

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

“THERE WAS WAR
IN HEAVEN.”

An Infidel Sermon

Delivered to the Portsmouth Branch of the National Secular Society

BY

ROBERT FORDER.

Text :

‘And there was war in Heaven : Michael and his angels fought against the dragon ; and the dragon fought and his angels.’—Rev. xii. 7.

ONE PENNY.

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“And there was War in Heaven.”

(Rev. xii. 7.)



FRIENDS,—The text that has just been read cannot but bring forcibly to your minds the picture of the terrible affray in the celestial regions, which may indeed be described as “the cause of all our woe.” To ascribe the entry of sin and misery into the world as due to our first parents eating fruit that was forbidden them by Jehovah is obviously a mistake, for the vanquished leader of the rebel host was only continuing the strife in another portion of the victor’s dominions, when *he* persuaded poor Eve that that apple was both pleasant to the eye, agreeable to the taste, and requisite to give the knowledge that she then lacked. The fall, therefore, was a defeat of Jehovah, and an effect of the war being transferred to the new-made earth, to which Satan had been so unceremoniously hurled.

But where, when, and how did this unbloody war begin? Do your priests tell you? Is it explained in your catechisms or made clear in your creeds? Do any of the ministers of the Gospel ever venture to fix a date? No. It is left to the preachers of the gospel of free-thought to faithfully set before their friends the time when this conflict began and the causes that led to the outbreak of hostilities. God’s holy word, aided by one of his faithful servants, John Milton by name, shall be requisitioned into our service, with an occasional aid from more profane but equally well-informed sources, so determined are we that the whole truth shall be fully set forth.

Jehovah, then, once upon a time alone with his three selves, made out of what they alone know, a company of beings generally known as archangels, seraphs, cherubim, and the rank and file known as angels. When this was is not known. But as Jahveh is the only "eternal," it must have been after his development. These seem to have been all male, as none of the gentle sex are mentioned. Some impious mortals have not hesitated to name their children after the highest of these beings, for Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael are by no means uncommon amongst Irishmen and Jews. If it is any consolation to my lady hearers, I may at once cheer them with the welcome news that, unlike many of the wars that have desolated the earth, the cause of this one was not woman. And women ought to be glad when, together with this testimony as to the non-existence of feminine aboriginal angels, there is the negative evidence of the whole of the Bible that no women have got there, coupled with the undeniable assertion of St. John the Divine that "there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour" (Rev. viii. 1). For this wise provision Milton even compliments Jahveh, but he almost upbraids him for giving Satan such an opportunity by making a woman upon earth. Hear him :—

"O, why did God,
 Creator wise, that peopled heaven
 With spirits masculine, create at last
 This novelty on earth, this fair defect
 Of Nature, and not fill the world at once
 With men as angels without feminine!
 Or find some other way to generate
 Mankind?"

But the divine John had, we are told, a termagant wife, and this must be his excuse for his impious and ungallant thought.

The archangels, then, were named, and among them was Lucifer. Jahveh, who certainly could not have foreseen the consequences that resulted from the creation of this being, must have made him imperfect, for he sooner or later showed signs of having a will of his own, growing at last into open rebellion against his Maker. But let us pause here, and ask, from our experience of

similar events amongst us, whether there must not have been a reason for this insubordination? Rebellion is always brought about by the tyranny of rulers or the ambition of rivals. Which was it, think you, that actuated Lucifer? Is it possible to imagine that abuses had crept into the imperial government? Were services required of a degrading and unworthy character? Or did his highness the Devil fancy he could boss the concern with a view to the greatest happiness of the greatest number? Was his employment that apportioned afterwards to the four-headed beasts, and which is vividly depicted for us by the other John in his Revelation, "who rest not day and night saying, Holy, Holy, Holy," before the great white throne? This occupation would certainly after a time become tedious, and there would be some excuse for trying to bring such antics to a close. Or had Satan charge of the stables of the heavenly menagerie, and did he ask for a change of duties and get refused? No one knows. But he rebelled; and we find from the fact of his following being numerous that a spirit of dissatisfaction must have been prevalent among the angels also. Here let me quote, with approval, a remark from the article "Satan" in Smith's *Bible Dictionary*: "We cannot, of course, conceive that anything essentially and originally evil was created by God." Therefore it follows that circumstances over which Jahveh had no control led up to a feeling in myriads of his angels that things were getting very bad there, and that radical reform was necessary. Lucifer unfurled the banner of revolt, and

