

That Story of Adam and Eve

By **DANIEL A. LORD, S.J.**

Australian Catholic Truth Society 1960 (No. 1340)

Let's talk about Adam and Eve.

Despite the long history of the human race that lies between us and our first parents, I find that Adam and Eve are unfailingly interesting.

For instance - and it makes a good point of departure - there is the letter I received a few years ago. The writer is a fine Catholic mother. Have no doubt about her faith; it is staunch and loyal, even if her knowledge is not too accurate or her sense of values too keen. After I read the letter, I did a lot of thinking. The letter received one of my promptest answers. And I have often talked about it since.

Using me, as she had often done in the past, as a sort of listening post for her problems, she wrote in this fashion:

A Letter on Adam and Eve

"I have had a most embarrassing experience today. Probably I am still blushing. My little girl came home from first grade and all in a breath told me the story of Adam and Eve. Really, as I listened to it coming from the excited lips of my baby, I realized for the first time what an act of faith I am required to make whenever I think of our first parents. Honestly, it is a ridiculous story, isn't it? Of course, I swallow hard and believe it, because I suppose that in some sort of fashion I must. But it does tax an adult's credulity, doesn't it?"

"While my child was rehearsing the story, my imagination was at work. I seemed to see God lean down, take some wet clay, and mould a little man. It was the sort of thing that a sculptor uses for a trial and puts up on a shelf to dry. Next I saw God stooping over the clay model and breathing hard. Lo, and behold! the little statue started to walk around. Man was made.

"Doesn't it seem a pretty incredible performance?"

Then There's Woman

"Just to add to the fantastic character of the story, God turns surgeon and performs a sort of impromptu major operation. He puts Adam to sleep, using some sort of heavenly ether, I suppose. He removes one of his ribs. Then, like some primitive ivory-carver, He shapes the rib into the general outlines of a woman. At first Eve must have looked a little like one of the handles of a Chinese fan. But God breathes again, and the woman starts to move.

"Frankly, and thinking this time as a friend and not a priest, don't you find all that a little hard to take? What is it? Some allegory or pious fairy tale that got mixed up with our Bible? Whatever your answer, I still wish my baby hadn't repeated what the dear Sisters taught her. It's asking a lot of an adult to believe that strange, primitive tale."

Why Distort?

With the years, I have come to the conclusion that, compared to the fairy tales of primitive man, or of the rising of the human species out of primitive gases in a remote chaos, the story of Adam and Eve makes pretty solid-sounding history. But I'm not taking the question from that viewpoint this time.

Poor Adam and Eve have taken a lot of joking during the centuries. I read the letter with interest, simply because I felt it expressed the typical attitude of a great many quite good people. More than that: it was a perfect instance of the way things in the Bible can be distorted in the retelling of them. It's like the famous distortion of Jonah, for example, and the so-called whale.

For a lot of wasted years people argued back and forth about the possibility of a whale's swallowing Jonah. Nobody seemed to bother about finding out what the Biblical account really stated. If someone did go to the source of the story, the difficulties disappeared. The account states that "*the Lord prepared a great fish*" with the express purpose of having it ready to swallow Jonah.

Now we may take it for granted that when God prepares anything for a definite purpose the thing is equipped with whatever is necessary for that purpose. I have sometimes said to youthful objectors in what my Irish grandmother used to call half-joke and whole-earnest: "When God prepared that special fish, He may have outfitted it with upper and lower berths, open plumbing, electric lights, and a kitchenette, for all we know."

The whole argument about what kind of a whale could have swallowed which kind of a man grows silly in the face of this very specially-designed fish. Really, with all respect, we may suggest that God merely anticipated the submarine. His interest in the fate of His prophet inspired the divine ingenuity.

Even if the words whale later appear in the Bible, it still remains a very special type of sea monster designed to swallow Jonah and deposit him safely at his destination.

A Trifle?

But to revert to Adam and Eve, one of the basic objections that always recurs centres around their sin.

"It was such a trifling sin," I've been told a hundred times. "Imagine! The poor dears were driven out of Paradise for the crime of pilfering an apple?"

Who ever said they ate an apple? The Bible doesn't state that. In fact, rather recently someone remarked in my presence that he was sure the forbidden fruit must have been an apricot; he particularly liked apricots. The Bible doesn't say that the fruit was a tangerine or one of the golden apples of the Hesperides. People who were looking for trouble decided that it was an apple.

