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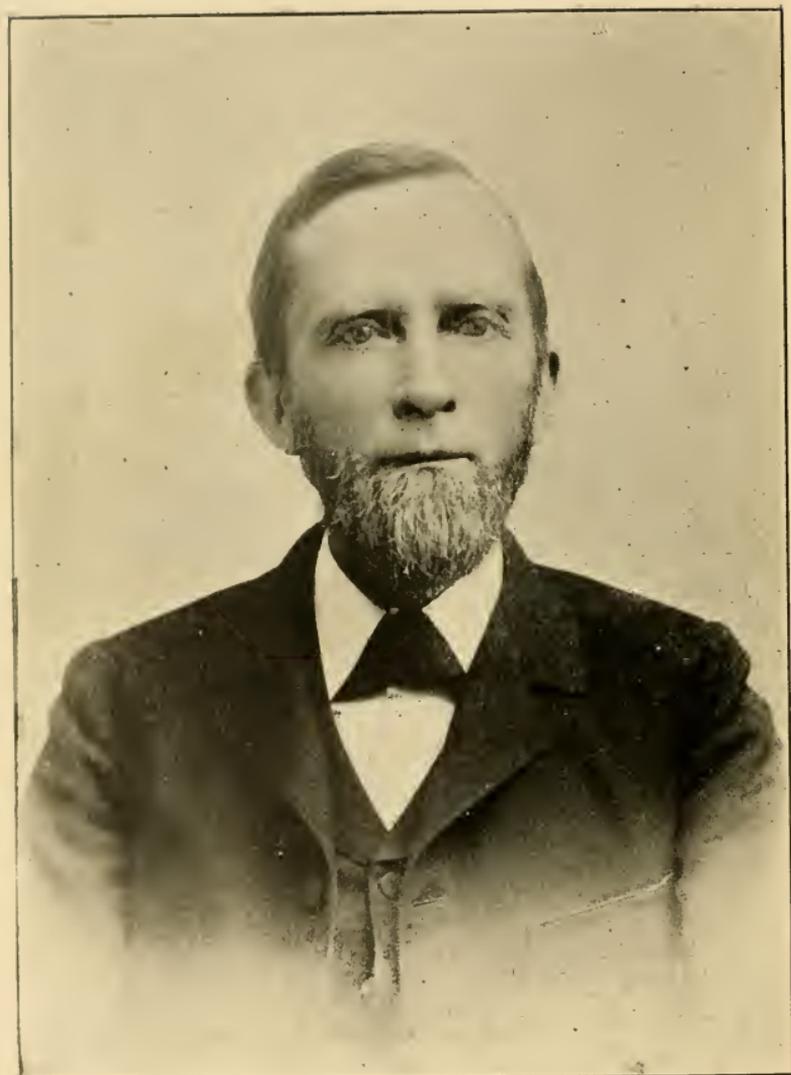
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# THE GOSPEL AS FIRST REVEALED.

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“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 iii. 15.

THIS verse, though often quoted, is seldom made the subject of public discourse. Yet, in itself and in its relation to other Scripture, it is eminently worthy of such consideration. It is the first form in which the gospel was revealed, and the germ of all subsequent revelations concerning Christ and his kingdom. We read it with the interest of an explorer who gazes into the fountain-head of some mighty river. There is, too, an advantage gained for the study of the nature of the gospel, by taking our stand at this first revelation. The plan of the Bible is not logical, as of a treatise, but historical. If we wish to study the political institutions of this country in which we live, we go back to the colonial period, and begin with the seeds and tendencies contained in the early deliverances of our fathers.

I. This first gospel was not addressed directly to Adam and Eve. That they heard it, and were saved through faith in what it announced, is not questioned. The words themselves teach that the heart of the woman was renewed. And Adam proclaimed his faith by calling his wife Eve, a name identifying her as the mother of the

seed that should bruise the serpent's head. All this is true, and yet the words of the text are a part of the address to the serpent. This is a significant fact, and calls for our consideration. It intimates the radical character and wide scope of the gospel. Adam and Eve had sinned in eating the forbidden fruit, and the divine displeasure against them for their sin was signally manifested. But the real author of the ruin wrought in the garden of Eden was the devil, who is a liar and a murderer from the beginning. (John viii. 44.) So he is first addressed, and the curse is laid upon him. The effect of the gospel is not confined to the release of the captives of the serpent, but extends to the tempter as well. The serpent's head is to be bruised. The gospel goes to the root of the matter, and makes an end of sins. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." (Hebrews ii. 14.)

