

CHAPTER 11

The devil of Christendom is a myth. Just as human fancy, working on a basis of fact and truth, has impersonated an object for its worship, so by a like process it has created a scapegoat to account for the crimes and vices of humanity. A mythical Jesus is the Buddha of Christendom; a mythical Satan is its bogey. In the one case as in the other, a gulf separates the myth from the reality.

The Satan of Christian mythology is a monster of wickedness, the instigator to every crime of exceptional brutality or loathsome lust. The Satan of Scripture is the awful being who dared to offer his patronage to our Divine Lord. When a man is led into evil courses, "he is drawn away by his own lust" (James 1:14). The human heart, our Lord Himself declares, is the vile spring from which immoralities and crimes proceed (Mark 7:21). Using the word "immoral" in its narrow, popular sense, there is no basis for the belief that Satan ever provokes to an immoral act. Indeed, if we leave out of account his incitements aimed against Christ personally, the solitary instance of Ananias and Sapphira alone affords a pretext for asserting that he ever tempted anyone to do anything which human judgment would condemn.¹ This statement may seem startling, but it is true, and its truth can be established. Of the unseen world we know absolutely nothing beyond what Scripture reveals; to the Scriptures, therefore, we must turn. And here the Old Testament is eloquent by reason of its silence. If the popular belief were well founded, is it possible that from Genesis to Malachi not a word could be found in support of it? In three passages only is Satan mentioned. The first describes the fall of man, and there the entire aim of the tempter was to alienate the creature from God. In the *role* of philanthropist he appeared to our first parents, and sowed in their hearts the seeds of distrust (Gen. 2). The next passage describes his assaults on Job, and here again his only aim was to lead the patriarch to doubt the Divine goodness (Job 1 and 2). And the third narrates that mysterious incident in which he sought to hinder the high priest Joshua in the discharge of his sacred office.²

When we turn to the New Testament, we must avoid the popular error of confounding Satan with the angels that "kept not their own principality, but left their own habitation" (Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:4). These are in bonds awaiting "the judgment of the great day." They have no part in the course of human affairs. Demons, again, are beings of a wholly different order. It is assumed that they are subordinate to the devil, and as some of them are expressly called "*unclean* spirits," uncleanness is attributed to Satan. But the assumption is based in part upon Jewish beliefs, and, even if a true one, the inference is forced. A ruler may have vicious subjects and yet not himself be vicious!³

1 See Appendix, Note VI.

2 Zech. 3:1,2. In 1 Chron. 21:1 and Psa. 109:6, the word rendered Satan in A.V. is merely *an adversary*. And I cannot avail myself of Isa. 14:12 &c. and Ezek. 28:14 &c., much as they would help me, because there is no way of ascertaining certainly whether Satan is there intended. I have no doubt of it myself. The word *Devil* does not occur in the Old Testament. In the four places where "Devils" is used in A.V., the R.V. adopts other words.

3 In Matt. 12:24-27, our Lord neither adopted nor rejected the Jewish belief. How grotesque is the suggestion that at such a time He should have discoursed to them on demonology! Passing the subject by, He turned their taunt back upon themselves by the words, "If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?" Unless the phenomena described by spiritualists may be explained by delusions or fraud, they must be attributed to demons; and

But are not sins described as "the works of the devil?" And what of the words, "He who does sin is of the devil"? Will the objector consider the definition of sin to which this refers--one of the only definitions in the Bible? "Sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4, R.V.). The possession of an independent will is man's proud but perilous boast. His duty and safety and happiness alike demand that this will shall be subordinated to the will of God, and all revolt against the Divine will is sin. Lawlessness is its essence; the element of immorality is entirely accidental.

And this explains the apostolic comment upon the precept "Be angry and sin not."⁴ Anger may in itself be right. But if cherished, it is apt to degenerate into vindictiveness; and thus what in its inception may betoken fellowship with God--for "God is angry every day" (Psa. 7:11)--may lead to thoughts and even acts which are only evil. Therefore the apostle adds, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give occasion to the devil." The Satan myth leads men to read this as though it were no more than a warning against homicidal violence. But the closing passage of this same Epistle (Eph. 6:10-20) gives proof that the apostle's theology of Satanic temptations relates to a far different sphere. The normal conflict of the Christian life begins where the struggle with "flesh and blood" has ceased. It is in the spiritual sphere, and not in the domain of morals, that the panoply [full armaments] of God is needed. The Pharisee or the Buddhist can boast as high a standard of morality as the Christian. Their motives may be lower, but the outward results are the same. When some man of repute is betrayed into acts of shame, the devil would be held accountable for his fall in any ecclesiastical court. But not at the Old Bailey, where prejudice avails nothing and proof must be full and clear. No one may assert that Satan might not stoop to such means to attain his ends, but we may aver that no "previous conviction" is recorded to his prejudice.