Or to get things still more confused, people insist that the sin of our first parents was one of impurity. It wouldn't be too difficult to see how they arrived at this idea. The Bible speaks of forbidden fruit. Some poet one day spoke of illicit sexual pleasure as forbidden fruit. Then someone else said, "Ah! if the sin concerned forbidden fruit, it must have been a sin of impurity, for impurity is forbidden fruit." And a lot of people got a few simple words muddled, tripped all over their figures of speech, and involved Adam and Eve in sins they never committed.

But this is Serious

In plain truth the sin of Adam and Eve was a much more serious offence than the mere reaching out of a greedy hand for a particularly tempting piece of fruit. In the sin of Adam and Eve was the essence of all sin. It was the symbol of every man's selfish rebellion against God.

Every sin can somehow be reduced to a sin of disobedience. God says to His children, "Don't!" And his children reply, calmly or passionately, with eyes wide open or lips tightly shut, "I certainly will." God in His wisdom says, "My child, that is very bad for you; please don't do it." The sinner, defying the wisdom of his Father and history's repeated evidence of the sad effects of sin, retorts, "Why not? I know better than you do, God. What's more, since you foolishly made me free, I shall use my freedom to grab this thing I want even though in the end it does me and others frightful harm."

That factor makes any sin fundamentally an act of wilful disobedience. The sinner looks up at his pleading Father and flings his refusal in His tender face. Anyone who has ever looked into the hard eyes and on the tightly-pressed mouth of a disobedient child knows how we must look to the gentle Father, Who asks but does not force, Who pleads with us, His children, but will not oblige us to go the happy, obedient way.

Ambition Gone Sour

If Eve had disobeyed God merely because she thought the forbidden fruit a particularly delectable morsel, her sin would have been evil but a little silly. The motive that lay back of her sin was much more tragic. The tempter offered her a bribe too rich to be refused. "If you eat that fruit, its magic properties will make you like God Himself," he told her, in effect. Because she was sure that the fruit could magically lift her to the level of her Creator, she gripped it with feverish eagerness.

Man's Most Frequent Temptation

And Adam fell, as the overwhelming percentage of men have fallen.

When he returned in the cool of the evening, his wife met him, all smiles and sweet seduction. She held out the forbidden fruit in the dear hand that God had fashioned to minister to him.

Adam was no fool. He knew there was something queer about the whole business. He was certainly not hungry for any single piece of fruit in an orchard that was dripping with luscious specimens. He had not even heard the serpent's promise of godlike powers.

Instead he faced the choice that men have made a hundred million times since then - the choice between his God and his woman. God was remote, and the woman was dear and intimately near. So, like a hundred million men since that fatal evening, he turned from his God and chose his woman.

It was the idolatry that brings men to their knees before the women whose beauty blinds them.

The Basic Sin

So you see the sin of Adam and Eve was no minor injustice, like the neighbourhood cop's picking up an apple from the corner fruit-stand. It was a sin that contained all the essential elements of all the sins that men and women could commit.

It was an insolent and wrong-headed disobedience to a Father Whose generosity was unbounded.

It was the elevation of human judgement above the judgement of God. A human pair decided that they knew more about what made happiness than God did. They took the responsibility for defying God's advice and going after the good they saw and desired.

It was a greedy discontent with God's lavish abundance. All the other trees in the luxurious garden were not enough. God had no right to reserve even one tree for His own use. They wanted that, too, and they pilfered it.

It was the haughty desire of mortals to climb to the same level as God Himself, to become His equals, to share His knowledge and snatch His powers.

It was the thrusting aside of the all-beautiful God and His love, to find love in the arms of a desired woman.

It was a woman's betrayal of the man who loved her, a betrayal through the love that was meant to ennoble him.

Finally, it was the revolt against God and in favour of His relentless enemy. It was high treason, by which the human race was surrendered to its merciless foe.

Lo! the Serpent

A great many shelves in a great many libraries could not hold all the books that have been written to explain the serpent in Eden.

Scholars have reminded us learnedly of the snake worship that degrades pagan peoples. They point to the snakes that crawl in eternal sculptured writhings around the friezes of pagan temples. They recall that snakes were worshipped in Babylon and Egypt and even in Aztec Mexico. They do not hesitate to leap a few hundred centuries in order to link the serpent of Paradise with the serpent of voodoo Haiti.

All of that is interesting, but from our immediate viewpoint quite superfluous.

For among His infinite perfections we must note that God is a poet. Symbolism is part of His most constant expression of His truths. Rhythm runs all through nature, from the beat of your pulse to the measured movements of the stars, from the

dance of a horse's hoofs to the recurrence of the tides and the seasons.

God was a poet when He gave us the outward signs of the sacraments.

He was a poet when He established the universe in measured pulse and beat.