II. Another circumstance that claims attention is that this first gospel is found in the bosom of a curse. The first curse and the first promise come to us in the same sentence; and the form of the utterance is the curse upon the serpent. There is more in this association than the general fact that the salvation of God's people is always attended with judgment upon their enemies. This interview in the garden follows closely upon the sin of our first parents. No one can read it and not recognize the intrinsic demerit of sin and the awful character of the retributive justice of God. God made man holy, and gave him dominion over this beautiful world. He made a covenant with man upon the easiest of terms, and gave to man the opportunity, under that covenant, of securing eternal blessedness by a brief period of obe-

dience. The tempter entered, and man fell. At once he felt in his soul both nakedness and guilt. God is just as well as merciful. Sin is death to the soul. This is the plain import of the shame and dread of Adam and Eve after they had sinned. They were now under the curse of the violated covenant of works. It is in this situation the first promise is made to them. To provide relief for their guilt and shame was the object of the first promise, so far as they were concerned. It was a promise of salvation to them through the coming seed of the woman. He was to bruise the head of the serpent, and to put enmity between him and the family of man. In accomplishing this the serpent was to bruise his heel. The deliverance was to be effected by suffering, by vicarious suffering. This much is plain from the promise itself; and that the suffering was to be expiatory in its nature was signified by the institution of sacrifice in the family of Adam. The great doctrine that without the shedding of blood there is no remission was imbedded in the gospel from the first. There was no hint to the heads of the fallen race that a great teacher, or one who should seal his testimony by his death, could save them. They were not treated as unfortunate dupes of Satan, who needed only a spectacular exhibition of self-sacrificing love to win back their hearts to the love of God. No intimation was thrown out that God, as the moral Governor of the world, must make an example of some sufferer, in order that he might not be misconstrued when he forgave sin. Nothing of all this. In fact, it is wonderful how all the false gospels that men have devised were anticipated by the first promise, and condemned in advance. The language of the New Testament reads like a commentary on the first promise: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for

it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. . . . Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." (Galatians iii. 10, 12.) "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." (Romans v. 19.)

III. Passing now from the form to the matter of this first gospel, we have an intimation of a conflict, ending in victory. The conflict is threefold. We take the features in the order of the record.

A personal conflict is first announced. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman." Literally, I am putting enmity between thee and the woman. The conflict has already begun; and having begun, it is to know no end in this world. Such seems to be the import of the phrase, "I am putting enmity." The unholy alliance between Eve and the serpent has been broken. Instead of concord there is enmity. Eve has new views, new feelings, and new purposes. A new heart has been given her. This great change is expressly said to be the work of God. In its beginning and in its progress he claims to be the author of it. It was a work of grace. And the work is done through a mediator. The context shows this. In fact, when Eve says, in Genesis iv. 1, "I have gotten a man from the Lord," she speaks as if she already *possessed* the deliverer. The Scriptures teach everywhere that two great objects were accomplished by the work of Christ, the removal of the curse due to sin, and restoration to the image and fellowship of God. The first he accomplished by his obedience to the precept and penalty of the law; the second he secures by the renewing and sanctifying power of the Holy

Spirit, purchased for his people. It would seem that Eve was the first subject of saving grace, as she had been first in the transgression. And that the evidence to herself and to others of the reign of grace in her heart was a war against the serpent. In this she is the type of all her descendants, who, like her, are renewed by the Spirit of God. There is a personal conflict for every believer with the evil one. The seat of the war is in the heart. The dominion of sin is broken by the new birth, but the seeds are not all exterminated. Satan does not yield his prey without an effort. The Saviour sustains faith and all the graces; Satan injects doubts, weakens confidence, seeks to seduce by his guile. The conflict is inevitable. It is sometimes prolonged, and it is always distressing; but it is to end in victory. Christians sometimes complain that they have not the joys of salvation. They forget that this is not the period of reward. This is the day of battle. It is not to be expected that a battle-field will be particularly a place for comfort. The great question with all of us is, are we fighting the good fight of faith? Religion has its joys even here, but its real rewards come after we have fought a good fight and have finished our course. Let us give attention to what principally concerns us here. Are we born again? Have we undergone that great change represented in Eve? Do we hate evil? There are but two classes of men upon the earth, those who are the enemies of the evil one, and those who have in them the carnal mind, which is enmity against God. It may seem strange to some that enmity can be the fruit of the grace of God, or taken as evidence of a gracious state. The thought is, God is love, and to be like him we must be full of love. Paul says, "Now abideth faith, hope, charity; but the greatest of these is charity." But it

must be remembered that the Scriptures also say, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." We have also the command, "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." The fact is, that the moral quality of our affections is determined by the objects to which they are directed. It is right to love holiness, it is wrong to hate holiness. It is right to hate evil, it is wrong to love evil. We can never love God too ardently; we can never hate the evil one excessively. A heart that does not love God is not pure; a heart that does not hate evil is corrupt. Possibly there is a suggestion in the text that the best evidence of a renewed state is enmity to the devil and his works. The enmity is certainly represented as progressing. The statement, "I am putting enmity," sounds very much like our Lord's language about the leaven. It was put in the meal, where it worked till the whole was leavened. Such a settled and growing enmity to sin harmonizes well with the precept to avoid in the life the very appearance of evil. If such is the state of the heart, there can be no yearning after worldly conformity, and self-denial will be habitual. The thought of the heart will be, how can we be delivered from the evils of our nature; rather than, how near may we live to the world and yet escape its doom!

