

COWARD ADAM

By Marie Corelli

AMONG the numerous fascinating and delightful members of the male sex whom I have the honor to count as friends, there is one handsome and devotedly attentive gentleman of four years old, who is particularly fond of reciting to me in private the following striking poem on the Fall of Man:

"When Mister Sarpint did deceive
Poor little silly Missis Eve,
The Lord he spied an apple gone
From off the branch it
hanged upon.
That apple was
a heavy loss,
And so the
Lord got
very cross.
He searched
the garden
through and
through. And called: 'Hi Adam! Where are you?'
But Mister Adam, he clum up a tree."



There is something in this vivid narrative which appears to tickle my young cavalier's fancy immensely, for whenever he says: "Mister Adam, he clum up a tree," he opens his big blue eyes widely, claps his tiny hands loudly, and gives vent to ecstatic shrieks of laughter. It is evident that he entirely understands and appreciates Adam's position. Young as he is he has the instinctive knowledge within him that when the time comes, he likewise will adopt the "clum up a tree" policy.

For Adam is the same Adam still, and nothing ever will change him. And when things are getting rather "mixed" in his career, and the forbidden fruit he has devoured so readily turns out to be rather more sour and tasteless than he had expected, when his Garden of Eden is being searched through and through for the causes of the folly and disobedience which have devastated its original fairness, the same old story may be said of him: "Mister Adam, he clum up a tree." Perhaps if he had only climbed a tree one might excuse him; but unfortunately he talked while climbing—talks as though he was an old babbling grandam instead of a lord of creation, and grandam-like puts the blame on somebody else. He says: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat."

Coward Adam! Observe how he at once transfers the fault of his own lack of will and purpose to the weaker, more credulous, more loving and trusting partner, how he leaves her defenseless to brave the wrath which he himself dreads; and how he never for one-half a second dreams of admitting himself to be the least in the wrong.

But there always is one great satisfaction to be derived from the perusal of the strange old Eden story, and that is that "Mister Sarpint" was of the male gender. Scripture leaves no room for doubt on this point. It says: "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And 'he' said unto the woman—"So that a "he" tempted a woman before "she" ever tempted a "he." Women should be duly thankful for the sex of "Mister Sarpint," and also should bear in mind that this particular "he" was "more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made." On many an occasion it will be found a salutary and useful fact to remember.

Once upon a time, so we are told, there was an "Age of Chivalry." The word "chivalry" is stated in the dictionary to be derived from the French *cheval*, a horse, and "chivalrous" men were in the literal meaning of the term merely men who rode about on horseback. But chivalry somehow has come to imply respect, devotion and reverence for women. The "chivalrous" knight is supposed to have gone all over the world, wearing the glove or the ribbon of his "ladye faire," in his helmet, and challenging to single combat every other knight that dared to question the supremacy of her beauty and virtue.

I confess at once that I do not believe in him. If he ever existed he must have been a most unnatural and abnormal product of humanity, as unlike his

first progenitor Adam as he well could be; for even in the "Round Table" romances one finds an entire lack of chivalry in the so-called knights of chivalrous King Arthur. Their moral principles left much to be desired, and the conduct of Sir Meliagraunce, who betrayed the loves of Lancelot and the Queen, was merely that of a common sneak. Coward Adam spoke in him, as in many of the Arthurian heroes—and that they were more "chivalrous" than the modern male gossips who jeer away a woman's name and honor in their smoking and gaming rooms is a legend which, like that of the Tree of Good and Evil itself, requires stronger confirmation than history as yet witnesseth.

Coward Adam, taking him as he appears in the present day, has shown himself off lately in various odd phases and lamentable positions. In course of the South African War he came out strong in some of our Generals who put the blame of certain military mishaps on one another like quarrelsome children, thereby losing dignity, and offering a most humiliating spectacle to the amazed British public. Coward Adam's policy, after making a blunder, is to adopt any lie rather than say frankly and boldly: "I did it." He will eat dirt by the bushel in preference to the nobler starvation act of singly facing his foes. He just now is exhibiting himself to his usual advantage in the British Parliament, while the nation looks on, waiting for the inevitable finale of his various hesitations and inefficiencies—the "Mister Adam, he clum up a tree"; for in most matters of social, political and moral progress the great difficulty is to obtain an upright, downright, honest and impartial opinion from any leading public man.