Satan Comes Crawling

So, when God allowed His children their first clear vision of the tempter, the evil one, who comes bringing sin, death, and evil, He was tricking His adversary, Satan, into playing a symbolic role. Satan chose, out of all the possible disguises he could have selected, the one disguise rich in poetic justice. He came to man on his first visit in the guise of a snake.

How Satan could have been betrayed into so abject a humiliation, God alone can some day tell us. Surely out of his shattered beauty and strength Lucifer could have done better than that. He might have found a disguise to suggest his ancient state. Had he wrapped himself in the tattered splendour of the past, gullible Eve might have been impressed and Adam might have gone down upon his knees. For angels are higher on the scale of being than are men, and even a fallen angels can trick men into thinking him glorious and powerful. The devils who dwelt upon high altars under the names of Moloch and Belial and Beelzebub proved that.

The Filthy Disguise

Yet Lucifer actually choose for his first appearance as tempter a disguise that becomes the eternal symbol of all tempters. He comes as a serpent.

He enters the earth, not with dignity, but crawling.

In the manner of all first inclinations to evil and treason, he wriggles into the presence of his hoped-for victims. He cannot come with forthright courage, confessing his identity; he comes creeping through the dank grass.

He speaks with no honest, candid tongue. His speech is forked, double. His words roll from the red, tricky, poison-laden tongue that darts and strikes and kills.

He does not approach Eve as an equal. He rises from under her feet, insinuating himself into her presence, as he hopes in slimy fashion to insinuate himself and his lies into her mind.

He makes no pretence to nobility. He drops down from heaven and rises from hell to play a part in the reptile kingdom; he comes on his belly among the worms of death, the crawling scavengers who lurk on the underside of damp stones, the vermin that gnaw silently at the foundations of our cities.

He and his words seem to twist and writhe together. As his long, glittering, repulsive body winds and undulates, his words twist into half-truths, whole lies.

Perfect Symbol of Sin

If Lucifer had tried to select out of all creation the disguise to typify most perfectly the deed he was about to do, he could not have selected with more dramatic fidelity any other than the one he chose. A sublime irony drives him, the villain of the piece, to come in most unattractive form. He, the traitor, confesses what he is, a snake in the grass.

Here, indeed, is high poetic justice. There is grim humour in the sight of this proud angel of light crawling on his belly towards his rendezvous. There is ghastly tragedy in this soaring spirit now levelled to the snakes, who will throughout all history make men and women shudder and draw back.

Probably, even if he had not chosen this disguise, we should still have used the hateful figure of speech; under the impulse of his trickery, we speak instinctively of a traitor as "the viper at one's bosom." We paint the traitor crawling up to strike his victim with a cobra-like head. We think of sin as the poison hidden in the deadly fangs of the asp, the rattler.

In actual fact, many a snake is a good and faithful friend of mankind, destroying man's real enemies, rats and destructive insects. Lucifer has, by his filthy disguise, made us lump all snakes together in common villainy. All men who tempt the innocent to their ruin are characterized as "those snakes!"

Pattern for Seduction

Since the day when Satan seduced poor mother Eve, many an author has written many a scene of seduction. Some of

those scenes have been brutally flat and vulgar. Some of them have had the subtle fascination that is created when expert betrayers stalk innocence.

But the most brilliant seduction in literature cannot pretend to match the insinuating skill and finesse of this first of all seductions. In fact, it has become a pattern for the million approaches of a million seducers who have styled themselves on the Devil himself to win their victims to submission and consent.

Technique

The serpent's approach begins most respectfully, almost with regret. There is no harsh demand, no flat assertion. There is a delicate question, a thinly-veiled compliment, a gesture of sympathetic understanding for a victim's oppressed lot.

"Why," asks the serpent, and there is a choke in his voice, *"has God commanded you, that you should not eat of every tree of Paradise?"*

One can easily paraphrase that brilliantly-worded sentence.

"You poor dear !" says the serpent, in effect. "Here you are, lovely, charming, and, above all, clever; yet God has laid heavy limitations on your liberty. Really, my dear, I cannot see how you stand it. I admire you enormously for submitting, when after all no one with a sense of beauty would lay any sort of command upon you. You should be free, my pet, free and unfettered by any law."

Cleverly he levels at God a wide and brutal charge.

He insinuates that God has forbidden to them all the trees of Paradise: ". . . *that you should not eat of every tree. . . .*" He makes God's mild command - to leave one tree untouched - sound like the most villainous act of tyranny. A gentle law is suddenly made to look black and heavy. He charges God with selfish monopoly, the exclusion of His own children from the delights of the garden in which He has placed them.

Subtle Approach

How like this is to the approach of all the seducers from that day to this.

