

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL & GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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Religious.

For the Christian Messenger.

The History of the Devil.

DEAR BROTHER,

I received a letter a short time ago from an esteemed brother in a distant part of the Province, whose mind has been disturbed with reference to the existence and operations of evil spirits. He says:—"Ever since I was a child I have been led to believe that there was at some remote period war in heaven, and that the Devil, having been leader in the rebellion, was turned from thence with his followers to curse the world and lead its inhabitants astray. Well—I used to believe it, until last winter, when I read Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which set me a-thinking on the matter. I searched the Scriptures, but could find no light, in fact only faint allusions to the matter; and I think the materials are so scarce that none but Milton could have ever invented such a doctrine of devils out of them. I know that good men preach it, but I think they err; they had better acknowledge that they know nothing about the matter than preach Milton's fancies as the truth of the Bible.

"Now, Sir, it seems to me a fearful thought to suppose that war ever invaded the sacred precincts of God's immediate presence and power: and if it were so, what security have we that it may not be so again? And who can tell but perhaps even after we get to heaven some ambitious angel may raise the standard of rebellion and we may be seduced from our allegiance? Why—I am so easily led astray—it frightens me."

My correspondent adds that "many are very dark on the subject," and requests me to send my reply to his letter for publication in the *Christian Messenger*.

There is very little, however, to be said on that branch of the subject to which my friend refers, because Scripture itself is brief and obscure on the point. The information contained in the Bible may be summed up in a few sentences. We are told that there are certain angels who fell from the pure and exalted condition in which they were created; they "sinned"—they "kept not their first estate." 2 Peter ii. 4, Jude 6. When this event took place, how it was occasioned, and what were its attendant circumstances, we know not. It has been plausibly conjectured from 1 Tim. iii. 3, 6, 7, ("the condemnation of the devil"—"the snare of the devil") that the rebellious spirit first manifested itself in pride. But if we ask on what occasion it broke out, and how a disposition so hateful could gain a lodgement in celestial minds, we obtain no answer. It is one of those subjects which God has not thought proper to unveil to us in the present state.

The words of our Lord recorded by Luke, ch. x. 18,—"I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven"—are thought by some to refer to the expulsion of the arch-rebel, when he and his were hurled from the celestial battlements. But others suppose, and perhaps with greater probability, that the language is prophetic, the Saviour foreseeing the triumphant issue of his redemption-work and rejoicing in the prospect of final and complete victory.

While it is stated that these wicked spirits are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6), it is manifest that the phraseology used implies powerful restraint rather than absolute confinement. Since it is the uniform testimony of Scripture that "the devil and his angels" are constantly engaged in active opposition to God and his people. See Job i. 7, Ephes. vi. 12, 1 Peter v. 8.

It is too often forgotten that the Bible is a book of facts. We learn from it what God is, what he has done, the laws he has instituted, and the arrangements he has made for effecting the purposes of his administration. But the reasons for his procedure are seldom disclosed, except in a general way. We are taught that he is "holy in all his ways and righteous in all his works," and with this we are to be contented. As Hannah More says, "Enough to animate our faith we know, But not enough to soothe the curious mind Of vain philosophy. Enough to cheer Our hopes we see: the rest is hid in cloud, And heaven's own shadows fall upon the view."

The difficulties connected with the existence and agency of Satan and the hosts of which he is the head (his "angels"—the "principalities"—the "powers"—the "spiritual wickedness," or, as Alford renders it, "the spiritual armies of wickedness") form part of the great problem which has puzzled and vexed man from the beginning. But it is no more strange that evil should exist among beings of a higher order, and in other parts of God's dominions, than that it should exist here. Why it has been permitted, and what purposes are to be served by its existence, will be made known to us we may confidently expect, in the next state of being. We may have to wait many ages for the explanation, but it will come at last, and then we shall be fully satisfied. The prophet's words may be fitly applied to the case:—"The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." Hab. ii. 3. Meanwhile, John Newton's remark, dictated alike by common sense and pious regard to God's word, will serve to direct us to present duty:—"Many have puzzled themselves about the origin of evil; I observe there is evil, and that there is a way to escape it: and with this I begin and end."

