

Pamphlets
for the People

No. 6

THE DEVIL



CHAPMAN COHEN

2^D

THE PIONEER PRESS

The Devil

THE Devil is one of the foundation-stones of historic Christianity. Jesus Christ is another. God the Father lingers in the rear, and in modern Christianity hardly appears; while the Holy Ghost forms, naturally, a shadowy background. But the foundations of Christianity are Jesus Christ and the Devil. Together they form the two halves of what is significantly known as Christian truth. The necessity for Jesus Christ lies in the activity of the Devil. Without him there would have been no Fall, no Scheme of Redemption, no Plan of Salvation, and every human being would have had to bear the consequences of his or her actions, instead of first blaming the Devil for his ill-deeds and then "passing the buck" on to Jesus. Without the Devil there would have been no gospel to preach, and no Christian Churches in which to preach it; indeed, there is considerable Christian authority for saying that without the Devil there would have been no human beings either to preach or to be preached at. The whole population of the world would have remained at two, and although the woman might have preached at the man, the listening half of the population would hardly have justified the use of the term "congregation." At any rate, there would have been no excuse for, and small profit in, making a collection.

The clergy have a great deal for which to thank the Devil. He is really their greatest benefactor. If one studies the history of early and medieval Christianity the Devil is the most prominent character that is mentioned. A multitude of stories centre round the Devil, and most of the prominent religious characters appear to have been engaged in constant struggles with him, often of a personal character. Cathedral

sculptures figure devils very prominently, and Devil's Bridges, etc., are numerous in all countries. One religious authority places the number of devils at work in the world as 7,405,926. Such arithmetical exactitude is very impressive. Fear of the Devil has been responsible for very many of the benefactions from which the Churches have benefited. The Christian clergy have justified their existence by their fight against the influence of the Devil, and have explained their failures by his ceaseless activities. It is one of the scandals of latter day theology that so little is now said about him. It is monstrous that in the whole of Christendom not a single monument has ever been raised to the Devil in recognition of the help he has been to the Church. It is the supreme exhibition of Christian ingratitude.

There is the highest Christian authority for saying that both Jesus Christ and the Devil came from the same "home town." Jesus came from heaven, and after a short and exciting stay on earth returned thereto. The Devil also began his career in heaven, but was "cast out," after which he appeared to have enjoyed a free and wide run on earth. He is respectfully referred to in the Bible as one of the "sons of God," and appears in heaven discussing various matters with his father. It was at one of these gatherings that God entered into a controversy with Satan, and a kind of wager was agreed upon as to whether "my servant Job" could be weaned from his allegiance. Job was not consulted on the subject, and from God's point of view came well out of the test; but while Job vindicated his character for steadfastness and God won the wager, it is quite evident that in the discussion Satan came out on top. God was good on boils, but weak in argument.

It may be noted that devils are common figures in most mythologies. In primitive religions they are

not so much devils as members of the numerous company of gods, each ruling his particular sphere, as princes of so many independent provinces. At a later stage, when mankind has created definite categories of good and bad, inferior and superior, devils are often no more than degraded gods, who sink to a secondary position as a result of conquest. They are deposed kings who have been banished to another region, but with their power little diminished and still bearing marks of their previous greatness. Even the nimbus which surrounds the head of a Christian saint, and in the old biblical pictures, of the deity, is retained in the horns that decorate the head of Satan. When a man is born in the purple, the "sacredness" of kings will cling to him for a long while.

That the Christian devils were degraded gods was the view of that great Christian, Justin Martyr; in this he was following the lead of St. Paul who said that the gods whom the pagans worshipped were devils. But although some of the early Christian writers modified this theory, and substituted the Jewish rabbinical belief that devils were fallen angels, there was no actual denial of the pagan gods as real existences until towards the end of the seventeenth century. A Dutch author was the first to treat them as completely fictitious. His book was rendered into English by Mrs. Aphra Behn, the well-known playwright, who appears to have had a decided streak of heresy in her composition. But such a thing as denying the existence of the pagan gods never appears to have entered the heads of the early Christians. They even used them as an explanation of the then unquestioned and unquestionable likeness between the Christian and the Pagan doctrines, ceremonies and symbols. Christian writers explained that the Devil knew Christianity was coming, and in order to discredit it he invented certain doctrines, and estab-

lished them in the world before Christ came. It was a case of "queering the pitch," a practice well known in the political world of to-day.