"But," the objector will indignantly demand, "did not our Lord Himself denounce him as a liar and a murderer?" Yes truly, such were His words to the Pharisees who were plotting His death. But what is their significance? Let us consider them with open minds, for the Satan myth has so obscured their meaning that the commentaries will not help us. To the Jews' vain boast of their descent from Abraham, the Lord replied that the patriarch's children would walk in their father's ways; but as for them, they sought to kill Him because He had spoken to them God-given truth. They then fell back upon that figment of the apostate, the fatherhood of God, thus bringing on themselves the scathing words, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning and has not stood in the truth because truth is not in him. When he speaks THE lie, he speaks of his own, for he is a liar and the father of IT."⁵ These, remember, are not words of vulgar invective. They are the words of Christ Himself to men of character and repute, honorable and earnest men who, under their responsibilities as the religious leaders of the people, deplored His teaching as pestilent and profane. Such language addressed by such lips to such men is awful in its solemnity; but what does it mean?

there seems strong reason to believe that some men are possessed by "unclean" demons.

4 Eph. 4:26. The words are quoted *verbatim* from Psa. 4:4 (LXX).

5 John 8:44. See Appendix, Note VII.

The devil was "a murderer from the beginning." The beginning of what? Not of his own existence, surely, for he was created in perfection and beauty. Nor yet of the Eden paradise, for Satan had dragged down others in his ruin long before our earth became the home of man. His being a murderer connects itself immediately with THE truth which he has refused and THE lie of which he is the father. As we listen to these solemn and mysterious words of our Divine Lord, we are accorded a glimpse into a past eternity when the great mystery of God was first made known to "principalities and powers," the great intelligences of the heavenly world.⁶ Greatest of them all was the being whom now we know as Satan, and the promulgation of the purpose of the ages disclosed to him the fact that a Firstborn was yet to be revealed who was "in all things to have the pre-eminence."

Science has poured contempt upon the old belief that man is the center of the universe. And yet the old belief was right. But He who claims this transcendent dignity is not the man of Eden--"vain insect of an hour!"--but the Man who is "the Lord from Heaven." And He it is who is the object of the devil's hate. In compassing the fall of Adam, he may perchance have imagined that *he* was the promised firstborn. But it was not till the Temptation of Christ Himself that Satan and his lie were at last revealed. Not one person in a thousand of those who read the record of it attempts to realize its significance. How could the Satan of Christendom dare to stand before the Lord of Glory! And how could the suggestions of such a loathsome monster be anything but hateful and repulsive? Suppose the biographer of some noble-minded and holy woman sought to emphasize the purity of her mind and the steadfastness of her character by recording that she was once closeted with a man well known to her as a coarse and shameless libertine, and yet passed through the ordeal unscathed! No less preposterous does the narrative of the temptation appear if we read it in the false light of the Satan myth.⁷

The Satan of Scripture is a being who claimed to meet our Lord on more than equal terms. Having "led Him up" and given Him that mysterious vision of earthly sovereignty, "the devil said to Him," we read, "To Thee will I give all this authority and the glory of them; for it has been delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore will worship before me, it shall all be thine."

Is this no more than the raving of irresponsible madness or impious profanity? It is the bold assertion of a disputed right. Satan claims to be the Firstborn, the rightful heir of creation, the true Messiah, and as such he claims the worship of mankind. Men dream of a devil horned and hoofed--a hideous and obscene monster--who haunts the squalid slums and gilded vice-dens of our cities, and tempts the depraved to acts of atrocity or shame. But, according to Holy Writ, he "fashions himself into an angel of light," and "his ministers fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness" (2 Cor. 11:14). Do "ministers of righteousness" corrupt men's morals or incite them to commit outrages?

⁶ This is probably the explanation of the "coincidences" between Christianity and some of the old religions of the world. I do not allude to Buddhism, for its seeming "coincidences" admit of a much more prosaic explanation (see, *e.g.*, Professor Kellogg's work "Light of Asia and Light of the World"), but to the cult of Tammuz and ancient Babylon. Scripture warns us that in the future Satan will travesty the Divine mysteries; is it strange if he has done so in the past?

⁷ See Appendix, Note VI.

