

A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE DEVIL.

BY "ICONOCLAST."

To have written under this head in the reign of James Rex, of pious memory, would have, probably, procured for me, without even the perusal of my pamphlet, the reputation of Dr. Faustus, and a too intimate acquaintance with some of the pleasant plans of torturing to death practised by the clever witch-finders of that day. I profess, however, no knowledge of the black art, and am entirely unskilled in *diablerie*, and feel quite convinced that the few words I shall say about his Satanic Majesty will not be cause of any unholy compacts, in which bodies or souls are signed away in ink suspiciously red.

In many countries, dealing with the Devil has been a perilous experiment. In 1790, an unfortunate named André Dubuisson was confined in the Bastille, charged with raising the Devil. To prevent even the slightest apprehension on the part of my reader that I have any desire or intent toward placing him unpleasantly near a black-visaged, sulphureous-constituted individual, horned like an old goat, with satyr-like legs, a tail of unpleasant length, and a disposition to buy a body from any unfortunate wight ready to dispose of it, I have only to assert my intention of treating the subject entirely from a Biblical point of view. Doubtless I ought to do this; the Christian Devil is a Bible institution. I say, advisedly, the Christian Devil, because other religions have boasted their Devil, and it is well to prevent confusion. But I frankly admit that none of these religions have the honour of a Devil so devilish as our own. Indeed our Devil ought to be the best, it costs the most. No other religion beside our own can boast the array of Popes, Bishops, Conferences, Rectors, Incumbents, and paid preachers of various titles. And all these to preach against the Devil!

It is necessary, before entering on my subject, that I should confess my little ability to do it justice. I am unable to say, certainly, whether I am writing about a singular Devil or a plurality of Devils. In one text "Devils" are mentioned,* recognising a plurality; in another,

* Leviticus, xvii., 7.

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“the Devil,”* as if there was but one. We may, however, fairly assume that either there is one Devil, more than one, or less than one; and, having thus cleared our path from mere numerical difficulties, we will proceed to give the Devil his due. Satan appears either to have been a child of God, or, at any rate, a most intimate acquaintance of the family; for we find that on “a day when the children of God came to present themselves before the Lord, that Satan came also amongst them;”† and no surprise or disapprobation is manifested at his presence. The conversation narrated in the Book of Job, as occurring between God and the Devil, has, for us, a value proportioned to the rarity of the scene, and to the high characters of the personages concerned. We are, therefore, despite the infidel criticism of Martin Luther, who condemns the Book of Job as “a sheer *argumentum fabulæ*,” determined to examine carefully the whole particulars for ourselves; and, in so doing, we are naturally surprised to find God, the omniscient, putting to Satan the query, Whence comest thou? We cannot suppose God, the all-wise, ignorant upon the subject, and we cannot avoid a feeling of astonishment that such an interrogatory should have been made. Satan’s reply, assuming its correctness—and this the text leaves us no reason to doubt—increases our surprise and augments our astonishment. The answer given is, “From going to and fro in the earth, and from going up and down it.” In remarking on this answer, I do not address myself to those wretched persons who, relying on their reason and common sense, ignore the divine truth. I address myself to the true believer, and I ask, is he not astonished to find, from his Bible, that Satan could have gone to and fro in the earth, and walked up and down, and yet not have met God, the omnipresent, occasionally during his journeying? The Lord makes no comment on Satan’s reply, but says, “Hast thou not considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil?” It is rather extraordinary that God should wish to have the Devil’s opinion on the only good man recorded as then living in the world: the more extraordinary when we know that God is all-wise, and knew Satan’s opinion without asking it, and that God is immutable, and, therefore, would not be influenced by the expression of the Devil’s opinion when uttered. Satan’s answer is, “Doth Job fear God for naught? Hast thou not made an hedge about him, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blest the work of his hand, and his substance is increased in the land; but put forth thine hand now and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.” What is God’s reply to this audacious assertion? Does he express his determination to protect the righteous Job? Does

* Luke, iv., 2.

† Job, i., 6.