" Hoping by treason foul to get
 Into the great Jehovah's seat;
 And drawing in by wiles and snares
 Angels of all sorts unawares,"

went into the fight in earnest. Here Holy Scripture fails us when we ask for particulars. We know nothing as to the beginning of hostilities—who sent the declaration of war; whether either side was equally well armed; whether the commissariat had been properly attended to; and whether adequate preparation had been made for the nursing of the sick and the wounded. But Milton assists us here; for ammunition appears to have run short on the Imperial side, and Michael's followers

"From their foundations loosening to and fro
They plucked the seated hills with all their load."

These they hurled at the rebel hosts, and terror was naturally excited in their breasts when they saw coming thick upon them

"The bottom of the mountains upward turned."

But Nick was not to be outdone by Mick at this game, and, giving the order, "Up, lads, and at 'em!" to his captains, they,

"In imitation, to like arms
Betake them, and the neighboring hills upore:
So hills amid the air encountered hills,
Hurled to and fro with jaculation dire!
That underground they fought in dismal shade."

What carnage! And heaven is a holy place, my friends; there no sin or sorrow can enter; there all is joy and love. Is it? Ask your Christian teachers for a guarantee that war will not occur there again. Look at the danger into which you are needlessly running by going there, now that it is the home of most of the scoundrels that have desolated the earth; of atrocious murderers—wretches who have been assured by priests, while on the very point of being "jerked to Jesus," that they were going straight to glory! There is infinitely more probability of a row there now than there was when all the inhabitants of the celestial regions were aboriginals, and had not incurred the risk of being corrupted by the miscreants that have gone there during the last six thousand years.

But to the field again. Besides this Brobdignagian ammunition, cutlery was brought into use, although it is difficult to understand how immortal beings could slash and maim one another. Yet so it was, for

"The girding sword with discontinuous wound,
Passed through him, but the ethereal substance closed,
Not long divisible.—
Yet soon he healed."

This peculiar action of "ethereal substance" prompted Cobbett to remark: "I am abused for my notions of Milton and Shakespeare; but why abuse me?" If there be persons who are delighted with the idea of an angel being split down the middle, and of the two halves com-

ing (*slap!*) together again, intestines and all, they may surely let me pass without abuse for not having so refined a taste."

The conflict raged for a long time, with varying fortune, Satan displaying generalship not unworthy of a Wellington or a Napoleon. Milton even seems proud of his prowess and gallantry, for thus he sings his valor in the fray:—

".....down they fell
By thousands, angel on archangel rolled.
.....Satan beheld their flight,
And to his mates thus in derision called:
'O, friends, why come not on these victors proud?
Erewhile they fierce were coming.'"

But all great battles must come to an end; and so Jahveh finished this bloodless struggle by pursuing Satan

"With terrors and with furies to the bounds
And crystal wall of heaven, which, opening wide,
Rolled inward, and a spacious gap disclosed.
Into the wasteful deep eternal wrath
Burnt after them to the bottomless pit.
Nine days they fell."