"My dear, how cruel that any law should make life difficult for you! Surely this rule was not meant for you, this ugly, oppressive law that binds your lovely hands and shackles your dancing feet. How could anyone be so cruel as to chain your free soul? Here are the really joyous things of the world, and a tyrant holds you back from them. How unfair! How brutal! And may I say how much I admire you for submitting without complaint to such rotten injustice?"

Satan has set an enduring example. His approach is perfect.

Eve naively answers him. She should have called him a liar for his ridiculous exaggeration. She should have turned away in disgust from this creeper, who lifts his head to poison the garden with falsehoods against the garden's gracious Creator.

Instead, like tempted men and women ever since her day, she meets the lies with sweet reasonableness and answers the tempter with grace and amiability.

"Of the fruit of the trees that are in Paradise we do eat," she explains.

We can almost hear the tempter retorting, "Ah, really?" as his eyes skip the thousand fruit-laden trees to find the one tree that has been forbidden them. In that one contemptuous look he dismisses the rest of the trees as worthless and gloats upon the one tree worth their desiring.

Eve Answers

Eve's eyes follow his and find the tree.

How beautiful it seems there in the warm hush of the afternoon, the sunlight stroking its fruit and turning them into things very magic and fascinating. She tears her eyes away with difficulty. And then, prototype of a million poor girls, she hastens to explain to the tempter that, after all, things are really not half so bad as he paints them.

"But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of Paradise, God has commanded us that we should not eat; and that we should not touch it, lest perhaps we die."

She has already reached the point where she puts the whole case in the subjunctive. It is not a plain statement of fact but a sort of hesitating rehearsal of something she has heard but now is not quite sure she believes.

"That's what God says," she seems to infer. "Now, of course, I personally wouldn't know. God may have been fooling us all the time. Possibly we could eat the fruit without anything happening to us. Death does seem a great and heavy penalty for so slight a violation. But then since God said it, I shouldn't want to take the risk. Even though I must confess, there is a look in your eye that seems to say you doubt it all."

Persuasion

Indeed the look in his eye is cynical.

Almost we see his flat, subtle head lifted in what corresponds to tolerant laughter. The girl realizes at once that he feels sorry for her innocence, her gullibility. Evidently he thinks that she is the sort to believe anything, no matter how inconvenient or ridiculous. Anyone should know, his laughter implies, that when you eat fruit you grow stronger and live longer. Fruit is excellent for the constitution.

How ridiculous to pay attention to the statements of a God Who quite clearly is bent on scaring a pair of young children out of the chance for a little fun, a bit of spirited adventure!

"No," he reassures her, *"you shall not die the death."*

Like all the world's seducers he pushes aside all thought of the possible consequences of sin. "Ridiculous!" - so might modern phraseology paraphrase it. "Who ever told you that if you sinned you would be punished? My dear child, where did you ever get the ridiculous notion that sin is other than sweet and delicious? What a pity they have frightened you all this time with poppycock about the wages of sin and the penalties of vice! Really I'm disgusted with them for frightening you. Yet, candidly, I'm a little embarrassed with you for believing such nonsense.

"On the contrary," he seems to insinuate, "you may take my word for it that this is precisely the thing that you need. It will do you a world of good. God knows that, too, but then God isn't so interested in your health . . . your good time . . . your full development . . . as I am."

"For God," says the serpent, *"does know that in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened; and you shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil."*

Wily Advice

"So that was what lay back of the command !" thinks Eve; "God's unwillingness to see us climb beside Him, His reluctance to have us as wise as He is, to have us know the things He knows!"

Her fingers itch. Her eyes glow with anticipation. Quite clearly the serpent knows what he is talking about. He is so convincing, so sophisticated and worldly-wise.

How mean of God if all the time He has been depriving them of a clear vision of life! Oh, to see life completely! To have experiences about which one can brag! Not merely to know good, which often enough seems boresome and monotonous, but to relish this mysterious thing called evil!

Evil! She rolls the word over on her tongue. It is a seductive word, a hypnotic word, a word full of amazing and amusing suggestion.

To think that, just because of her failure to show a little daring, God had been allowed to bar her from savouring this evil and tasting its delights!

Yet, above all the other promises, one rang in her mind like glad, challenging music . . .

"You shall be as Gods. . . ."

Why, if that were true, then God Himself could lay no more commands upon her. She could do just as she pleased. God's powers would be her powers. She wouldn't be just a little, inexperienced girl; she would be a wise, experienced, profound, worldly woman.

The Tree of Trees

She looked again at the tree, this time hungrily.

She felt that she had really never seen it before.

