

Poetry.

Watching.

(Psalm cxxx. 6.)

Have you ever watched by a loved one's bed Through the long, long hours of night, When you feared the spirit should have fled...

The Visitor's Pulpit.

The Assaults of the Devil.

A SERMON BY REV. JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.

"Touch all that he hath and he will curse thee to thy face."—Job. i. 11. "Touch his bone and his flesh and he will curse thee to thy face."—Job ii. 6.

The man spoken of is Job, a perfect man and an upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil. He lived in the land of Uz. The speaker is Satan, who came with the sons of God on the first occasion, and said, "Touch all that Job hath, and he will curse thee to thy face."

I take it for granted that you and I are fully agreed that there is no devil. Everybody is so good, everybody is so honest, all our habits and practices and customs are so transparently and beautifully moral, that it is utterly impossible for us to believe that there is a devil.

Why do we speak of the existence of the devil? Why is there so very much devilishness about. The best way to prove that there is no devil is to get rid of the devilishness. When you have cleaned that out of the way you will make it exceedingly difficult for me to believe either in a personal or impersonal devil.

In this incident it will be our privilege to see the devil twice wrong. Here is a man called Job, who is chosen for the battlefield. In all lines and spheres of life some particular persons are called upon to illustrate universal truths and confer universal blessings.

He has always been walking and working in the dark. He has been moving about stealthily and taking advantage where he could—but I am not aware that he has ever with undisguised audacity actually challenged the Almighty to fight it out in one particular case.

nothing on the other side? Does God simply afflict some men and leave them with their afflictions—does he simply gather his clouds over some heads and cause them to discharge their pitiless storms without setting the rainbow on the cloud-laden sky?

It is easy for us who have endured but the secondary pains and ills of life to suggest compensations to those who are our leaders in suffering and our veterans in bearing the chastisements and penalties, and visitations of God. Still, it is surely something to be God's proof man, to be called out as the particular man on whose character, intelligence, grace, patience, fortitude, great results are staked.

That is the view which every one of us should take of his afflictions; that is, every man should feel that perhaps he is made the medium through which God is answering the devil's challenge. The devil may have been saying to the Almighty concerning you, concerning me, "Take his health away, take his trade away, touch his bone and his flesh, subtract considerably from the sum-total of his indulgences and his enjoyment, and then he will curse thee to thy face."

There are great stakes pending. God said, "He will bear it well, with the grace of a sanctified hero." The devil said, "He will burn his Bible and cast down his family altar." Who is right? If thou art bearing that heavy loss well, bowing thy poor old knees at the same altar, and saying, with a choking in thy throat, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away—blessed be the name of the Lord," thou hast enabled God to strike the devil on the face.

Could Job now look over the ages that have been healed and comforted by his example, stimulated to bear the ills of life by the grateful memory of his invincible patience, surely now in heaven he would be taking in the reward of his long-continued and noble endurance of the Divine visitation. It may be so with thee, poor man, poor woman; thou dost not get all the sweets now; this shall be a memory to thee in heaven, long ages hence; the wrestling thou hast now may minister to the high delight, keen enjoyment, rapture pure and abiding.

Job has been read by countless readers. His of course is a public trial, a tragedy that was wrought out for the benefit of multitudes in all generations. Nevertheless it is literally and pathetically true that every man, the very obscurest, has his readers, fewer in number, it may be equally earnest in attention. Think you that your children are not taking notice of you, seeing how you bear you temptations and difficulties and anxieties? Think you not that eldest boy of yours is not kept away from the table of the Lord because you are as atheistic in sorrow as ever Voltaire was?

You have your readers; the little Bible of your life is read in your kitchen, and in your parlor, and in your shop, and in your warehouse, and if you do not bear your trials, anxieties, and difficulties with a

Christian chivalry and heroism, what is there but mockery on earth and laughter in hell? God give us grace to bear the chastisement nobly, serenely; bless us with the peace which passeth understanding, with the quietness kindred to the calm of God; and help us when death is in the house and poverty on the hearthstone; and when there is a storm blinding the one poor small window we have, to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. If I perish I will pray, and perish only here."

Let us give the devil his due. I am bound to say that the devil had but too much reason to believe that his propositions concerning Job were right. He did not speak without book. He had at his girdle many proofs that strong men had fallen under his stroke. The devil may have reasoned that if so many had yielded to his ministry, Job, the mightiest and brightest of all, might yield as well.

But the devil came upon a distinctively different man; he assailed Job, who was a perfect man and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil—that is the man to fight, then. If the devil conquers there, he will tear the heavens to pieces, he will break up the Throne of God, he will disband the angels, he will scatter the fire of perdition upon the walls and floors of Heaven's City. It is therefore a great fight—it is a critical battle; everything depends upon the issue, for God has given permission to assail this perfect man and therefore he has put perfectness of character to the test.

Whoever has the true root in him shall be found at last to the praise and glory of God. Is this a dangerous doctrine to preach? Only because all doctrine is dangerous in some cases and in some circumstances; but this is our joy, our strength, our hope: if I have to be saved because I am always doing the right thing in the right way, accomplishing all my purposes, fulfilling all my duties—I never will be saved.

Even in Job himself we have complaint enough, murmuring enough, but in Job we have the true life, and therefore at the last he is more than conqueror. In this case we see really all that the devil can do. What is it in his power, as given by God, to inflict? Bereavement, poverty, pain, humiliation. God has given him these four great dogs to set upon thy life; they will bite thee and gnaw thee, but they cannot kill thee, true child of God.

THE DEVIL'S BRIEF PROGRAMME; he cannot add a line to it if he could fill his hell by the doing of it. Beyond his chain he cannot go. Thou knowest, poor soul, what he can do—bereavement, poverty, pain, humiliation; sit down, count the cost, add it up line by line, item by item, and when thou has done so, know the sum total, and ask whether the grace of God is sufficient to meet an exigency such as that result brings before thy view.

How afflictions may be to show God's grace! I will try during this 1879 to take that view of my difficulties, cares, and sorrows. Great battles may be fought in our little lives: I will therefore every day think that God is fighting out some case along the line of my experience, and that my behaviour may have something to do with God's own satisfaction.

Where is your difficulty? On the brink of it is the devil. Is yours a home difficulty? God and the angels are waiting there, saying, "We have a great fight going on in this house: here is a poor life worried—worried—and we are waiting to see whether the devil's position or God's grace shall get the better."

Try, wait, try again, pray, hope—ah, there! a touch did it at last: and the unravelled string lies before thee, a straight line. What is your difficulty? Health? What is yours? A secret sorrow that cannot be put into speech, that no speech is fit to utter? It is a great battle that is being fought out in thy life: fight it sedulously, daily, constantly, lovingly.

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