It is only within recent years that some leading Christians have denied the existence of a personal devil—but, it must be remembered that many leading Protestants still assert his existence, and the Roman Catholic Church affirms it as an unquestionable dogma. Founders of sects such as Wesley, preachers such as Spurgeon, and a host of lesser lights, would have considered a repudiation of a personal devil as equivalent to a confession of Atheism. After all, hell is part of the historic teachings of the Christian Church as a whole, and hell implies devils just as devils imply hell. It is also impossible to accept the Jesus of the New Testament without also accepting a personal devil. Jesus had personal conflicts with the devils of the New Testament, and plainly accepted as beyond doubt that all disease was caused by devils. The clergy of the Church of England and of the Roman Church are all endowed with the power to cast out devils. Leave the devil out and it is impossible to understand a very large part of Christian history.

We are too apt in this matter to take half-hearted and humane believers as representative of Christians as a whole. They are not. There are millions of believers in this country who still believe in a personal devil and a literal hell. Their outlook is as barbarous and as brutal as that of the primitive Christians. Even with those Churches that have ceased to preach what Harold Frederic called "straight flat-footed hell," there is no definite and explicit rejection of the belief. And there would be a holy row in the Churches if a clear official repudiation of the doctrine was forthcoming. The clergy try to keep their hold on the more backward by carefully

chosen language that implies a belief in hell, and also hope to retain the good-will of the more enlightened by saying nothing about it.

But consider this, which up to about twenty years ago, formed part of the Wesleyan Methodist Catechism, and was written for "children of tender years."

What sort of a place is hell?

A dark and bottomless pit, full of fire and brimstone.

How will the wicked be punished there?

Their bodies will be tormented with fire, and their souls by a sense of the wrath of God.

How long will their torments last?

The torments will last for ever and ever.

Or this from a Roman Catholic pamphlet, one written for "Children and young persons," and published at one penny. It describes to a child what a room in hell is like:—

Look into this room. What a dreadful place it is. The roof is red hot, the walls are red hot, the floor is like a thick sheet of red iron. See, on the middle of that red-hot floor stands a girl. . . . Look, she says (to the devil), at my burnt and bleeding feet. Let me go off this burning floor for one moment. . . . The devil answers her question. . . . No, not for one single moment during the never-ending eternity of years shall you ever leave this red-hot floor.

There is plenty more of this kind of thing published by the criminals (I use the word advisedly), responsible for the essay, but I will return to the general subject of hell in another pamphlet. All that it is necessary to note now is that this was the common doctrine of Christianity for many, many centuries. The brutal savagery of it almost passes belief. Here is a specimen from a Christian writer of the sixth century, St. Fulgentius:—

Little children who have begun to live in their mother's womb and have there died, or who, having been born,

have passed away from the world without the sacrament of holy baptism administered in the name of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, must be punished by the eternal torment of undying fire.

And a greater writer than the one just cited, Peter Lombard, wrote that "the elect shall go forth . . . to see the torments of the impious, and seeing this they will not be affected with grief, but will be satiated with joy at the sight of the unutterable calamity of the impious."

Let us go to the devil, or rather let us get back to him, although his company would certainly be preferable to these "fathers of the Church." One might get along with the devil with dignity; it would be impossible to be with these "Saints" without degradation. As the old lady remarked to the parson who was trying to cheer her last moments with thoughts of heaven, "Heaven is all right for climate, but hell is the place for good company."

In many plays and tales the Devil appears as a polished scholar. But the pamphlet for children from which I have just cited, presents us with the following description of him:—

St. Francis saw him. He was sitting on a long beam which passed through the middle of hell. His feet went down into the lowest depths of hell. They rested on the floor of hell. They were fastened with great heavy chains. These chains were fixed to an immense ring in the floor. His hands were chained up to the roof. One of his hands were turned up to heaven to blaspheme against God. His other hand was stretched out pointing to the lowest depths of hell. His tremendous and horrible head was raised up on high and touched the roof. From his head came two immense horns . . . his enormous mouth was wide open. Out of it there was running a river of fire, which gave no light, but a most abominable smell. . . . Round his neck was a collar of red-hot iron. A burning chain tied him round the middle. The ugliness of his face was such that no man or devil could bear it. . . . One of the Saints who saw the Devil said she

would rather be burnt for a thousand years than look at the devil for one moment.