And this prepares the way for the further statement that it is the *religion* of the world that he controls, and not its vices and its crimes. "The god of this world" is his awful title--a title Divinely conceded to the Evil One, not because the Supreme has delegated His sovereignty, but because the world accords him its homage. It is in the sphere of religion, then, that the influence of the Tempter is to be sought--not in the records of our criminal courts, not in the pages of obscene novels, but in the teaching of false theologies.

The lie of which he is the father is the denial of the Christ of God, the Christ of Calvary, the only mediator between God and men, the propitiation for the world's sins--the "mercy-seat"⁸ where an outcast sinner can meet a holy God and find pardon and peace. But "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them" (2 Cor. 4:4, R.V.). Hence it is that men turn to the Church, to religion, to morality, to "the Sermon on the Mount"--making the Lord Himself minister to their self-righteousness and pride--in a word, to anything and everything rather than to the Cross of Christ.

What led to the discovery of the planet Neptune was the apparent disturbance from some unknown cause in the movements of other planets. And have we not reason to search for a "Neptune" in the spiritual sphere? Is it not clear that there is some sinister influence in operation here? How else can it be explained that in the full light of our advanced civilization, even persons of the highest intelligence and culture are gulled by the tricks and superstitions which form the stock-in-trade of priestcraft?

But "the lie" has other phases. The mind of the Tempter is disclosed no less in some of our most popular books of piety. Eternal judgment and a hell for the impenitent, redemption by blood, and the need of salvation through the death of the great Sin-bearer--these and kindred doctrines are rejected as survivals of a dark and credulous age. It is for man to work out his own destiny and to raise himself to the Divine ideal. And all this is prefaced and made plausible by boldly insinuating that plain words Divinely spoken are either misunderstood or spurious. A new gospel some men call this; it is the oldest gospel known. In every point it reminds us of the old, old words: "Has God said?" "Ye shall *not* surely die;" "Ye shall be as gods knowing good and evil." The "Jesus" of this theology bears a sinister resemblance to the great philanthropist of Eden! In the name of that "other Jesus" (2 Cor. 11:4), the Christ of God would be again rejected if He returned to earth today.

During His ministry on earth the Lord's acts and words to the fallen and depraved led to His being branded as the friend of the dishonest and the immoral. And why? This question is best answered by another: Did He not come to seek and to save *the lost*? How then could He drive them from His presence? A strange Savior such would be! *Sin* He could not tolerate, but for *sinner*s His love and pity were infinite. And His detractors mistook sympathy with sinners for sympathy with sin. But when men refused to own that they were lost, and separated themselves from Him by an impassable barrier of religion

8 In I John 2:2 and 4:10 He is called the *ἰλασός*. In Rom. 3:25 He is called the *ἰλαστήριον* (mercy-seat). The word occurs but once again in the New Testament, *i.e.*, Heb. 9:5.

and morality, infinite love was powerless. Omnipotence itself was baffled! And He who had wept in silence in presence of human sorrow gave way to unrestrained outbursts of grief as He contemplated their doom.⁹

On yet another occasion He exclaimed, "How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and *ye would not*" (Luke 13:34). The hand stretched out to save them they thrust from them with obloquy [revilement]. And what wonder! Men of blameless morality, of the deepest piety, of intense devotion to religion, men looked up to and respected by the people, who acknowledged them as leaders, were told that the degraded and depraved had better hopes of heaven than themselves. His teaching was a public scandal. His mission was an insult to them. And all truth and decency were outraged when He openly called them "children of hell" and told them they had the devil for their father!

When a malignant tumor is eating at the vitals, the tenderness of the physician is useless. The surgeon's knife must reach the mischief, let the risk be what it may. And surely if He who was so gracious, so "meek and lowly in heart," spoke such scathing words as these, it was because no tenderer treatment could avail. It was because their own case was desperate and their influence was disastrous. And such men must have successors and representatives on earth today. Who are they, then, and where? Let the thoughtful reader work out the answer for himself. But let him keep in view the factors of the problem. It was not the "publicans and harlots" who were branded thus as hell-begotten. Alas for human nature, no devil was needed to account for the sins of such! But to the *religious* Jews it was that these awful words were spoken. And why? Because the Satan cult is to be sought for, not in pagan orgies, but in the acceptance of the Eden gospel and the pursuit of religious systems, which honor man and dishonor Christ.¹⁰

9 In John 11:35 the word used betokens silent tears. The word in Luke 19:41 means to lament with every outward expression of grief.

10 For a further discussion of the general question, see Appendix, Note VIII.