Up to this time she had been busy exploring the limitless delights of the garden; she had had hardly time more than to glance at the forbidden tree. It was quite an art to twine roses, and she was learning it. With housewifely skill she was learning to select those fruits which gave substantial nourishment and those which were merely a delight to the palate, and those the juices of which quenched one's pleasant thirst. Really, she had hardly more than begun to explore the resources of the Paradise about her.

But now everything she had done before seemed routine and tiresome. She saw adventure and experience ahead. All else was stale and tasteless.

"[She] . . . saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold."

Was that one forbidden tree really much fairer than the others? Who knows? Was its fruit really the most luscious of all the fruits in the garden? Possibly. But that is all part of the other eternal question: Is sin ever really more attractive than virtue? And to that the answer is an unfailing "Certainly not." Yet, when the imagination plays around it, when the shrewd salesman of sin rehearses his sales talk and stimulates a too-willing fancy and whets an acquiescent appetite. . . .

Eve ran to the tree and pulled towards her the fruit-laden branch, which seemed to bend to offer itself to her hand.

"And she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat."

The Tempter Fades

The seducer had won his victim. The first story of innocence betrayed becomes the paradigm on which all future betrayals can be fashioned.

Then, his work done, the tempter fades from the scene. He rustles away through the grass, hardly disturbing a leaf. Why should he stay to watch the certain wreckage? He crawls off to gloat. He must find a place where he can throw off his disguise and laugh and exult and hug his obscene joy to his heart.

Here is a scene so perfectly worked out that only the person without imagination or the man without poetry in his soul can fail to sense the eternal quality of the story. No drama or novel or poem of seduction will ever tell the course of seduction so completely, humanly, convincingly.

Unfortunately, seduction has come to mean largely the incitement to sins of passion. That is a limitation to seduction's most frequent form. But seduction is that wooing and winning of men and women to betray their loyalties. It is the clever siege which villainy lays to innocence. It is the brilliant twist by which men and women are won from the side of bright, shining goodness to the side of smelly, repellent evil.

And the Man . . .

And the story completes its cycle with the return of Adam.

Happy over the day's work in the luxuriant garden, he stretches out his arms to his wife.

But between them she holds out the forbidden fruit.

A first gasp of horror constricts his throat. What has she done? What atrocious folly is this she invites him to share?

Then it comes over him with a rush that she has eaten of the fruit and that a penalty falling upon her would separate them, perhaps, forever. The fruit in her outstretched palm grows suddenly into a barrier separating them. It is almost as if he cannot come to her again unless he surmounts that tiny mound now grown mountain-high.

She smiles at him across the yawning distance.

He seems to see her sin thrusting her away from him. There is something of her that he does not now share, a part of her that no longer is his. And the smile of invitation on her lips calls to him to come and take that part . . . to hurry to her across the chasm she has already dug . . . to grasp her once more before she is swept away from him by death or the wrath of the God Who commanded them not to touch that fruit.

His God or his woman?

He reaches for the fruit, not because it is sweet and attractive and delicious, but because it rests on the hand he longs to hold and because it stands between him and the woman he must have.

He eats.

The story reaches its full close.

The eternally-recurring pattern of sin has been established by a man, a woman, and the seducer, who knew how to crawl into the vanity and passion and pride of the sons and daughters of God.

Creation Once More

Now we revert to the question of God's creation of Adam and Eve. And since everyone talks about the story and few bother ever to read the bold statements in which the Bible records the creation of Adam and Eve, we owe it to ourselves to put those statements down here.

With a fine sense of the dignity of mankind the sacred author first tells the history of man's creation in a passage that serves as magnificent libretto for a great oratorio.

"And He [God] said: Let us make man to Our image and likeness; and let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and the beasts, and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moves upon the earth.

"And God created man to His own image; to the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

Thus far the entrance of man upon the world scene is certainly grand drama. In literal sense he comes "trailing clouds of glory." The sacred author seems, indeed, to be so fascinated with the realization that man was actually made to mirror the infinite God that three times within two sentences he insists upon the fact. He shouts to the high heavens the glorious phrase: ". . . to *His own image*."

In that magnificent second sentence he cries, boldly, "*God created man to His own image*"; and then as if to make sure that the sense is utterly clear, he reverses the order: "to the image of God He created him."

Dominion

What other origin could be more splendid than that?

Thus far there is nothing in the Biblical account which is not noble and regal and godlike.

Next, God, with divine generosity, shares with His new creature His own world-wide domain. He delivers into the hands of this new child of His love the earth and all that it contains. Under His newly-formed hand He subjugates as bond-slaves the fishes, the birds, the beasts, and - lest their insignificance let them escape - the very things that crawl under the earth.

