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# Folks Used to Believe

by ALVIN F.  
HARLOW

## The Serpent in Eden



A LEADING zoological question which was discussed with great zest from two to four centuries ago was that regarding the species of serpent which misled Mother Eve in the Garden of Eden. The general belief was that it had stood upright, because its sentence of punishment, as given in the Bible, was to crawl on its belly for the remainder of time. Some medieval authorities insisted that the serpent (generally admitted to be Satan in disguise) had a woman's face while talking to Eve, in order to win her confidence; and it is so pictured in several old books. Others thought it was that mythical serpentiform animal, the basilisk.

Sir Thomas Browne, the Seventeenth Century philosopher, says that Julius Scaliger (1484-1558), "speaking of certain strange kinds of serpents, reports that in Malabar there are serpents 8 foote long, of an horrible aspect, but harmless unless they bee provoked. These he calls boy-lovers, for that they will for many houres together stand bolt upright gazing on the boyes at their sportes, never offering to hurt any of them. These, saith he, while they glide on the ground, are like other serpents or eeles, but raising themselves upright,

they spread themselves into such a corpulent breadthe, that had they feet they would seeme to be men, and therefore he calls them by a coigned name, eeel-like men." From this description Browne supposes that this must have been the kind of serpent that spoke to Eve.

Dr. Adam Clarke (1762-1832) argued that it was not a serpent at all, but an ape—his contention being that the Hebrew word *nachash* in *Genesis* III, 1, is nearly the same as an Arabic word which means not only an ape, but the Devil! Dr. Clarke pointed out that whatever the *nachash* was, in intelligence and reason it stood at the head of the lower animals, that it evidently walked erect, and that it possessed the gift of speech, which he apparently conceives that apes once possessed.

There was also much wrangling over the question whether the forbidden fruit was really an apple or not, some claiming it was a pomegranate, others a sort of melon. One Matthiolus described it as *Pomum Adami*, or Adam's Apple, a tropical fruit somewhat like a citron, but with deeper, rougher corrugations on the skin, which represented the marks of Adam's teeth, still inherent in the fruit.