Can he use his power to rebuke the evil tempter? No. "The Lord said unto Satan, Behold all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put forth not thine hand." And this was Job's reward for being a perfect and upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil. He was not sent to the Devil, but the Devil was sent to all that he had. And he lost all without repining, sons, daughters, oxen, asses, camels and sheep, all destroyed, and yet Job sinned not. Some divines have urged that we here get a beautiful picture of patience and contentment under wrong and misfortune. But I reply that it is not good to submit patiently to wrong, or to rest contented under misfortune. I urge that it is manlier far to resist wrong, nobler far to wage war against wrong, better far to carefully investigate the causes of wrong and misfortune, with a view to their removal. Contentment under wrong is a crime, voluntary submission under oppression is not the virtue some would have it to be.

"Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord [as if God's children could ever be absent from him], and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord. And the Lord said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the Lord and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth? a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, ALTHOUGH THOU MOVEDST ME AGAINST HIM TO DESTROY HIM WITHOUT CAUSE."

Can God be moved against a man to destroy him without a cause? If so, God is neither immutable nor all-wise. Yet the Bible puts into God's mouth the terrible admission that the Devil had moved God against Job to destroy him without cause. If true, it destroys God's goodness; if false, then the Bible is no revelation.

But Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life; put forth thine hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face."

Does the Lord now drive the Devil from his presence? Is there any expression of wrath or indignation against this tempter? Not so. "The Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand, but save his life." And Job, being better than everybody else, finds himself smitten in consequence with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. The ways of the Lord are not as our ways, or this would seem the reverse of an encouragement to virtue.

We turn over the pages of our Bibles for further information on this diabolic theme.

After reading the account of the numbering by David attentively, one is puzzled by the apparent contradiction, that in one place "God"

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and in another "Satan" occurs.* But it may be that there is more harmony between God and the Devil than ordinary men are aware. Unfortunately, we have not the advantage of great scholarship, but one erudite commentator on the Bible tells us, in speaking of the Hebrew word Azazel—"This terrible and venerable name of God, through the pens of Biblical glossers, has been a *Devil, a mountain, a wilderness, and a he-goat.*"† Well may incomprehensibility be an attribute of Deity, when, even to holy and reverend fathers, God has been sometimes undistinguishable from a he-goat or a Devil. Goats and Devils are alike represented with horns and tails. We trust that profanity will not enlarge on this sad confusion of ideas. Not possessing great lingual acquirements, we adhere to the English Bible, believing that religion can never be improved by mere common sense, or human effort. We admire, without understanding, the skill of the Missionary, who makes the word "Mooigniazimoongo" an equivalent for God in the Sooahelee dialect, and who represents "original sin" to the Ottomi Indian by the word "Teacatzintiliztlatlacolli," and who recommends the Delaware to repentance as "Schiwelendamowitchewagan." We do not wonder that in these translating thaumaturgic exploits God and Devil get mistaken for each other.

God is a spirit. Jesus was led up of the Spirit to be tempted of the Devil; and it is also true that spirits are very likely to lead men to the Devil. Too intimate acquaintance with whisky-toddy overnight is often followed by the *delirium tremens* and blue-devils on the morrow. We advise our readers to eschew alike spirituous and spiritual mixtures. They interfere sadly with sober thinking, and play the Devil with your brains.

The history of the temptation of Jesus by the Devil has been dealt with in another essay.‡ Yet it may be well to add the opinion of a Church of England divine in this place—"That the Devil should appear personally to the Son of God is *certainly not more wonderful* than that he should, in a more remote age, have appeared *among* the Sons of God, in the presence of God himself, to tempt and torment the righteous Job. But that Satan should carry Jesus, bodily and literally, through the air—first to the top of a high mountain, and then to the topmost pinnacle of the temple—is wholly inadmissible, it is an insult to our understanding."§ It is pleasant to be able to find so many clergymen, in these days, zealously repudiating their own creeds. I am not prepared to speak strongly as to the colour of the Devil; white men paint him black, black men white; but, allowing for the prejudices of dark-coloured and fair-

* 1 Chron., xxi., 1; 2 Sam., xxiv., 1.

† G. R. Gliddon's extract from "Lanci's Sagra Scritara," chap. iii., sec. 1.

‡ "Who was Jesus Christ?" p. 3.

§ "Christian Records," by the Rev. Dr. Giles, p. 144.