Here Milton's genius seems to have deserted him, for, if the pit was bottomless, they would still be tumbling, and Satan would be powerless. But the other John avers that they were cast out into the earth, though this statement is curiously contradicted by Christian theologians, who have *invented* a hell in which to preserve him. This assertion may seem to Christians present to be a very reckless one indeed; but it is the opinion of the writer of the article "Hell," in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, a view that we may fairly take to be that of all the eminent theologians who contributed to that important biblical cyclopædia. Hear what HELL is. "This is the word generally and unfortunately used by our translators to render the Hebrew *Sheol*. It would, perhaps, have been better to retain the Hebrew word *Sheol*, or else render it always by 'the grave,' or 'the pit.'.....The Hebrew ideas respecting *Sheol* were of a vague description. Generally speaking, the Hebrews regarded the grave as the end of all sentient and intelligent existence." It may be urged that Jesus often used the words *hell* and *hell-fire*; but we must not allow the ignorance of a poor Jew, see

ing that there is no evidence that he understood a word of Hebrew, to influence us on this question. His reported passionate and revengeful speeches, in which those words occur, were probably invented by artful priests in the second or third century of our era. Besides, the Revised Version has generally substituted *Sheol* for "Hell" in the Old Testament; and Hellophiles are sadly distressed in consequence.

Satan, then, was hurled from heaven to earth; and here we may now expect to find him. It would be unfair to charge him with that artful trick of chousing Jahveh in Eden, but for the fact that orthodox Christians identify him with the serpent. Of this there is no evidence whatever, and the view cannot be supported by a single sentence from the Hebrew books. We first find him and Michael "at it again," contending about the body of Moses (Jude 9), but whether for a dissecting room or in the interest of rival undertakers "no one knoweth unto this day." Certain it is, however, that Mick showed due and proper respect to his whilom *confrère* and subsequent antagonist, as he dared not bring a railing accusation against him, but simply said at the end of the conflict: "The Lord rebuke thee." Certain it is, therefore, that Satan secured the body of Holy Moses, either for an hospital or for some professional Mr. Mould, Round three for Satan.

Pursuing our inquiries about this time, we find that Nick, having entered into a kind of treaty of peace with Jahveh, again became on friendly terms with his rival. "There was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them" (Job i. 6). Of course he did; what was to prevent him? "Ha! how do, Sate?" said Jahveh. "All right, old boy; how are things up here?" replied Nick. "Very quiet indeed; scarcely any addition to our circle," says Jahveh, "since you sent most souls another way by that Eden escapade of yours, old man." "No recriminations, let bygones be bygones!" sharply replied the Old One, a reply which brought Jahveh back to the novelty of the situation. "Where have you been lately, Satan?" said the elder Old One in his blandest tone; to which the younger Old One answered: "Oh, only having a run up and down the earth." "And how are matters generally in

that neighborhood," queried the Omniscient, "and by the bye, do you ever get as far as Uz?"* "Oh, yes, I have a country house there, and generally spend a part of the autumn in the locality." "Do you know a big pot down there named Job?" "Know him well, as well as I know you. Saw his missus home from a party the other night—Job, who keeps good hours, having gone home early."

"What's your opinion of the old chap, Satan—tell us the truth now? I consider him to be a right good sort, in fact there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man." "Is he?" said Satan; "you don't know him as well as I do. See what you have done for him, made his fortune for him, blessed him with a large family, enabled him to become prime minister of his country, and protected him on every hand. Take these advantages from him, and he'll repudiate you at once."

"I don't believe it; but I know, Satan, you're a man of your word. Promise me you won't hurt the old fellow, and you may try the experiment of depriving him of all his property, knocking his house down about his ears, and you can even go so far as to smite his sons and daughters; but don't meddle with Job, and respect his missus." "That's a bargain, Jahveh; you may trust me to keep my word respecting Job, and nothing would induce me to harm his missus. Ta, ta!"