We should also bear in mind that we are fully warned of our danger—that we are instructed how to resist the foe—that we have gracious assurances of help—and that ultimate victory is secured to all the followers of the Lamb. He was "in all points tempted like as we are"; He is "able to succour them that are tempted"; He says of his own, "They shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand," and "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set with my Father in his throne." Heb. ii. 18; iv. 15. John x. 27-30. Rev. iii. 21.

We need be under no apprehension regarding the future. The devil and his angels will be cast into the fire that is "prepared" for them and there they will be "tormented day and night for ever and ever." Rev. xx. 10.

Nor is there any ground for fear as to any other outbreak. Our Lord will "put down all rule, and all authority, and all power."—All enemies will be subdued, and placed under his feet. And "we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," 2 Peter iii. 13.—Then, peace, purity, and joy will universally prevail. Evil, which has been under limits and restraints all along, will exist no more, save in a state of just punishment. The devil will be cast finally into the "bottomless pit" and will be never more "loosed out of his prison." God will be "all in all."

Milton has built up a magnificent fiction with a very slender stock of material.

"The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name."

Shakespeare.

My correspondent says that the perusal of *Paradise Lost* set him a-thinking and sent him to the Bible. There he found truths instead of fancies. If he is ready to complain that truths are so few, and sometimes so darkly expressed, he may be reminded that God has left us in ignorance on thousands of subjects, and that it is better to confess that ignorance, and make the best use of what is actually to be known, than to busy ourselves with vain speculations or "darken counsel by words without knowledge." The ignorance to which I have referred relates to all the themes of thought and inquiry. It is part of our trial in the present state of being. Many men bear the trial very impatiently. They do not like to say, "I do not know." But the greatest philosophers are continually compelled to make that confession, of which we have abundant evidence in their published works.—So it is in theology. "Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known," 1 Cor. xiii. 12. What a blaze of light and glory will then burst upon the soul!

"I am an entire disciple of Butler," said Richard Cecil. "He calls his book *Analogy*; but the great subject, from beginning to end, is *human ignorance*."—"The Bible seems to be treated scientifically. After all

your accurate statements, it will leave you aground. The Bible does not come round, and ask our opinion of its contents. It proposes to us a Constitution of Grace, which we are to receive, though we do not wholly comprehend it. Numberless questions may be started on the various parts of this Constitution. Much of it I cannot understand, even of what respects myself; but I am called to act on it, and this is agreeable to analogy. My child will ask me questions on the fitness or unfitness of what I enjoin, but I silence him:—"You are not yet able to comprehend this; your business is to believe me and obey me." Works, iii. 458, 460.

Dr. Paley very wisely said, "True fortitude of understanding consists in not suffering what we do know to be disturbed by what we do not know."

Archbishop Whately's "View of the Scripture Revelations respecting good and evil angels" is an instructive book. I have just received from England a copy of the Archbishop's "Life," and find some remarks in one of his letters which all readers and thinkers may profit by. They are subjoined.

"When a man has got thoroughly puzzled at some passage in an author, or at a mathematical problem, I have known him to sit over it for hours, till he was half-distracted, without being any the forwarder; and when he comes to look at it again a day or two after, having been occupied in the interim with other things, he finds it quite easy. And it is the same when you are trying to recollect some name. I always told my pupils, 'When, after a reasonable time, you cannot make out a difficulty, pass on to something else, and return to the point next day'; and many a weary hour have I saved them. I have known a game-keeper act on an analogous plan.—When the dogs failed to find a winged bird in a thicket, he called them off, and hunted them elsewhere for half-an-hour; on coming back, they found the bird at once. He assured me that if he had kept them at that thicket all day, they would never have found the bird. The phenomenon is curious, and I do not profess to explain it. But of the fact and inference I cannot doubt." Life of Whately, ii. 145.

May this New Year be the happiest, holiest, and most useful year of our lives!

Yours &c.,

J. M. CRAMP.

Acadia College, Jan. 1st, 1867.

Baptism of a Presbyterian Missionary.