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skinned believers, an invisible green would not be an unreasonable tint. We presume that he is not colourless, as otherwise the Evangelists or the persons present would have laboured under considerable difficulties in witnessing the casting out of the Devil from the man in the synagogue.* This Devil is described as an unclean Devil, and it is, therefore, a fair inference that there are clean Devils as well as dirty Devils. Printer's Devils are mostly unclean Devils, but then they are only little Devils, and we must not make too much of them. Nearly all the Devils seem to talk, and it has therefore been conjectured by some bachelor metaphysicians that they are of the feminine gender, but I see no reason to agree in this, and my wife is of a contrary opinion. The Devils are probably good Christians—one text tells us that they believe and tremble. It is a fact with some poor Devils that the more they believe the more they tremble. We are told in another text that the Devil goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. He will have extremely bad taste, however, if he eat up the lean and bony working-classes, while so many fat bishops and stout archdeacons remain unconsumed. Devils should be a sort of eternal salamander, for we are told there is everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels,† and that there is a lake of brimstone and fire, into which the Devil was cast.‡ Perhaps instead of being salamanders they will, while in the fire, be rather of the 'otter tribe; but this is a question which Mr. C. H. Spurgeon, who is a far better judge of brimstone than myself, would be more competent to settle. The Devil has, at least upon one occasion, figured as a controversialist. He disputed with the archangel Michael, contending about the body of Moses;§ and in these degenerate days of personality in debate it is pleasant to know that the religious champion, unlike the Grants, Coopers, and Brindleys of the present period, was very civil toward his Satanic opponent. The Devil was once imprisoned for 1,000 years in a bottomless pit.|| If a pit has no bottom, it seems but little confinement to shut the top; but with faith and prayer even a good foundation may be obtained for a bottomless pit.

It is urged by some that the Devil was the serpent of Genesis—that is, that it was really Satan who, in this guise, tempted Eve. There is this difficulty in the matter—the Devil is a liar,¶ but in the interview with Eve the serpent seems to have confined himself to the strict truth.** There is, in fact, no point of resemblance—no horns, no hoof, nothing except the tail—which can be in any way identified.

The Old Testament speaks a little of the Devils, sometimes of Satan, but never of "The Devil," and it seems almost too much, in Matthew, to usher him in, in the temptation scene, without intro-

* Luke, iv., 35, 36.

§ Jude, 9.

** Genesis, iii., 4, 5, 22.

† Matt., xxv., 41.

|| Rev., xxi., 2.

‡ Rev., xxi., 10.

¶ John, viii., 44.

duction, and as if he were an old acquaintance. I do not remember reading, in the Old Testament, anything about the lake of brimstone and fire; this feature of faith was reserved for the warmth of Christian love to inspire; the Pentateuch makes no reference to it. Zechariah, in a vision, saw "Joshua, the High-Priest, standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him." Why the Devil wanted to resist Joshua, is not clear; but as Joshua's garments were in a very filthy state, it may be that he was preaching to the Priest the virtues of cleanliness. It is often said that cleanliness is next to godliness; I honestly confess that I should prefer a clean sinner to a dirty saint. Jesus said that one of the twelve disciples was a Devil,† but I am not prepared to say whether he meant the unfaithful and cowardly Peter, to whom he intrusted the keys of Heaven, or Judas who sold him for money, just as would nearly any bishop of the present day. The bishops preach that it is as difficult for a rich man to get into Heaven, as for a camel to go through the eye of a needle; yet they enrich themselves, and their families, as greedily and carelessly as if they, at any rate, never expected to smell brimstone as a consequence. You are told to resist the Devil, and he will flee from you;‡ if this be true, he is a cowardly Devil, and thus does not agree quite with Milton's picture of his grand, defiant, almost heroism. But then Milton was a poet, and true religion has but little poetry in it.

Jeroboam, one of the Jewish monarchs, ordained priests for the Devils,§ and this may be the reason why, at the present day, all the orthodox clergy are gentlemen in black. In the time of Jesus, Satan must, when not in the body of some mad, deaf, dumb, blind, or paralytic person, have been in Heaven; for Jesus, on one occasion, told his disciples that he saw Satan, as lightning, fall from Heaven.|| Of course, this would betoken a rapid descent, but although a light affair, it is no laughing matter, and we reverently leave it to the clergy to explain the text. Jesus told Simon Peter that Satan desired to have him, that he might sift him as wheat;¶ in this text it may be urged that Jesus was chaffing his disciple. Paul, the apostle, seems to have looked on the Devil, much as the magistrates of Guernsey, Devonport, and Yarmouth look on the police, for Paul delivered Hymeneus and Alexander unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.**

Revivalists are much indebted for their evanescent successes to Hell and the Devil, if the following extract from the experience of a Christian preacher be reliable:—

"Thomas English was one of those very noisy and active preachers who do so much in promoting revivals." He would tell his

* Zechariah, iii., 1.