Now, if the story in the Book of Job be true (and we must assume that it is), Satan went straight from Heaven to Uz, and played the devil with poor Job in real earnest. The Sabeans carried off all his oxen and donkeys, the Chaldeans stole his camels, and, probably, in order that nothing should be left, God himself lent a helping hand in this work of destruction by dropping down fire from Heaven on the poor sheep, being rewarded, no doubt, by "a sweet savour" of which we know from holy writ that he was exceedingly fond. In this general destruction, my friends, do not forget that the whole of Job's servants, with the exception of three or four, were either burnt to death by God or murdered by those bands

* Only Jahveh and Nick knew this country. "Whether the name of Uz survived to classical times is uncertain."—*Dic. of the Bible.*

that fell on his flocks; and, to complete this hellish Satan-Jahveh experiment, a hurricane was sent which wrecked the house of Job's eldest son, in which were gathered Job's other sons and daughters, all of whom met with a violent death. O! friends, it was a dreadful thing to fall under the notice of the living God; but, fortunately for humanity, he is dead now, or gone on a journey, or is asleep. Amid all this carnage and destruction it is satisfactory to state of Satan that he was a man of his word; he faithfully kept the promise he made to Jahveh not to harm Job. Round four for Satan.

Satan returned to Heaven on the next levée day, presumably to report progress, for the conversation is a repetition of the former interview, Jahveh again asking Nick what was his opinion of Job. If the Devil's character has not been grossly misrepresented, his Christian enemies have credited him with being possessed of craft, cunning, and deceitfulness to such a degree that even saints have for a time been deceived by him. We may, therefore, assume that Nick took in the situation at once, laid his plans accordingly, and reasoned thus: "I have with very little difficulty got round my old enemy, and have bamboozled him by blarney sufficient to allow me to go and punish, with his permission (although I could have done it without), one of his most obsequious followers; and if I only humor him a little more, I have no doubt I can get round him and obtain his permission to go and torment old Job with small-pox, fever, or blotches. I will therefore tempt him." So Satan acted; poor old Jahveh fell into the trap, not without some suspicion, however, that Nick was diddling him, for he pathetically reproached Satan with having "movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause." "Skin for skin," said Nick, "all that a man hath will he give for his life. Put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." The historian of the transaction has suppressed the remainder of the conversation, but let us try and fill up the hiatus. Jahveh exclaimed: "I don't believe it." "Try him," said Satan, "and see if I don't know him better than you do." "Well, Sate," replied Jahveh, "most honorably have you kept your word in conducting the last mission; make me a solemn promise on your

word as a devil that you won't take his life from him, and a further experiment shall be tried." "I will swear it, if you doubt me," began Nick; but he was instantly stopped by Jahveh exclaiming: "No—no oath; I myself sware one once to Abraham* and have been unable to perform it. Your word is sufficient." Here the inspired chronicler comes again to our aid. "Behold, he is in thine hand; but spare his life." Off went the old one to Uz, "and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to his crown." You will notice, my friends, how clearly every fact is stated in this holy book; you cannot possibly mistake the character of these boils. They were sore boils; boils that were not sore were none of Satan's production.

Poor Job seems to have had a sour-tempered wife, like Milton, for, instead of at once making him some strong linseed-meal poultices, or looking him up a box of Holloway's ointment, she began reproaching him, Job getting out of her way by going out and lying down on the dust heap in the back-yard, scraping his boils with a piece of a broken tea-cup. There's a spectacle, my friends! there's an incentive to be good! What an awful example of serving Jahveh faithfully! Beware of him, shun him as you would the — boils. But in order that there may be no doubt whatever of the truth of this event, the narrative relates that Job had three friends; and so accurate is the book in small matters, as well as great, that it descends to telling their names. There was Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite; but where these countries were the Devil only knows. These three men began comforting poor Job by tearing up their coats and throwing dirt on their heads—actions which by no stretch of the imagination can be considered as cures for boils; they finished, however, by sitting down on the ground by Job's midden. "for seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word to him." This round must certainly be given to the Devil. Score: Devil four, God one.

