprehend not. The injunction would have been so far unreasonable and unworthy of God, as the violation of it was impossible on the part of Adam and Eve. For being themselves the immediate work of the Creator, and maintaining with him a continual and direct communion¹³, is it possible that they could have worshipped any strange gods or idols--taken the name of GOD in vain--or by any act of irreverence profaned the Sabbath? Commandments which would restrict them from such sins as these, would have been unreasonable, and unworthy of God; for they could not be broken. The first table of the decalogue would therefore have been unnecessary; and if unnecessary, "unworthy of GOD" to ordain.

In like manner, Adam and Eve could not have violated any commandment of the second. The second table of the decalogue is for a state of society: Adam and his wife were alone. How could they, therefore, honour their father and mother, who had none? How could they commit adultery or theft against each other? How could they have borne false witness against their neighbour, or coveted his goods? And can we suppose that they would so far forget the sense of

their common interest as to kill either the other, since the commission of such a crime would have left the survivor the only creature in the universe without its kind? They would not, therefore, have committed murder, even had they known (which is doubtful) the nature and the means of death. Commandments, therefore, which would restrict them from such sins as these, would have been unreasonable, and unworthy of GOD; for they could not, by any probability, be broken. Besides, the violation of them presupposes that tendency to sin--that corruption of their nature, which did not exist in them until after the Fall.

The offence by which Adam fell must, therefore, have been a simple one: so simple, that it might be committed without inherent depravity; and yet so obnoxious to GOD, as to demand his instant and severest visitation. Now what offence can we imagine more simple, more free from innate depravity, than that of eating the fruit of a forbidden tree? The inducements to eat of it were powerful; and such as, in the absence of a prohibitory command, would have been not only natural, but laudable. It was a desire to become as intelligent as the angels: a desire which, in Adam and Eve, was natural; for by the gratification of it, they would know more of GOD and of themselves: and as "the knowledge of GOD" is perfect happiness, it was natural that they should wish to perfect their enjoyments. Springing from such an origin, the desire was sinless; and only sinful when indulged in opposition to a prohibitory command.

But this command was written by the finger of GOD upon their hearts: "Thou shalt not eat of it." And this command they violated!

Simple, of necessity. was the outward act by which they incurred the displeasure of their Maker: but the moral offence involved all the guilt which attaches to unnecessary disobedience, incredulity of GOD'S word, and defiance of his power; and under this view we may regard the sin of Adam to have been as great as if we were to violate the whole of the decalogue: for the whole commandment, which was given to them, they broke.

2. But, if the prohibition was not unworthy of the dignity of GOD, was not the punishment which followed disobedience more than adequate to the offence? Certainly not. Entire disobedience, being entire unrighteousness, is manifestly obnoxious to the severest penalty. The greatness of the punishment can prove nothing but the greatness of the sin which preceded it, when the parties concerned are man and GOD. But even had the punishment been "more than adequate to the offence," it would not have been an act of injustice to inflict it. For Adam and Eve, as they knew the means of obedience, knew the penalty which would follow disobedience; they sinned, therefore, with all the consequences of sin before them. Their eyes were sufficiently "open" to know the truth which was afterwards revealed to the children of disobedience, that "GOD is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good¹⁴?"

We see, then, that neither was the prohibition of the tree of knowledge of good and evil an unworthy condition on the part of GOD to make with Adam, nor the punishment which overtook the disobedient man too great for the offence.

But here it may be objected, upon the very principle of our argument, --if Adam committed sin in consequence of a natural instinct--a desire of enlarging his understanding--with this desire about him, prompting him to sin, --can he be said to have been created pure? And if he had not been created pure, there is no necessity for believing that he ever fell, in the peculiar manner related by Moses; for the sinfulness of man would be sufficiently accounted for by the imperfection of his origin. To this we may reply, that the desire of enlarging his understanding did not necessarily induce Adam to sin: sin was, indeed, the consequence of his indulging this desire, but not the necessary consequence. He might have indulged it by communion with GOD, instead of finding its gratification by communion with Satan. That Adam, by too great a thirst after knowledge, fell, does not prove that he was prone to sin; but it certainly does prove that he was liable to it: and while we deny the proneness, we not only admit, but maintain his liability to fall, being created, expressly, for the greatest glory of God, it follows that Adam was created with that nature which was best adapted to this purpose. He was, therefore, created pure, perfect, and free. For Omnipotence itself cannot produce a nobler being than one in God's own spiritual likeness; perfectly sinless, and perfectly a free agent. But, however free and pure, such a person cannot be without a liability to sin: for if he be without a liability, he is without responsibility, which is an attribute suited to the Creator alone, and incommunicable to a creature. It could not, therefore, be otherwise, then that Adam should have been liable, though not prone, to sin: for that would have made his nature imperfect, and anticipated the corruption which did not exist in him until after his fall. What, before the fall, was only a liability, became afterwards a proneness to sin. Had Adam been placed in Paradise in any other state, he