

CHAPTER XXXV

THE ORIGIN AND DESTINY OF MAN

1. Of all created beings man alone possesses the power of self-determination; he assigns his destiny to himself. While he endeavors to find the object of all other things and even of his own existence in the world, he finds his own purpose within himself. Star and stone, plant and beast fulfill their purpose in the whole plan of creation by their existence and varied natures, and are accordingly called "good" as they are. Man, however, realizes that he must accomplish his purpose by his manner of life and the voluntary exertion of his own powers. He is "good" only as far as he fulfills his destiny on earth. He is not good by mere existence, but by his conduct. Not what he is, but what he ought to be gives value to his being. He is good or bad according to the direction of his will and acts by the imperative: "I ought" or "I ought not," which comes to him in his conscience, the voice of God calling to his soul.

2. The problem of human destiny is answered by Judaism with the idea that God is the ideal and pattern of all morality. The answer given, then, is "To walk in the ways of God, to be righteous and just," as He is.¹ The prophet Micah expressed it in the familiar words: "It has been told thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord doth require of thee: Only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."² Accordingly the Bible considers men of the older generations the prototypes of moral conduct, "right-

¹ Gen. XVIII, 19; Deut. VIII, 6; X, 12; XXXII, 4. ² Micah VI, 8.

eous men who walked with God." Such men were Enoch, Noah, and above all Abraham, to whom God said: "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be thou whole-hearted. And I will make My covenant between thee and Me."¹ The rabbis singled out Abraham as the type of a perfect man on account of his love of righteousness and peace; contrasting him with Adam who sinned, they beheld him as "the great man among the heroes of the ancient times." They even considered him the type of true humanity, in whom the object of creation was attained.²

3. This moral consciousness, however, which tells man to walk in the ways of God and be perfect, is also the source of shame and remorse. With such an ideal man must feel constantly that he falls short, that he is not what he ought to be. Only the little child, who knows nothing as yet of good and evil, can preserve the joy of life unmarred. Similarly, primitive man, being ignorant of guilt, could pass his days without care or fear. But as soon as he becomes conscious of guilt, discord enters his soul, and he feels as if he had been driven from the presence of God.

This feeling is allegorized in the Paradise legend. The garden of bliss, half earthly, half heavenly, which is elsewhere called the "mountain of God,"³ a place of wondrous trees, beasts, and precious stones, whence the four great rivers flow, is the abode of divine beings. The first man and woman could dwell in it only so long as they lived in harmony with God and His commandments. As soon as the tempter in the shape of the serpent called forth a discord between the divine will and human desire, man could no longer enjoy celestial bliss, but must begin the dreary earthly life, with its burdens and trials.

¹ Gen. V, 22; VI, 9; XVII, 1-2.

² Gen. R. XII, 8; XIV, 6, ref. to Josh. XIV, 15.

³ Ezek. XXVIII, 14.

4. This story of the fall of the first man is an allegorical description of the state of childlike innocence which man must leave behind in order to attain true strength of character. It is based upon a view common to all antiquity of a descent of the race; that is: first came the golden age, when man led a life of ease and pleasure in company with the gods; then an age of silver, another of brass, and finally the iron age, with its toil and bitter woe. Thus did evil deeds and wild passions increase among men. This view fails utterly to recognize the value of labor as a civilizing force making for progress, and it contradicts the modern historical view. The prophets of Israel placed the golden age at the end, not the beginning of history, so that the purpose of mankind was to establish a heavenly kingdom upon the earth. In fact, the fall of man is not referred to anywhere in Scripture and never became a doctrine, or belief, of Judaism. On the contrary, the Hellenistic expounders of the Bible take it for granted that the story is an allegory, and the book of Proverbs understands the tree of life symbolically, in the verse: "She (the Torah) is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her."¹

5. Still the rabbis in Talmud and Midrash accepted the legend in good faith as historical² and took it literally as did the great English poet:

"The fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden."

In fact, they even followed the Persian dualism with its evil principle, the primeval serpent, or the Babylonian legend of the sea-monster Tiamat, and regarded the serpent in Paradise as a demon. He was identified with Satan, the arch-fiend, and later with evil in general, the *yezer ha ra*.³ Thus the

¹ Prov. III, 18.