Rev. W. Mil'ar, of North Arthur, writes to the *Canadian Baptist* under date of Nov. 17:—"On Saturday, the 3rd inst., I was visited by Mr. Warren, who has been laboring for some time in the township of Luther as a Presbyterian missionary. The question of baptism had for some time previous to this occupied his attention. He became convinced that believers were the proper subjects. Under this impression he applied to me for the administration of the ordinance, and after hearing a full and very satisfactory account of his conversion to God and the steps which led to this conclusion, it was agreed that the ordinance should be administered a week from the following Sunday, the 11th inst. On the morning of this day, I proceeded on my way to fulfil my engagement; a number of our friends here accompanied me and although the day was unfavorable and the roads exceedingly bad, we arrived at the place of meeting in good time. In a short time the place where we met was crowded, and a discourse was preached suitable to the occasion. At the close of the service, Mr. Warren arose and gave a full detail of the reasons that led him to his present conclusion, exhorting them at the same time to search the Scriptures for themselves as the only safe guide in all matters of religion. We then proceeded to the water side, and after a few remarks on the nature and significance of this solemn ordinance, our dear brother was buried with his Lord in baptism, in presence of a large number of spectators. Two others have been baptized during summer. Bro. Warren appears to be truly a pious young man, earnestly intent on doing good. May God guide him in his future movements, and may his example in this case exert a mighty influence on the minds of many."

Rev. W. N. Cote, writes from Granby, and gives an account in the same paper of the conversion of M. Ayraud a French notary who of the reasons which led him to dissolve his connection with the Church of Rome. He says M. Ayraud's "style of writing is simple, popular clear and forcible, and his book will no doubt be perused with much interest by his countrymen."

Dr. CUMMING.

The close of the past year has afforded the unbelievers in definitely fixing the prophetic periods, an opportunity of noticing the failure of some expectations raised in the minds of many persons of some sudden change taking place during the year in our mundane affairs.

Dr. Cumming has been one of the most prominent of these prognosticators and now finds it necessary to vindicate his position.

We find the following in a late number of the *London Record*:

DR. CUMMING AND HIS REPORTERS.—In "A Word for Oneself," addressed to the *Times*, Dr. Cumming corrects a misreport of a recent sermon by which he was asserted to have fixed the consummation of all things and the end of the world in this year 1866.—"I neither said nor meant it. I merely took the opportunity of stating that twenty years ago Elliott and the greatest writers on prophecy, starting from A. D. 532 or from A. D. 606, have taught that we may expect this very year the final judgment on the Papacy, so far as providential. But all of us expect it is not to be utterly destroyed till He shall come whose right it is to reign. The earth, I believe, is to be transformed, not annihilated. I have stated in a work published in 1865, called *The Last Warning Cry*, and illustrated by historical proofs in a work which Nisbet will publish in a few days, entitled *The Sounding of the Last Trumpet*, that the great prophetic epochs on the fairest and most reliable data, expire in 1867. In one of these I have written, 'I adhere to the solution I have given of the exhaustion of the great chronological epochs of prophecy as alike most probable and most justified by induction from events. How soon after 1867 the Redeemer will return and take the kingdom and reign over all the earth I cannot say.'"

An ingenious correspondent of the *Pall Mall Gazette* plays off a wicked joke upon Dr. Cumming. The numerical values of the letters of the doctor's own name spelt in Greek, together with that of the article prefixed, he says, make, when added together, the exact number of the Beast, and he adds a table to prove it.

A Sermon spoiled and yet improved.

An anecdote told of the life of a dissenting minister has a fair claim to the admiration of every clergyman who is in earnest. There was a minister who it appears had obtained no small reputation among his brethren for his eloquence generally, and more particularly for the logical sequence and the "impressive conclusions" of his sermons. On some great occasion he was appointed to preach in the open air, and he had deeply interested his auditors through a long discourse. Just before the conclusion he was observed to hesitate, and then in a rambling manner he recapitulated part of what had been already said until he reached a very lame and impotent finale. At the subsequent dinner, when the preacher's health was proposed, "Brother," said one of the ministers present, "we must all I am sure have been charmed by your discourse; but if I may hazard the observation, I thought at the conclusion you lost the thread of your argument, and hardly equalled your ordinary eloquence." "If I must tell you the reason," was the reply, "this it was. Just as I was about to conclude, I saw a poor man running up to the place, hot and dusty, and eager to hear. 'Speak a word to him,' said conscience. 'You will spoil your sermon if you do,' said pride. And I did spoil it, I know; but I have done him good."

He who puts a bad construction upon a good act, reveals his own wickedness at heart.

A compromise with sin is a surrender to the devil.