You will have noticed that after Satan's repulse he was cast out into the earth, and all his angels were cast out with him; and the history in Job certainly corrob-

* See Genesis, xxvi—3.

rates this, for it speaks of him walking up and down in it then. Subsequently we find him playing pranks with David, tempting him to take a census of his kingdom*—a little eccentricity indulged in by us every decade in Great Britain and Ireland, just to show that we are still faithful to the Prince of this world, and respect his counsel and follow his advice. True, a few devoted followers of Jahveh the younger indignantly protested against this device when it was first adopted; but they were met with scorn and derision in Parliament and in the press. Satan again triumphed, and the result of his victory in this bout has been of immense advantage to his subjects here. Jahveh waxed angry with David for taking that first census, and, possibly being afraid to engage in open hostilities with Satan, resolved to punish the old Jewish king. So he sent to David a certain fortune-teller, named Gad, with a message of a most engaging nature. "I, Jahveh, am determined to be revenged for this your action in following the advice of Satan: choose, therefore, how you will be punished. You can have three years of famine, or three months in flight before your enemies, or I will gird my angel Michael with one of my best Damascus blades, and he shall have three days' sport among your people." David, feeling assured that Satan would stand by him, chose the last alternative, and Jahveh's deputy went at it with a pestilence, and smote 23,333½ persons per day for three days—70,000 in all. Not a bad three days' work, was it? Consider, too, how just and moral it was—killing the people for being counted, and sparing the king who counted them, and Satan who "moved" the king thereto. It is only fair to say that another writer in this blessed book declares that it was Jahveh himself who "moved" David to number his subjects; but that is manifestly impossible, as it would make of Jahveh a fool as well as a murderer. Besides, the writer shows his ignorance of the details of the affair by making the three years' famine into seven. It is possible to believe that three are equal to one; but to require assent to the proposition that three are equivalent to seven is rather too much—even for the faithful.

Satan and his angels are more frequently met with in

* 1 Chron. xxi. 1.

later times. When Jesus was led up by the spirit into the wilderness, it was on purpose to be tempted by the Devil. On another occasion we find some of Satan's angels taking up their abode inside the body or bodies of a man or men (for Matthew and Mark relate the story differently as to the number; and, while one lays the scene in Gergesha, the other is positive that it was at Gedara). In this affair we learn that the devils knew Jesus although they were inside the man, and begged of Jesus, if he evicted them, to permit them to take up their residence inside two thousand pigs that were in the neighborhood. This being conceded, the pigs—doubtless wondering what the devil was the matter with them—ran headlong “down a steep place into the sea,” and were drowned. The news of this destruction of these Jews' pigs brought the people out of the city, and they very naturally “besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.”

This is not the only story told of devils in God's Word. Jesus, in choosing his twelve apostles, admitted that one of them was a devil; and, in another place, we have this apostle identified, when Jesus says to Peter: “Get thee behind me, Satan.” In those authentic productions of the early Christian writers we have numerous instances of the trouble caused by devils to the Christian Church. Some of these veracious writers descend to particulars, and thus enable us to estimate their power in this fight. Hear St. Cyprian: “They (the devils) insinuate themselves into the bodies of men, raise terrors in the mind, distortions in the limbs, break the constitution, and bring on diseases—yet, adjured by us in the name of the true God, they presently yield, confess, and are forced to quit the bodies which they possessed.” This work of exorcism went on for more than a thousand years, the Church drawing up a form of prayer to drive devils out of dwellings—an operation which took seven days to perform. The whole of this office has been preserved by Bourne in his *Antiquities*, and I will cite a pertinent remark of Brand, another antiquary, in introducing it in his work: “Here follows the tedious process for the *expulsion* of Dæmons, who, it should seem, have not easily been *ferretted* out of their *quarters*, if one may judge of their unwillingness to depart by the *prolixity* of the subsequent