² Gen. R. XVI, 10; Shab. 55 b.

³ B. B. 15 a.

belief arose that the poisonous breath of the serpent infected all generations, causing death even of the sinless.¹ The apocrypha also held that the envy of Satan brought death into the world.² This prepared for the dismal church doctrine of original sin, the basis of Paul's teachings, which demanded a blood atonement for curse-laden humanity, and found it after the pagan pattern in the vicarious sacrifice of a dying god.³

Against such perversion of the simple Paradise story the sound common sense of the Jewish people rebelled. While the early Talmudists occasionally mention the poisoning of the human race by the serpent, they find an antidote for the Jewish people in the covenant with Abraham or that of Sinai.⁴ One cannot, however, discern the least indication of belief in original sin, either as inherent in the human race or inherited by them. Nor does the liturgy express any such idea, especially for the Day of Penitence, when it would certainly be mentioned if the conception found any place in Jewish doctrine. On the contrary, the prevailing thought of Judaism is that of Deuteronomy and Ezekiel,⁵ that "Each man dies by his own sin," that every soul must bear only the consequences of his own deeds. The rabbis even state that no man dies unless he has brought it upon himself by his own sin, and mention especially certain exceptions to this rule, such as the four saintly men who died without sin,⁶ or certain children whose death was due to the sin of their parents.⁷ They could never admit that the whole human race was so corrupted by the sin of the first man that it is still in a state of sinfulness.

6. Of course, the rabbinical schools took literally the Biblical story of the fall of man and laid the chief blame upon

¹ Shab. 146 a; Yeb. 103 b; Ab. Zar. 22 b; Shab. 55 b.

² B. Wisdom, II, 24.

³ Romans V, 12 f.

⁴ Shab. 146 a.

⁵ Deut. XXIV, 16; Ezek. XVIII, 4.

⁶ Shab. 55 a, b.

⁷ Shab. 32 b.

woman, who fell a prey to the wiles of the serpent. This is done even by Ben Sira, who says: "With woman came the beginning of sin, and through her we all must die."¹ So the Talmud says that due to woman, man, the crown, light, and life of creation, lost his purity, his luster, and his immortality.² The Biblical verse, "They did eat, and the eyes of them both were opened," is interpreted by Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Akiba as "They saw the dire consequences of their sin upon all coming generations."³ The fall of man is treated most elaborately in the same spirit in the two apocalyptic books written after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Apocalypse of Baruch and the IV Book of Esdras.⁴ The incompatibility of divine love with the sufferings of man and of the Jewish people on account of the sin of the first man is solved by an appeal to the final Day of Judgment, and the striking remark is added that, after all, "each is his own Adam and is held responsible for his own sin." We cannot deny that these two books contain much that is near the Paulinian view of original sin. It seems, however, that the Jewish teachers were put on their guard by the emphasis of this pessimistic dogma by the nascent Church, and did their best to give a different aspect to the story of the first sin. Thus they say: "If Adam had but shown repentance, and done penance after he committed his sin, he would have been spared the death penalty."⁵ Moreover, they actually represent Adam and Eve as patterns of repentant sinners, who underwent severe penance and thus obtained the promise of divine mercy and also of final resurrection.⁶ Instead of transmitting the heritage of sin to coming generations, the

¹ B. Sira XXV, 24.

² Yer. Shab. II, 5 b.

³ Gen. R. XIX, 10, ref. to Gen. III, 6-7.

⁴ Apoc. Baruch XXIII, 4; XLVIII, 42 f.; LVI, 6; and especially LIV, 14-19; IV Esdras III, 7; VII, 11, 118.

⁵ Pesik. 160 b; Num. R. XIII, 5.

⁶ P. d. R. El., XX; comp. Adam and Eve, I; Erub. 18 b.

first man is for them an example of repentance. So do the Haggadists tell us quite characteristically that God merely wanted to test the first man by an insignificant command, so that the first representative of the human race should show whether he was worthy to enter eternal life in his mortal garb, as did Enoch and Elijah. As he could not stand the test, he forfeited the marks of divine rank, his celestial radiance, his gigantic size, and his power to overcome death.¹ Obviously the Biblical story was embellished with material from the Persian legend of the fall of Yima or Djemshid, the first man, from superhuman greatness because of his sin,² but it was always related frankly as a legend, and could never influence the Jewish conception of the fall of man.