St. Francis saw him! That guarantees the accuracy of the description.

But most presentations of the devil are more flattering than this one, written for children. Unconsciously most of the Christian biographers of the devil have borne unwilling, perhaps unconscious, testimony to his greatness and intelligence. They have glorified God officially, but they have given their real praise to the Devil. Thus Martin Luther refers to "the wonderful cleverness displayed by knowing Satan against poor half-witted God." (*Michelet's Life of Satan*, Bonn's Ed., p. 249.) Certainly, in most of the contests between Satan and God, Satan appears to have scored.

According to Christian theologians God made man for his own glory. Also according to Christian theologians the majority of those whom God made for himself go straight to hell and spend their best time in serving Satan before going there. God has to be content with the fragments of the feast he prepared for himself. St. Augustine described the whole human race as "one damned batch and mass of perdition." (Cited by Alger, *Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life*, p. 398). St. Chrysostom doubted if of the 100,000 inhabitants of Antioch, 100 would be saved. Du Moulin, a writer of the seventeenth century, was certain that from the time of Adam, not more than one in a million would escape hell. Jonathan Edwards was equally emphatic on the limited number that would escape damnation. And God made man for his own glory! As Martin Luther said, "Poor half-witted God!" The world he made becomes the playground of his greatest competitor. The creatures he created for himself spend their time in paying service to his enemy. God cast Satan out

of heaven, but how much wiser it would have been to have kept him there so that he might have had an eye on him. It looks as though the evangelical cry of "Get right with God!" ought to give way to "Get right with the Devil!"

Perhaps there is some recognition of the wisdom of doing this in the comparatively respectful way in which common usage treats the devil. One notes the freely popular manner in which the name of God is treated, from the "Gawd blimey" of the street to the "swelpmegawd" of the police court. There is, of course, the almost equally popular phrase, "What the devil—!" but that merely expresses uncertainty as to what is likely to happen, or puzzlement as to what the devil will do next. But there is a distinct indictment implied in the common expression "Good God," when one is told of a disaster at sea or an earthquake. Such a saying as "Trust in God, but keep your powder dry," is another illustration of the riskiness of concluding that God will do the right thing at the right time.

There is, on the other side of the ledger, such sayings as "having a devil of a time," which implies a rather jolly time. No religious writer that I know of has ever spoken of having a jolly time with God. There is also a popular saying that "The Devil looks after his own," and it is believed he does this in this world. But it is quite clear, from the nature of the petitions to God that no one can rely upon him doing what his followers would like him to do. It really looks as though mankind has possibly been "backing the wrong horse," and that we ought to have paid greater attention to the devil than we have done. Moncure Conway, in his *Demonology and Devil Lore*, speaks of a lady who taught her children always to rise and bow when the name of the devil was mentioned. She explained that she thought it safer.

We are not dealing with the natural, but the Christian, origin of the Devil, and, according to the Book of Revelation, he began his existence as one of the chief angels in heaven. But there was "war in heaven," and the revolt was led by the being whom God had, with very questionable judgment, selected as his commander-in-chief. In the end Satan lost the war—and common sense suggests that God should have treated Satan as the Allies did Napoleon, after the return from Elba. Instead of that, he was given a free pass to go where he liked and do what he liked, and a new residence was prepared for him, the character of which does not appear to have hurt either Satan or his followers, but was to be eternally uncomfortable for men and women. Satan was really serving God as chief gaoler.

Two charges are, either directly or indirectly, brought by the Christian Church against the Devil. The first is that he was ambitious and wished men to worship him. But ambition, while it may lead a man into dubious paths, is not a very serious crime; any person of moderate intelligence might get weary of a place where the only form of dissipation appears to be eternally singing songs of the Lamb. But the Christian God does not like competition, and Satan's "better to reign in hell than serve in heaven," was bound to create friction.

For Satan to seek worship was a more serious offence. It hit at both God and the Church. For while the Church flourishes on belief, the gods live on worship. All the gods of the past have lived upon worship. While they were worshipped the gods of Egypt, of Rome, of Greece, were fine, lusty fellows, who gave their followers all that the Christian God gives his worshippers. These gods of the ancient world sent rain and gave their followers good health; they answered prayers; they sent their faithful wor-

shippers to a prepared heaven and their enemies to a prepared hell. But as man's worship declined so the objects of the worship declined also. Gods are fragile things, they may be killed by a whiff of science or a dose of common sense. They thrive on servility and shrink before independence. They feed upon worship as kings do upon flattery. That is why the cry of gods at all times is "Worship us or we perish." A dethroned monarch may retain some of his human dignity while driving a taxi for a living. But a god without his thunderbolt is a poor object.