removal-warrant, which I suppose the Romish clerical bailiffs were not at the trouble of *servng for nothing.*" Father Montfaucon has recorded, in his *Journey*, an instance of how these devils vexed the faithful in later times. In the Church of St. Maria del Popolo, at Rome, he found an altar bearing upon it an inscription in the Latin tongue, which his English translator renders thus: "This altar, solemnly erected by Pope Paschal II., in this place, upon a Divine Inspiration, by which he soon drove out the tall Devils who, sitting on the Nut Tree, cruelly insulted the people as they passed by, was, by the authority of Pope Urban VIII., removed to the higher place, where you now see it, in the year of our Lord 1527." To-day it is not uncommon, among people that are very religious and very ignorant, to believe in the raising and laying of the Devil. I know that in Norfolk it is a widespread form of this Bible superstition, and the charms employed to remove the Evil One are many and quaint. Saying the Lord's Prayer backwards, whilst walking round the parish church, is one of these; but a much easier method is to be found in the Jewish records. For the use of those who may at any time be troubled by having the Devil in their houses, we will relate how he was got rid of. There was a young man named Toby, who fell in love with a young lady named Sara, and, like most young men under similar circumstances, he proposed marriage to her. The girl was young and pretty, and she had been married to seven men, all of whom went to bed on their wedding-night well and strong, but all were found dead beside her the next morning. The Devil was in love with her, and was determined that no one but he should be her spouse. When Toby discovered this he was not quite so anxious to make her his wife. However, one evening he went down to the river Tigris to wash himself, when a fish jumped up and sought to devour him. No doubt it was Jonah's whale on the rampage again; but Toby eluded it. Looking round he saw the angel Raphael, who shouted: "Toby, put in your hand and pull out that fish." A fish that is about to swallow you is the sort of fish to pull out with your hand. Toby did so. Then Raphael gave instructions to Toby to take out the heart, liver and gall, and put them away safely. The fish was

next cooked and eaten for supper by Toby and the angel, after which they both jogged on together to Ecbatane. Here we may remark that whenever the angels came down to earth they were noted for indulging in a good square meal; in Abraham's time roast veal was the bill of fare; in this it is roast fish. Perhaps up above they are restricted to manna, and are glad of a change when out visiting. On the way, the angel assured the young man that he could now safely marry the girl, but the fate of her seven husbands troubled poor Toby. He, however, being assured by the angel, went to the girl, proposed, and was accepted. Raphael gave him instructions how to "lay" the Devil, and after they had supped, they brought the girl to Toby's bedroom; he made a fire in it and put the heart and liver of the fish on it "and made a smoke therewith." You may take it for granted that if he had kept those organs of that fish long he would have made a stink also; and this is borne out by the statement of the writer, who says: "The which smell, when the evil spirit had smelled, he fled into the uttermost parts of Egypt, and the angel bound him." So you see, my friends, that if you should be troubled by Satan, leave holy water, prayers, and signs of the cross alone—give him a dose of stinking fish!

There was war in Heaven; but let us again remark that it was only discovered by the last writer in the Bible. Similar tales were prevalent with nearly all the peoples from most remote antiquity. In the Persian, Etruscan, Indian, Egyptian, and Assyrian cosmogonies this story is variously related, and there has recently been unearthed what are known as the Chaldean creation tablets, which have been translated by the late George Smith. In editing a popular History of Babylonia, written by Mr. Smith, the Rev. A. H. Sayce, an Oxford professor, says: "Connected with these creation tablets are others which describe the fall of man, brought about by the tempter, the great dragon Tiamatu (Tehamtu), or the 'Deep,' as well as another series which recounts the war of Merodach, the sun-god, with Tiamatu and her allies. This war reminds us of the Biblical passage (Rev. xii. 7), in which it says there was war in heaven." (*History of Babylonia from the Monuments*, p. 53.) Remind us, good heavens! remind us of

what? Why, that the early Christians cribbed from the old, hated Babylonian sun-myths their pretended origin of the Devil, and foisted it on a credulous and ignorant people as a revelation from God.

Such, then, is the origin of this story, which has been of enormous advantage to priests in all times, but which is now laughed at and derided by the wisest and best of men. Let us all do our best to exorcise this wretched superstition from earth—by logic, if you like, by reasoning, if you will, but, more potent than either of these, by ridicule and laughter, as adopted by us to-night.

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