

SATAN—THE ADVERSARY

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NO one who is seeking to do Christian work in the way the New Testament directs will deny that there is an Adversary. Of course, it is possible to be oblivious of the fact — no doubt many workers are, but that only suggests that they are not fully alive to the truth about our present earthly circumstances as Christians. In the New Testament the Christian is represented as being at war with and continually liable to be involved in battle against unseen foes led by the 'prince of the power of the air' (Eph. ii. 2).

Furthermore, it is part of good generalship to know the capabilities and customary tactics of the enemy. Hence Paul could say, 'We are not ignorant of his devices' (2 Cor. ii. 11). 'The design of almost every thing that the Scripture teaches concerning devils,' as Calvin remarks, 'is that we may be careful to guard against their insidious machinations and may provide ourselves with such weapons as are sufficiently firm and strong as to repel the most powerful enemies' (*Inst.* I. xiv. 13). The aim of this paper is that the reader may thus be 'not ignorant' and 'may be careful to guard against their insidious machinations'.

In the first place, those who consider that there is no devil, or that the biblical term 'the devil' is merely to portray in a vivid way the evil impulses which arise in all our hearts, are faced with scriptures such as Mt. xxv. 41, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels' (R.V.); or 1 Jn. iii. 8, 'the devil sinneth from the beginning'. Devils are described in Jude 6 as 'angels which kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation' (R.V.). How meaningless these and many other such expressions would be if there were no devils at all!

HIS DEVICES AGAINST THE UNBELIEVER

The statements of Scripture on the present activities of Satan fall into two broad classes — his devices against the unbeliever and those against the believer. God sent Paul to the Gentiles 'to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God' (Acts xxvi. 18, R.V.). Their state is characterized by darkness and the domination of Satan. The natural man likes to think he is free. To submit to any yoke, such as our Lord proposes in Mt. xi. 29, is unthinkable. The truth is, however, that he is not free. He walks, or lives, 'according to the prince of the power of the air', and is subjected to 'the world-rulers of this darkness' (Eph. vi. 12, R.V.). This will become more apparent when the results of this domination are considered.

DARKNESS TODAY

We might notice also Col. i. 13: 'who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love' (R.V.). The question arises in connection with these quotations: 'What is darkness?' Is it absence of intellectual knowledge? Or is it used in a moral sense? That the latter is the case can be inferred from such verses as Rom. xiii. 12, 'Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness' and Eph. v. 11, 'have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness'. The

power of darkness in the life of the unbeliever issues then in a life of sin. Significantly enough, sins in 1 Jn. iii. 8 are called 'the works of the devil'.

Is this borne out in the world of today? Or the question might be put in another way: 'Does the decline of belief in the gospel lead to a life of darkness and sin?' It is interesting to read the comment of an upper middle-class man as to the truth of the gospel. 'I have travelled too much and seen too many different religions to believe that there is such a thing as a true religion.' Or again, from 'a serious-minded man of the professional class': 'I believe Christianity cannot be sustained as a theological system, and doubt whether its ethics, and therefore the civilization built on Christianity, can survive the decay of belief in their supernatural sanction' (*English Life and Leisure*, Rowntree and Lavers, p. 355). A perusal of this book will show that Romans i. 24-31 is a statement of present day facts. If a man is not in 'the Kingdom of the Son of His love', then he is under 'the power of darkness' and 'darkness' means sin. 'As a result of ten years' experience, I conclude that the *average* customer is dishonest' — A seaside hotel lost 10,000 coat-hangers in fifteen years — The eroticism in certain newspapers — Sexual laxity; all these are signs of the times. (Facts from *op. cit.*).

This power that is under consideration prompts the unbeliever to disobedience. Eph. ii. 2 has the phrase 'the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience'. Satan will allow no possibility of willing submission on the part of Mansoul to the rightful King or to His just laws. So sin can be described as lawlessness (1 Jn. iii. 4, R.V.), a state of rebellion encouraged by Satan, himself a rebel.

THE DECEIVER

It is puzzling, at first, to understand how it is that the sinner does not see this for himself and throw off this oppressive yoke. The answer to this problem is twofold. As far as Satan is concerned, he keeps his dupes in uncertainty by his lies. 'He is a liar, and the father thereof' (Jn. viii. 44, R.V.). In Rev. xx. 10, he is spoken of as deceiving men. Bunyan shows sharp insight into this truth when he makes Diabolus in *The Holy War* speak thus of a possible attack on Mansoul by Shaddai: 'Tis in vain for us to hope for quarter, for this King knows not how to show it. True, perhaps, he at his first sitting down before us, will talk of and pretend to mercy, that thereby with the more ease, and less trouble, he may again make himself the master of Mansoul; whatever therefore he shall say, believe not one syllable or tittle of it. . . . And suppose, again, that he should give quarter to everyone of you, be sure he will bring you into that bondage under which you were captivated before, or a worse, and then what good will your lives do you?'