The second charge against Satan is one that reflects credit upon him and discredit on the Christian Church. Unconsciously the Church presented the devil as the inspirer of knowledge, the fount of human improvement. The first offence after the creation of man, which the Bible attributes to Satan, was that of inducing man to seek knowledge and acquire independence. God had forbidden Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge. Men were to grow up as ignorant as cows and as docile as sheep. And but for the devil they might have lived "according to plan." It was the devil that first set man on the path of knowledge. And of all the leading figures of the Christian mythology Satan is the most impressive. He is the hero of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the central figure of Goethe's *Faust*, and the most interesting in Byron's *Vision of Judgment*.

In most cases advances in scientific knowledge were attributed to the influence of the devil. The art and science and philosophy of ancient Greece came under the Christian fear of being due to the inspiration of the devil. Scientific medicine was mainly inspired by the devil because it interfered with the traffic of the Church in miracle cures; and with St. Gall curing epilepsy, St. Blaise curing sore throats, St. Gervase curing rheumatism, and a special saint

allotted to each disease, the inquisitiveness of medical men was obviously a piece of Atheistic impertinence.

The printing press was an invention of the devil. It was said that Copernicus was inspired by the devil to teach his revival of the old Greek astronomy. Inoculation against smallpox was an invention of the devil; part of the oppositon was that smallpox was sent by God so that any attempt to prevent it was inspired by Satan. The same objection was later brought against the use of chloroform in the case of women in child-birth, the objection here being that God had ordained that women should bear children in suffering, and any attempt to evade this could only be inspired by the devil. Chemistry was clearly due to the same source of origin. So was the attempt to prove that geological phenomena owed their origin to known natural causes. When I was a youth, the Prime Minister of England, W. E. Gladstone, was denouncing the theory of evolution as an attempt to turn God out of his own universe, an obvious device of the devil.

The list need not be prolonged; there is not a single advance in which the interests of the Christian Church were threatened, and this at one time covered everything not expressly sanctioned by the Bible and the Church, that was not put down to the credit of the devil. The things not put to the credit of the devil were the rack, the thumbscrew, the burning of heretics at the stake, the slaughter of thousands of old women and children for witchcraft—these and similar things were admittedly done to carry out "God's will."

If we are guided by Christian records we are warranted in considering the devil as the patron saint of intelligence, invention, and discovery. The Church never ceased to dwell upon his cunning, his mental alertness, his readiness to induce men to tread new

and unfamiliar paths. Men like Bishop Barnes, who profess to believe in the adventures of science, and who somehow manage to still believe in a God, ought to pray daily, "Thank God for the Devil!" Without the devil, man might have been fit for heaven, but not for anywhere else.

I only know of one case in which the Christian Church has persistently cast discredit on the intelligence of Satan. This is the ever-recurring instance in which the Church has depicted him as taking extraordinary means, and paying an enormous price in order to capture the soul of a monk or a priest. After all, there should be some kind of relation between the value of the object purchased and the price paid.

Robert Buchanan rightly made Satan say (in his *The Devil's Case*):—

In spite of the Almighty,
I have leavened its afflictions,
Teaching men the laws of Nature,
Wisdom, Love and Self-control.

This I have achieved entirely,
By the very means forbidden—
At the first by the Almighty—
Teaching men to see and know.

I'm the father of all Science,—
Master-builder, stock-improver,
First authority on drainage,
Most renowned in all the arts.

While the priests have built their Churches,
To a God who does not heed them,
I have fashioned decent dwellings,
Public hospitals and baths.

Thus for ages after ages,
I, the Devil, have drained the marshes,
Cleansed the cesspools, taught the people,
Like a true progressionist.

By the living soul within me,
I have conquered—tho' for ages
I have been most grossly libelled
By the foolish race of mortals.