When Lucifer looked for a disguise, he was forced to select one of the creeping things which the generous Father had already subjected to the rights and powers of man.

God's Own Record

The second time the sacred author tells of man's creation, he goes into the details which excited the embarrassment of the mother who wrote me the letter that I quoted in the introduction to this booklet. Rather - let's make it clear - what embarrassed her was the badly-paraphrased story she had heard from the child. The record runs thus:

"And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth; and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul. . . ."

"And the Lord God said:

'It is not good for man to be alone; let us make him a help like unto himself. . . .'

"Then the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon Adam; and when he was fast asleep, He took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it.

"And the Lord God built the rib which He took from Adam into a woman; and brought her to Adam."

"And Adam said: This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man."

"Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be two in one flesh."

No Paraphrases Here

Naturally I should not care to defend the various distortions of this amazing story. The story has been simply retold for the child, elaborately for the learned, cynically for the sceptic, reverently for the saint. Some of these retellings are beautiful. Some of them are absurd. Some of them have simply made the exalted account a little fuller. Some have been ugly parodies intended to excite laughter and ridicule.

But, then, it is possible to distort the simplest story and to make ridiculous and ugly man's most sacred history.

And quite often words themselves are so magnificent and clear that amplification is unnecessary and paraphrase an impertinence.

Yet we can examine these records reverently. And we shall.

God the Artist

One hurried glance at the world, and we are ready to confess God the world's one great artist. Indeed, it is God Who makes possible the weak, imitative art of us human beings. He turns divine landscape gardener and traces a mountain range, a forest, the course of a river, the movement of the eternally-varying sea. Then some great landscape painter catches a fraction of the divine setting upon a canvas, and the galleries of the world bid for the right to exhibit what they could see by looking through an open window. He made the body of man or a woman and achieved an artistic perfection which is still the challenge and the despair of the sculptor.

Whether God designed a snowflake in the pattern of a lace veil, or the incredible variety of the flowers, or the grace of a deer, or the iridescent plumage of a pheasant, the wing of a butterfly, the hidden flame of a diamond, He remained the artists' artist. He carelessly established patterns of perfection that never could be copied by all the long generations of painters and sculptors and workers in metal and stone.

He Begins His Masterpiece

So, like an artist, God approached the making of His masterpiece, man.

He was doing more than making merely a single individual. He was doing more than starting the human race on its course. He was establishing a technique by which all the artists of the world would henceforth work.

Out of the wet clay which is the earth's slime He models an exquisite figure. He shapes it with an artistry that will leave the succeeding artists helpless to duplicate or imitate. Soon He holds the model of a man.

We can imagine, when His clay man is finished, the divine artist looking upon His artistic work and knowing that it is excellent. *"Good,"* the Scriptures call it; magnificent we know it to be.

Pygmalion - A Legend Grounded in Truth

Now, every artist that ever lived, when he looked upon his masterpiece, instantly fell in love with it. That is the most natural and uniform of reactions. A thousand stories have been built around that response. Of these the ancient story of Pygmalion and Galatea is the most famous and durable.

You remember it well. Only recently George Bernard Shaw's play, *"Pygmalion,"* was given to us musically in *"My Fair Lady."* The story: A learned scholar declares that he can make a lady out of the veriest London slavey. He gets the girl from the slums, fashions her manners and her speech, teaches her the ways of society, builds up within her a trained mind and an exquisite culture. And when he has completed his job, he suddenly knows that he has fallen in love with the woman he had made. That is the ancient Greek legend in modern dress.

The traditional legend is simpler and sweeter.

In his open-air studio, Pygmalion, the Greek sculptor, works patiently at his art. But always before him is the dream of a

perfect woman. He will carve her some day. He will make a figure of the most beautiful woman an artist ever conceived. One day he begins his work. This time he disdains any living model. No mere woman will satisfy his demands. He wants to create out of a marble nymph straight from the hands of the gods, a work worthy of the creative interests of the Olympians.

But first he moulds his clay in the miniature of a woman lovelier than any that walks the streets of Athens or sings in the groves of Corinth. With fingers of sheer genius he fashions the clay, and a dream woman takes shape under his artist touch.

When the clay figurine is finished, Pygmalion selects the perfect block of stainless marble; and blow by blow, day after day, he cuts from the perfect stone the figure of the exquisite woman who has haunted his dreams.

Pygmalion - The Gods Intervene

In the end his statue stands there in his studio, cool, white, inanimate, but endowed with all the beauty that genius can draw out of a fiery imagination and the marble which God set in the hills for the skill of His artistic sons.