The nation may be drifting devil-ward; but statesmen are judged to be more statesman-like if they hold their tongues and watch it go. They must not speak the truth. It would offend so many people. It would upset so many interests. It would create a panic on the Stock Exchange. It would throw Wall Street into hysterics. The world's vast public, composed of thinking, working and more or less educated and intelligent people, may and does crave for a bold utterance, a truth openly enunciated and bravely maintained, but to the weavers of political intrigue and the self-seeking schemers in Governmental departments, the public is considered merely as a big child, to be soothed with lollypop phrases and tickled by rattle promises.

If the big child cries and screams because it is hungry, they chirp to it about "Fair Trade"; if it complains that its ministers of religion are trying to make it say its prayers backward, they promise a full "inquiry into recent abuses in the Church." But fine words butter no parsnips. Coward Adam always climbs up a tree as quickly as he can, when instead of fine words fine deeds are demanded. Physical feats of skill, physical gymnastics of all kinds, he excels in, but a moral difficulty always places him as it did in the Garden of Eden, in what he would conventionally term "an awkward position."

Not long ago I saw Coward Adam at his tree-climbing in a law court. Three valiant descendants of Ananias, all bound in a compact to support their great ancestor's reputation, appeared against me to try and prove that I wanted to build a free library on Henley-st., Stratford-on-Avon, where there were some old houses of Shakespeare's time which I judged it would be patriotic and natural to save from wreckage. They said that my motive was not to save the old houses, but to put up a building commemorative of my own philanthropy. Never having had the remotest intention of building anything anywhere, I faced my accus-

ers. I confronted Sergeant Buzfuz. I contemplated Messrs. Dodson & Fogg. I was one woman against three men. I had only one witness who could answer to the fact that I never had so much as dreamed of committing a free-library crime, and this witness also was a woman. She, being in the employment and under the rule of *Messieurs les Ananias*, of course was "sub-pannaed" on their side, and

not on mine. *Messieurs les Ananias* swore themselves black, if not in the face, yet in the heart; but despite the advantage they had of being three to one, they were proved libelers, and lost their case, going out of court somewhat less perkily than they came in.

During the progress of the whole business, I was much interested as a kind of outside spectator, apart altogether from my own share in the proceedings. Coward Adam was climbing his tree all the time, and I watched him climb. "The woman whom thou gavest"—it was the same everlasting old cry! One of the Ananiases concerned some months before had contributed something to the press about "the unwritten laws of chivalry." Oh, those unwritten laws! Why are they not called those unacted laws?—seeing that Coward Adam always quotes them when ignoring them!

"Never kiss and tell," is, I believe, an "unwritten law of chivalry." This law, so I understand, Coward Adam sometimes does manage to obey, albeit reluctantly—because he would like to tell—he would very much like to tell—if—if the story of the kiss did not involve himself in the telling! But at this juncture "the unwritten laws of chivalry" step in and he is saved. And chivalry is the tree up which he climbs, chattering to himself the usual formula: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me," etc.

Alas, poor woman! She has heard him saying this ever since she, in an unselfish desire to share her food with him, gave him the forbidden apple. No doubt she offered him its rosiest and ripest side. She always does—at first; not afterward. As soon as he turns traitor and runs up a tree, she takes to pelting him, metaphorically speaking, with coconuts. This is natural on her part. She had thought him a man—and when he suddenly changes into a monkey she doesn't understand it. To this cause possibly may be attributed some of the ructions which occasionally jar the harmonious estate of matrimony.

Coward Adam does well in America. He sees his position there plainly. He knows that if he climbs his tree too often hundreds of feminine hands will pull him down. So he resigns himself to the inevitable. He is not slow to repeat the customary whine: "The woman whom thou gavest me"—but he says it quietly to himself between-whiles, because he knows that she knows all his share in the mischief. So he digs and delves, and finds gold and silver and limitless oil wherewith to turn into millions of dollars for her pleasure; he packs pork, lays railway tracks, starts companies, organizes "combines"; and strains every nerve and sinew to "do" every other Adam except himself in his own particular line of business, so that "the woman" (or may we say the women?) "whom thou gavest" may be clothed in Paris model gowns, and wear jewels outrivaling in size and luster those of all the kings and queens that ever made their sad and stately progress through history.

Indeed, Coward Adam, in the position he occupies as a free citizen of that mighty Republic over which the wild eagle screams exultingly, looks a little bit like a beaten animal. But he bears his beating well, and is pleasant about it. In regard to "the woman whom thou gavest me," he is nearer the imaginary code of "chivalry" than his European brother.

If the original Adam had learned the ways of a modern American gentleman of good education and fine manner, one can imagine him saying: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me generously offered me a share of the apple, and I did eat. But the serpent whom thou didst permit to tell lies to my amiable partner concerning this special kind of fruit was chiefly to blame."

Coward Adam, as he is seen and known among