A greater than Buchanan, Carducci, in his *Hymn to Satan*, makes Satan say:—

I animate all who fight against servitude and somnolence. The heroes and martyrs of liberty and progress in every age have drunk of the strength of my spirit. I inspire the revolter, the scorner, the sceptic, the satirist. I still distribute the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. I am the soul of the world. The fire of my inspiration may consume, but it gives unspeakable rapture. I am the Prometheus of the universe, and keep it from stagnating under the icy hand of power. Milton, Goethe and Byron made me the hero of their greatest poems, and felt my power in despite of themselves. Burns spoke of me with a tenderness he never displayed towards God. Wits and humorists own my sway. I moved the minds of Aristophanes and Lucian, of Erasmus and Rabelais, and through the pen of Voltaire I shattered the mental slavery of Europe. I am the lightning of the human mind. I level thrones and altars, and annihilate binding customs. With the goad of a restless aspiration I urge men on, until they outgrow faith and fear, until the Slave stands erect before the Tyrant and defies his curse.

But just as mankind is indebted to the Devil for the development of the thirst for knowledge, so the Church owes him all its power and the larger part of its wealth. Fear of hell is responsible for a much larger proportion of gifts and legacies to the Church than is love of heaven. The only thing that could possibly have made heaven worth entering was that there was a hell to keep out of. It was for the sake of securing release from purgatory, that most of the legacies fell to the Church, and if the number of this species of legacy has been fewer in recent times, it is because the fear of hell has waned. The Church very early seized upon hell as a powerful weapon for its enrichment, and the following from Dr. G. G. Coulton's *Medieval Studies*, is worth noting in this connexion:—

Apart from the very small minority who were rich enough to make written wills, every man was obliged to dispose of his property on his death-bed by word of mouth, in the presence of the parish priest. Let us put ourselves for a moment in the dying man's place. Whatever else the poor wretch may believe or disbelieve of hell and purgatory he has never been allowed to doubt. . . . Whenever he entered his parish church, there stood the ghastly picture of the Last Judgment staring down on him from the walls—blood and fire and devils in such pitiless realism that, when they come to light nowadays, even sympathetic restorers are often fain to cover them again under decent whitewash. A picture of that kind, seen once or twice a week for fifty years, is indelibly branded into the soul of the dying man, and however little he may have allowed these things to influence the conduct of his life, however deliberately he may have overreached and cheated and robbed in his generation to scrape his little hoard together, here on his death-bed he has at least the faith of a devil—he believes and trembles. He knows that gifts to the Church are universally held to be one of the surest preservatives against the pains of purgatory; he has even seen men burned at the stake for denying a truth so essential to the Roman Catholic creed. What wonder then if death-bed legacies to the clergy and to the churches became so customary that the absence of such pious gifts was taken for proof presumptive of heresy, and that in some districts the dying man was compelled as a matter of course to leave a third of his goods to the Church. Moreover, this laudable custom, when once established, would exercise a practically binding force over the written wills, which were themselves also invalid until they had been duly "proved" in the Church courts. (pp. 135-6).

At the hands of the Christian Churches the Devil has had what the Americans call a "raw deal." For centuries this historic figure, the subject of sculpture, song and story, has not a single monument in any of the Churches, which without him would never have been. Man's ingratitude to man is said to be great enough to make angels weep. But what is this compared with the ingratitude of the Church to the greatest of its benefactors?

But ingratitude brings its nemesis. The devil and God are the components of a Siamese twin. Neither has any existence apart from the other. In denying the existence of the one, Christians have helped to kill the other. If there need to be no fear of hell, people may well ask what is the attraction of heaven? Gods and devils were born together. Gods and devils will die together.

PAMPHLETS FOR THE PEOPLE

By CHAPMAN COHEN

1. Did Jesus Christ Exist?
2. Morality Without God.
3. What is the Use of Prayer?
4. Christianity and Woman.
5. Must We Have a Religion?
6. The Devil.
7. What Is Freethought?
8. Gods and Their Makers.
9. Giving 'em Hell.
10. The Church's Fight for the Child.
11. Deity and Design.
12. What is the Use of a Future Life?
13. Thou shalt not suffer a Witch to Live.
14. Freethought and the Child.
15. Agnosticism or . . . ?
16. Atheism.
17. Christianity and Slavery.

Other Pamphlets in this Series to be published shortly

Twopence Each; Postage One Penny.

*Issued for the Secular Society Limited, and
Printed and Published by*
THE PIONEER PRESS (G. W. FOOTE & Co., LTD.),
2 & 3, FURNIVAL STREET, LONDON, E.C.4,
ENGLAND.