THE DECEIVED

The other side of the problem concerns man himself. Even allowing for Satan's deceptive wiles, it may seem that man is excessively gullible. To think that he so easily believes God's rule to be a tyranny! Surely he can see that God's 'commandments are not grievous!' (1 Jn. v. 3). The answer, of course, is simple: *he can't see at all*. 'The god of this world hath 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. iv. 4, R.V.). Satan carefully blindfolds his followers lest they should see Jesus in all His grace and, seeing Him, see God. That is the last thing Satan wants us to see, that God is like Christ. 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father' (Jn. xiv. 9). And so 'God is love' (1 Jn.

iv. 8). How even Christ Himself can be made to appear a harsh and stern Judge to the sinner's conscience is clear from Luther's experience. 'Together with the law,' he says, 'Satan torments the conscience by picturing Christ before our eyes as an angry and stern Judge' (*Table Talk*). With good reason Paul writes 'our gospel is veiled . . . in them that are perishing' (2 Cor. iv. 3, R.V.).

This tremendous obstacle can be overcome only by God — the God who said of Creation, 'Let there be light' (2 Cor. iv. 6). He can cause 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' to shine into our darkened hearts.

HIS DEVICES AGAINST THE BELIEVER

It might almost be said that Satan redoubles his efforts when one of his subjects is being taken from him and being brought into the kingdom of light. With those who are quiescent under his rule he takes little trouble. It is rather when a man takes sides against the powers of darkness that he experiences the full force of their renown

Snatching away the seed

Note then the various ways in which Satan seeks to oppose the progress of the gospel, beginning with the very earliest stage when the word is first addressed to men. There are two related agencies at work in conversion, the Word (1 Pet. i. 23, R.V. — 'begotten again . . . through the word of God, which liveth and abideth') and the Holy Spirit (Jn. iii. 6 — 'born of the Spirit'). At the outset, as the seed of the Word is sown, Satan does his utmost to snatch it away (Mt. xiii. 19), especially from the thoughtless hearer. Dr. Alexander Whyte relates an experience of his own which is to the point. 'Before family worship, the old farmer had been reading to me out of a book of notes we had taken of Dr. John Duncan's sermons when we were both young men. After worship I got up and spoke first and said: "Let us have some more of those delightful notes." "Excuse me," said my friend, "but we all take our candles immediately after worship." The wicked one was prevented and outwitted every night in that house.'

Satan does not often use such lofty means to achieve his end of taking the mind off the Word and worship of God. It may be after-church topics, criticism of the poor technique of the human sower in the pulpit, light conversation relating to the weather or the people who have been seen in church; or again, an attitude of mind which is disinclined to believe that things are as bad as the preacher would have us believe — all will turn out for the best in the long run! We think God as easy-going as we are. And so the sermon is forgotten.

Tares in the field

There is nothing so confusing as a clever counterfeit. If Satan cannot prevent conversions, then he will imitate them, to the great confusion of the onlooker and to the great discredit of Christ's cause. The tares in the field are 'the sons of the evil one; and the enemy that sowed them is the devil' (Mt. xiii. 38, 39, R.V.). People who by outward profession are in the kingdom, but who have had no corresponding work of grace in the heart, constitute the tares. As Matthew Henry quaintly puts it, they have 'religion from the teeth outward'. They have a form of Christianity without the cross and the shame. Discipleship is unknown to them. They know nothing of the 'wind in their face for Christ's sake'. How many of these tares there are! Now it is neither accidental nor natural that this should be the case. It is the work of the evil one. 'An enemy hath done this!'

Starters hindered

If another title was needed for this section, it might be 'infant mortality'. The apostle Paul knew that the 'babes in Christ' would be a sure target for the devil's attack. He sent Timothy, he writes, 'that I might know your faith, lest by any means the tempter had tempted you, and our labour should be in vain' (1 Thes. iii. 5, R.V.). The newly-born Christian needs the support of older and more experienced friends. No one knows this better than our adversary, for we find that when Paul was anxious to return to his Thessalonian converts, Satan hindered him (1 Thes. ii. 18). If he cannot prevent the seed taking root, he will try to break the sapling before it gains strength. He will hinder earnest workers in every way possible. 'More especially when our endeavours are directed to the work of the Lord, it is certain that everything that hinders proceeds from Satan . . . Satan is continually contriving, by every means, in what way he may hinder us or obstruct the edification of the church' (Calvin).