§ 2 Chronicles, xi., 15.

** 1 Timothy, i., 20.

† John, vi., 70.

|| Luke, x., 18.

‡ James, iv., 7.

¶ Luke, xxii., 31.

hearers of "dwelling with devouring fire, bearing everlasting burning, roasting on the Devil's spit, broiling on his gridiron, being pitched about with his fork, drinking the liquid fire, breathing the brimstone fumes, drowning in a red-hot sea, lying on fiery beds,"* &c.

In the present year the vulgar tirades of Reginald Radcliffe, Richard Weaver, and C. H. Spurgeon (some of them delivered in Exeter Hall) will serve to evidence that the above quotation is not the exaggeration which some might think. In London, before crowded audiences, Mr. Weaver, without originality, and with only the merit of copied coarseness, has called upon the Lord to "shake the ungodly for five minutes over the mouth of Hell." Mr. Spurgeon has drawn pictures of Hell which, if true and revealed to him by God, are most disgustingly frightful, and which being, as we believe, false, and but the creation of his own vulgar, morbid fancies, induce, on our part, a feeling of contempt as well as disgust.

The Wesleyans, some years since, made the Devil a prominent feature in the famous "Fly-Sheet" controversy, so much so that a Wesleyan, speaking and writing on the subject, suggested that the authors of the "Fly-Sheets" were Devils, and another once-Wesleyan writer says, "The first thing which made me inquire about the Devil, was that I thought him abused. I thought him bad enough, but could not help fearing that people told lies about him. R. S——, a very zealous prayer-leader, stole some oats, and imputed the blame to the Devil. T. C—— got drunk, and complained in the love-feast that the Devil had been very busy with him for some time, and then took him in an unguarded moment. B. S—— was detected in lying, and complained that Satan had gained the advantage over him. Old George White burned his fingers in lighting his pipe, and declared that it was the Devil that caused him to do it; and Farmer Duffy horsewhipped his wife, and said that he did it to beat the Devil out of her. This made me desirous to know what influence the Devil really had, and I was stimulated to this inquiry by my friend, Mr. Treleven, who assured me that the Devil was as necessary as the Almighty to the orthodox faith."† The fashionable preachers in the neighbourhood of Belgravia mostly eschew the Devil, and avoid the taint of brimstone; treacle is the commodity they dispense.

For myself, the only Devil I know, is that black Devil, ignorance, fostered by knavery and tyranny; a Devil personified by the credulous many, and kept up in the past by the learned but treacherous few, who preferred to rule the masses by their fears, rather than to guide them through their love. This devil has, indeed, not been a roaring lion, but a cowardly and treacherous boa constrictor; it has enveloped in its massive folds, glorious truths, and in the fierceness of its brute

* "Pilgrim's Progress from Methodism to Christianity."

† Ibid.

power has crushed them in its writhings. But oh! a glorious day is coming: amidst the heretofore gloom of night the bright rays of the rising sun are piercing, the light of truth dispels the mists of ignorance. Bright facts drive out dark delusions; mighty truths triumph over pious frauds, and no longer need men be affrighted by the notion of an omnipotent fiend, wandering through the earth, ever seeking their damnation.

Yes—to partially adopt the phraseology of a writer in *Macmillan's Magazine*—I do refuse to see in God a being omniscient as omnipotent, who puts us into this world without our volition, leaves us to struggle through it as we can, unequally pitted against an almost omnipotent and supersubtle Devil, and then if we fail, finally drops us out of this world into Hell-fire, where a legion of inferior Devils find constant and never-ending employment in inventing fresh tortures for us; our crime being, that we have not succeeded where success was rendered impossible. No high, no manly, no humane thinkings are developed in the doctrine of Devils and damnation. If a potent faith, it degrades alike the teacher and the taught, by its abhorrent mercilessness; and if a form instead of a faith, then is the Devil doctrine a misleading sham, which frightens weak minds and never develops strong men.