7. Judaism rejects completely the belief in hereditary sin and the corruption of the flesh. The Biblical verse, "God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions,"³ is explained in the Midrash: "Upright and just as is God, He made man after His likeness in order that he might strive after righteousness, and unfold ever more his god-like nature, but men in their dissensions have marred the divine image."⁴ With reference to another verse in Ecclesiastes:⁵ "The dust returneth unto the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it," the rabbis teach "Pure as the soul is when entering upon its earthly career, so can man return it to his Maker."⁶ Therefore the pious Jew begins his daily prayers with the words: "My God, the soul which Thou hast given me is pure."⁷ The life-long battle with

¹ Gen. R. XII, 5; XIX, 11; XXI, 4 f.; comp. Shab. 55 b.

² See Windishman: *Zoroastrische Studien*, p. 27 f.

³ Eccl. VII, 29.

⁴ Tanh. Yelamdenu to Gen. III, 22.

⁵ Eccl. XII, 7.

⁶ Shab. 152 b.

⁷ Ber. 80 a. The rabbis did not have the belief that the body is morally impure and therefore the seat of the *yezer ha ra*, as is stated by Weber, l. c., 228 f. See Potter, l. c., 98-107; Schechter: *Aspects*, 242-292. It is wrong also to explain Ps. LI, 7, "Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my

sin begins only at the age when sensual desire, "the evil inclination," awakens in youth; then the state of primitive innocence makes way for the sterner contest for manly virtue and strength of character.

8. In fact, the whole Paradise story could never be made the basis for a dogma. The historicity of the serpent is denied by Saadia;¹ the rabbis transfer Paradise with the tree of life to heaven as a reward for the future;² and both Nahmanides the mystic and Maimonides the philosopher give it an allegorical meaning.³ On the other hand, the Haggadic teachers perceived the simple truth that a life of indolence in Paradise would incapacitate man for his cultural task, and that the toils and struggles inflicted on man as a curse are in reality a blessing. Therefore they laid special stress on the Biblical statement: "He put man into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it."⁴ The following parable is especially suggestive: "When Adam heard the stern sentence passed: 'Thou shalt eat the herb of the field,' he burst into tears, and said: 'Am I and my ass to eat out of the same manger?' Then came another sentence from God to reassure him, 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,' and forthwith he became aware that man shall attain a higher dignity by dint of labor."⁵ Indeed, labor transforms the wilderness into a garden and the earth into a habitation worthy of the son of God. The "book of the generations of

mother conceive me," as inherited sinfulness, as Delitzsch and other Christian commentators have done, following Ibn Ezra, who refers this to Eve, the mother of all men. The correct interpretation is given by R. Ahha in Lev. R. XIV, 5; "Every sexual act is the work of sensuality, the *Yezer ha ra*." Comp. Yoma 69 b. Needless to say that Hosea VI, 7; Isa. XLIII, 37; Job XXXI, 33 do not refer to the sin of Adam.

¹ See Ibn Ezra to Gen. III, 1.

² See Taan. 10 a; Ber. 34 b; D. comp. Enoch XXIX-XXXII; *Seder Gan Eden*, in Jellinek, *Beth ha Midrash*, II, III.

³ *Moreh*, II, 30; Nahmanides to Gen. III, 1.

⁴ Gen. R. XVI, 8, ref. to Gen. II, 15. ⁵ Pes. 111 a; Gen. R. XX, 24.

man" which begins with Adam is accordingly not the history of man's descent, but of his continuous ascent, of ever higher achievements and aspirations; it is not a record of the fall of man, but of his rise from age to age. According to the Midrash¹ God opened before Adam the book with the deeds and names of the leading spirits of all the coming generations, showing him the latent powers of the human intellect and soul. The phrase, "the fall of man," can mean, in fact, only the inner experience of the individual, who does fall from his original idea of purity and divine nobility into transgression and sin. It cannot refer to mankind as a whole, for the human race has never experienced a fall, nor is it affected by original or hereditary sin.

¹ *Seder Olam* at the close; Gen. R. XXIV, 2.