Dissensions within

In the book of Acts we can see how Satan tried alternately to wreck the Church from outside and inside. Chapter iv — attack from without, Peter and John put in ward. Chapter v. 1-11 — attack from within, Ananias and Sapphira. Chapter v. 17 to the end — attack from without, the apostles in prison. Chapter vi — division within between Grecian Jews and Hebrews, followed by the persecution (from without) of Stephen. Dissensions within are from the devil's armoury. Notice what Peter said to Ananias: 'Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?' It was indeed the work of the great adversary of the Church. How great a part dissensions, amounting even in some cases to 'wars of religion', have played in the melancholy history of the Church down the ages. Some one has remarked that the power of the day of Pentecost has never been witnessed since simply because God has never since then found a hundred and twenty persons all with one accord in one place. Workers easily grow suspicious of one another. 'The Pauls' and 'the Barnabases' still have 'sharp contentions', and the work is hindered.

Deceitful workers

Or, in other words, false apostles. 'No marvel,' says Paul, 'if we should find these within the church, for even Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light.' It will not surprise us then to find false teachers 'fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ' (2 Cor. xi. 13, R.V.) and, under cover of innocent motives, making havoc in the Church. Such false teachers went to the churches of Galatia, troubling and unsettling the believers. They were the successors of the false prophets in the Old Testament who spoke 'a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord' (Je. xxii. 16). Surely if Satan is alive today, he has not laid aside this tremendous weapon. Many preachers 'have rejected the word of the Lord; and what manner of wisdom is in them?' (Je. viii. 9, R.V.). 'They strengthen the hands of evildoers' (Je. xxiii. 14) and 'destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture' (Je. xxiii. 1). Such men, according to the Word of God, are Satan's ministers (2 Cor. xi. 15). The supreme irony of the situation is that preachers of the truth were in the minority in the Church of Jeremiah's day, in Paul's day (2 Cor. ii. 17, R.V. — 'we are not as the many, corrupting the word of God!'), and also today. This is a master stroke of Satan!

A devouring lion

Under this title, Satan is seen as the one who seeks to tempt and destroy

the Christian. His ferocity in attack is pictured as like that of a hungry lion while searching for prey (1 Pet. v. 8), his subtle attacks are mentioned (Eph. vi. 11 — the wiles of the devil'), the confusion and pain set up in the soul of the tempted Christian remind Paul of an attack where flaming arrows are used (Eph. vi. 16). It is essential to remember that temptation is not sin. The Christian is told in Holy Writ, 'neither give place to the devil' (Eph. iv. 27), 'resist the devil and he will flee from you' (Jas. iv. 7). It speaks of those who 'have overcome the evil one' (1 Jn. ii. 13, R.V.), a victory based upon the great victory won by the Lord Jesus Himself over Satan and his forces at the cross (Jn. xii. 31; Col. ii. 14, 15; and Rev. xii. 10, 11). There is also the example of the Captain of our salvation who overcame the fierce assault of the tempter in the wilderness (Mt. iv. 1-11). The disciple can win too, for the Lord is with him to the end of the age.

Cast into prison

This was the lot of many Christians in the early years of the Church. It has been the lot of many since. In more modern times, John Knox was a prisoner on a French galley, Samuel Rutherford of Anwoth was imprisoned in Aberdeen, John Bunyan in Bedford jail, not to mention the incidents of persecution in the present century. Whose agency is this? Rev. ii. 10 (R.V.) makes it clear: 'The devil is about to cast some of you into prison'.

The furious activity of Satan ought not to deceive the Christian. 'He hath but a short time' (Rev. xii. 12). An eternal fire is prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt. xxv. 41). Meanwhile, the Christian should be vigilant, prayerful, victorious. 'Having been previously warned that we are perpetually threatened by an enemy, and an enemy desperately bold and extremely strong, skilled in every artifice, indefatigable in diligence and celerity, abundantly provided with all kinds of weapons, and most expert in the science of war, let us make it the grand object of our attention that we suffer not ourselves to be oppressed with slothfulness and inactivity, but, on the contrary, arousing and collecting all our courage, be ready for a vigorous resistance; and as this warfare is terminated only by death, let us encourage ourselves to perseverance' (Calvin's *Institutes* I. xiv. 13).

Communism in India

A missionary in India writes:

'While on holiday in the south I could not help being conscious of the strong influence of Communism there. I realized, too, it is probably stronger in the south than anywhere else in India. Almost all the missionaries I met seemed to feel that we should have a sense of urgency in our work as our time as missionaries out here may be short. It is true, too, that during the last few months I have realized that Communism is spreading in this province. However, the opinion of people from other parts of India such as Bengal and the North is very different, and suggests that the spread of Communism is rather a remote possibility. But one thing is very evident, and that is that Russian literature seems to have the monopoly of any and every bookstall in the streets and on the railway stations. It made one long to flood such stalls with Christian literature. Only this morning while doing my ward round I found a patient in a private ward reading a book on education in Russia. Realizing that she could read English I immediately gave her some English gospels and tracts. I later went back to talk to her and she was full of interest to read all she could and to understand what Christ's coming into the world means for us today. This patient is herself a Brahmin.'