A general conflict is next proclaimed. I am putting enmity "between thy seed and her seed." That this is a conflict distinct from the one mentioned in the last clause of the verse is clear, because there the parties are the serpent himself and the seed of the woman. Who are the parties to this general conflict? To limit the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent so as to make the conflict nothing more than the mutual antipathy between all men and literal serpents is puerile.

The seed of the woman, in the strict sense, is Christ. So Paul says expressly, in Galatians iii. 16. But in saying so he speaks of Christ as the head of the body of believers. That the word "seed" is used in a secondary sense is clear both from the Old Testament and the New Testament. The two lines of descent from Adam, through Cain and through Seth, indicate the import of the phrases "seed of the woman" and "seed of the serpent." The first is the ungodly line, in which is found polygamy and murder. The second is the line of life, spiritual life. In John viii. 44, Jesus said to the wicked Jews, "Ye are of your father the devil." And in his interpretation of the parable of the tares he said, "The good seed are the children of the kingdom. But the tares are the children of the wicked one." It is plain that the parties to this general conflict are two sections of the descendants of Eve. Satan set up a kingdom in this world when he triumphed in Eden. He is called the god of this world, and he is the head of an organized conspiracy of evil. Christ's people are also an organized host, going forth under his leadership to conquer this world. For six thousand years this mighty conflict has been waged. The battle has been fierce, as well as long. Beginning with righteous Abel under the Old Testament, and again with holy Stephen under this dispensation, the church has her roll of martyrs to the truth. And yet victory is certain. In these last days we see the promise of approaching triumph. The church of God confronts the kingdom of darkness in every quarter of the earth. It was my privilege once to witness a review of a great army. Stretching across a broad plain in double lines, composed of strong men with brave hearts, the burnished arms flashing in the sunlight, while the waving banners mark the various organizations—the sight

was inspiring to the heart of a patriot. In a moment, however, my mind reverted to the church, and I felt the force of the exclamation, "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners!" Brethren, are we good soldiers of Christ? Do we sympathize with the purposes of our great teacher? Are we obedient to orders, patient under discipline and present for duty? Are we sustaining the church at home and abroad?

Last of all, we have the announcement of a special conflict. "He shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." The parties here are Christ and the devil. That Christ is intended has always been the faith of the church; and for it there is good reason. He is identified, as we have seen, by the Apostle Paul as the "seed" of the woman. The term did not begin with Abraham and the covenant with him, to which the apostle refers. It had its introduction in the Eden gospel. From the mother of the race it descended, narrowing as it went, to Abraham and then to David's line, and was fulfilled in Christ. Besides this, why is he the seed of Eve and not of Adam? In the covenant of works Adam was the party made prominent. And so it was in the case of Noah, of Abraham, and of David. There must have been some peculiar sense in which the word "seed" was used in this first promise—a sense like that realized in the son of Mary. And still further, it is only at this feature of the conflict that victory is proclaimed. The result of the personal and the general conflict is not stated. The victor comes in at the special conflict, not only triumphing gloriously over the great enemy of God and man, but reflecting triumph back upon the Christian conflict, both in its individual and general aspect. He is represented as a person, as the son of the woman, and as the con-

queror of the devil; a true man, and yet more than a man. The voice of prophecy continued to hold up the coming seed of the woman to the faith of the ancient church as a mighty conqueror. The apostles proclaimed that the risen Saviour had assailed principalities and powers. The authors of the life of our Lord represent him as specially engaged in conflict with the devil at the opening and the close of his public ministry. All the guile of the tempter was brought into play in the assault in the wilderness, and all his malice and power in Gethsemane and on Calvary. This world has no other battle-field like these. The serpent had power to bruise his heel. This does not denote the slight injury supposed by some. A gallant officer, a friend of mine, received a Minie ball in the heel, by a flanking column, in one of the great battles of the late war between the States. Hearing of it, I inquired about it of the surgeons. They said, "Not necessarily fatal, but serious." The heel, they said, had so many bones that a wound there was serious. And so it was. He suffered much and long, but lives to-day to be elected for the third time to the Senate of the United States. What the Saviour of sinners endured in the garden and on the cross no heart can conceive. But the victory was never for a moment doubtful; and it was thorough and complete. He bruised the serpent's *head*. Through death he destroyed him that had the power of death. And now, my hearer, is not this enough? May I not ask you to look to this victorious sufferer and live! He had no battle of his own to fight, he entered the lists as our friend. He met our enemy and overcame him for us. He has the right in view of his triumph to say, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He said in anticipation of his death, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Shall it not be true of you?