His friends come and stand in wordless admiration. Never was there a woman as lovely as this one. A purchaser hurries in and offers a fabulous price. The artist hardly hears him. He is overcome with the beauty he has created. He has fallen in love with the stone woman he made.

Then, said the wise old Greeks, who understood human nature thoroughly, he did a thing of which the gods approved. He lifted his hands to high Olympus and cried: "She is too beautiful not to live. She is too lovely to be mere stone. O immortal gods, give life to my creation. Endow with a living soul this statue I have made."

Artist-like, he had fallen in love with his own masterpiece. In that easiest to understand of human reactions he wished that so beautiful a creature might live and move and speak and love him in return.

According to the gracious legend of old Greece, the gods smiled upon the artist, his statue and his love for it. Into the cold, perfect body of the statue they dropped a human soul. The marble began to glow with delicate colours. A faint flush appeared in the cheeks. The hair, stiff in its graven lines, suddenly grew soft and flexible. The fingers moved. The lips opened. The eyes gazed with love upon the man who had carved them.

Slowly the statue came to life.

Whereupon the artist, Pygmalion, married in perfect happiness the woman he had made from stone. She was too lovely not to live. The gods themselves were willing to grant a soul to so beautiful an image.

Michelangelo's Work

A similar impulse fired Michelangelo - but with different results.

In a burst of genius he completed his great statue of Moses. Quite candid in his admiration of the masterpiece he had wrought, he stood back to look at it. There in glorious, if mute, reality sat the great lawmaker, his powerful body twisted in a blend of thought and determination, his great, noble head turned expectantly towards the people, his arms clasping the Ten Commandments, with which God had just entrusted him.

Michelangelo felt as if he were on Mount Sinai. Almost as if for the first time Moses seemed to appear ready to step out before the Jewish people and promulgate God's eternal law. The artist was enormously moved by the statue he had made. It was too glorious to be allowed to stay there endlessly mute.

Now, if you are without imagination, his next gesture may seem to you silly or useless.

If, however, you have the slightest knowledge of human nature or any insight into the artistic soul, you will understand what he did.

The great sculptor picked up the mallet with which he had carved his masterpiece. He weighed it for a second in his hand. If with that mallet he wrought this masterpiece before him, perhaps that same mallet could work just another miracle.

He swung the mallet and smacked it against the marble of his sculptured Moses.

"Speak!" he commanded. "Speak!" he thundered, with all the compelling power of his will.

But nothing happened. No miracle occurred. Moses sat there, still dumb.

Michelangelo had been able to work cold marble into the glorious figure of the Jewish lawgiver. Before it millions would, until the end of time, stand in awed admiration. But the sculptor had not the power necessary to inflame this marble with the vital spark. He could not give his statue speech and a soul.

Much as he loved his own masterpiece, he knew it was destined to sit silent, motionless, until the end of time.

The Great Artist Speaks

Now all this may make the creation of man seem a little easier to understand. For God, the great artist, also fell in love with the figure He had made - man.

God, the artist's artist, made out of the clay of earth the amazing figure of a human being. There in the cold clay were the outlines of rippling muscles and the strong curves of arms and legs and torso. The sightless eyes looked out blindly towards their Creator, dull and dead. The lips, framed for speech, were wordless. The heart within, poised as if waiting for its first beat, the first spark of love, was without motion. Thus far God had made a lovely but lifeless statue of a man.

What more natural than the next step that the Master Artist took?

Only unlike Pygmalion, He did not need to lift His arms to some mythical Olympus. Unlike Michelangelo, when He commanded His statue to speak, it would speak.

Within this artist was the great creative power of His Fatherhood. He needed to take only one further creative step, and the statue in the palm of His hand would move, speak, live, love.

And God breathed into the face of man the breath of life. And he became a living soul.

The eyes of the masterpiece looked up and saw their Creator and dropped in reverent awe. The lips of the statue began to speak His praise. The heart beat once and then leaped in ecstasy of love as it acknowledged the greatness of the God Who had endowed it with a soul to His own image and likeness.

God, the greatest of all artists and the prototype on which all artists work, watched His masterpiece become His man, His cold creation become His living child, the model He had made suddenly walk the earth, His son, His image, His heir apparent.

What All Artists Desire

Anyone who does not see in all this the most natural and understandable of dramas simply has no poetry in his soul. Indeed, I should be inclined to say that he has no knowledge either of God or of human impulses that come from God's creative nature.

Throughout the course of artistic history great artists have longed to do precisely what God actually did. They have been limited by their human weakness. He could speak His creative Fiat, and before Him walked a beloved Son capable now of loving Him and of doing His work on earth. God could turn the cold clay of a masterpiece into the warm image of Himself. Need we be surprised that He did just that?

Woman is Made

Women should be delighted that God created woman in precisely the fashion that He chose to do it. The manner in which woman was created puts her in a position that makes possible her high dignity and her assurance of protection from the men of the race.

But here again in the creation of woman God moves in the realm of high artistic poetry.

The woman He meant to make was to be closer to her husband than was his own heart. She was to be bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, dependent upon him in many charming ways but always a living part of him, himself lifted into fresh reality.

So God chose to make woman out of the rib of the sleeping Adam. Perhaps even as he slept, Adam dreamed of the perfect helpmate, whom he had not found among the animals. The dreams God sends are sometimes very beautiful.

From that part of the man which actually is nearest to his heart, his ribs, God selects part of man's essential structure. From this rib he makes the first woman.

With a smile Eve could say to her husband, "Man was taken from the slime of the earth; woman was taken from the living breast of a man." Perhaps fancifully we might suggest that for that reason woman should be more humane, less earthly.

Again, the Artist

God, once more the artist, fashions this new and exquisite creature with infinite perfection. Yet as He works, He broods over the deep symbolism of what He does. Woman has come from the breast of man; and to that breast she is to return in high human love. Woman comes from within the circle of his arms because she can return there to find rest, strength, protection.

Woman, because of her origin, can and must admit her dear dependence upon the physically stronger man. Yet she rightfully can demand of him the same watchful protection he gives to himself. For, after all, isn't she part of him, a part miraculously removed yet beautifully returned to his safe keeping?

Luckily for Women

Precisely this is the response Adam gives to the vision of Eve, his helpmate.

His first words, when he looks upon her, are not, "You are beautiful." He does not even say, "I love you." He says something far more important for her whole future. He refers her immediately to himself and assumes voluntarily his deep responsibility to her to protect and care for her. Anticipating the dear Christ, Adam knows he must love his woman as himself.

"This [woman] now," he cries, "is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man."

And he smiles in welcome upon the woman who comes back to him in a union of love, precisely because she was taken from him by a God of love. He holds her to his heart, from which just a few minutes before she has been symbolically carved.

Consequences for Women

Instantly the sacred writer draws the inevitable, inescapable consequences. This origin of woman from the body of man is her guarantee of clear rights. her claim in personal protection from man.

"Wherefore" - because a woman was taken from the body of a man and returned to him in love - "a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be two in one flesh."

A moment before they had really been one flesh, the flesh of the solitary Adam.

Now, once more, they are to be one flesh, reunited in blessed and voluntary love.

And the woman can lay to her husband a claim that takes precedence over the claims of anyone else in the world - yes, even over the claims of the mother who bore him.

Woman from Man

So to this day the woman who catches the vast significance of this amazing history of her origin can look upon her husband and say, half-seriously, half-jestingly: "My dear, I belong to you as your body belongs to you. I came from your body, and of my own will and God's design I return to you. Protect me as you protect yourself. Hold me safely near the heart from which I originally came. When you love yourself you are loving me; when you love me, you are loving yourself."

God's simple method of creation has put all this happily within the power and province of woman. Can any woman speak other than with gratitude and respect of God's delightful care of her origin ?

The Beautiful Truth

So it seems to me that the letter I quoted, like the jests and arguments directed against Adam and Eve, is based on sad

misunderstanding. If anything, I am embarrassed that mankind has missed the high poetry and artistic beauty of the story of our first parents. I am ashamed that a Catholic woman could have so little insight into the marvellous dignity and charm with which God surrounded the beginnings of the human race.

Later God Himself was to write a story more beautiful than that of Adam and Eve. He was to give the world a woman conceived utterly free from stain, a woman whose foot would crush the head of the crawling tempter, who had so badly tricked the first Eve. He was to give all mankind His only-begotten Son, Who was born in the loveliness of Bethlehem, lived the perfect life, and died on Calvary as a culmination of all gifts and sacrifices and love itself.

But the story of Adam and Eve is still the world's second most charming history. Can any man or woman suggest how else God could have achieved His purpose of making the beginnings of the human race more dignified, beautiful, artistic, and poetic?

Frankly, I doubt if there is an answer to that query except a humble bowing of the head before God's creative act set in the splendour of a garden and marked with the delicate touch of the divine poetic artist.

That is why I have always loved the story of Adam and Eve. It makes me proud to be human, and to be a man. It makes me glad that my Father is the kind of God He is. It opens the story of the human race in a burst of glorious poetry, with a masterpiece achieved by the master artist.

* * *