

THE DEVIL.



CHAPTER I.

DIABOLISM.

Dragon and Devil distinguished—Dragons' wings—War in Heaven—
 Expulsion of Serpents—Dissolution of the Dragon—Theological
 origin of the Devil—Ideal and actual—Devil Dogma—Debase-
 ment of ideal persons—Transmigration of phantoms.

'WE are all nothing other than Wills,' says St. Augustine; and he adds that of the good and bad angels the nature is the same, the will different. In harmony with this John Beaumont says, 'A good desire of mind is a good God.'¹ To which all the mythology of Evil adds, a bad desire of mind is a Devil. Every personification of an evil Will looks beyond the outward phenomena of pain, and conceives a heart that loves evil, a spirit that makes for wickedness. At this point a new element altogether enters. The physical pain incidentally represented by the Demon, generalised and organised into a principle of harmfulness in the Dragon, begins now to pass under the shadow cast by the ascending light of man's moral nature. Man becomes conscious of moral and spiritual pains: they may be still imaginatively connected with bodily

¹ 'Treatise of Spirits.' By John Beaumont, Gent. London, 1705.
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agonies, but these drop out of the immediate conception, disappear into a distant future, and are even replaced by the notion of an evil symbolised by pleasure.

The fundamental difference between either a Demon or Dragon and a Devil may be recognised in this: we never find the former voluntarily bestowing physical pleasure or happiness on man, whereas it is a chief part of the notion of a Devil that he often confers earthly favours in order to corrupt the moral nature.

There are, indeed, apparent exceptions to this theorem presented in the agatho-dragons which have already been considered in our chapter on the Basilisk; but the reader will observe that there is no intimation in such myths of any malign ulterior purpose in the good omens brought by those exceptional monsters, and that they are really forms of malevolent power whose afflictive intent is supposed to have been vanquished by the superior might of the heroes or saints to whose glory they are reluctantly compelled to become tributary.

Undoubtedly the Dragon attended this moral and religious development of man's inward nature very far, and still occupies, as at once prisoner and gaoler in the underworld, a subordinate relation to it. In the long process he has undergone certain transformations, and in particular his attribute of wings, if not derived from the notion of his struggle against holier beings, seems to have been largely enhanced thereby. The exceptional wings given to serpents in Greek art, those, for instance, which draw Demeter and Persephone in their chariot, are trifling as compared with the fully-developed wings of our conventional Dragon of the christian era. Such wings might have been developed occasionally to denote the flying cloud, the fire-breathing storm, or explain how some Ráhu was enabled to pursue the sun and moon and swallow them temporarily

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in the phenomena of eclipse. But these wings grew to more important dimensions when they were caught up into the Semitic conception of winged genii and destroying angels, and associated with an ambitious assault on heaven and its divine or angelic occupants.

‘There was war in Heaven,’ says the Apocalypse. The traditional descriptions of this war follow pretty closely, in dramatic details, other and more ancient struggles which reflect man’s encounters with the hardships of nature. In those encounters man imagined the gods descending earthward to mingle in the fray; but even where the struggle mounted highest the scenery is mainly terrestrial and the issues those of place and power, the dominion of visible Light established above Darkness, or of a comparatively civilised over a savage race. The wars between the Devas and Asuras in India, the Devas and Ahuras in Persia, Buddha and the Nagas in Ceylon, Garúra and the Serpent-men in the north of India, gods and Frost-giants in Scandinavia, still concern man’s relation to the fruits of the earth, to heat and frost, to darkness or storm and sunshine.

But some of these at length find versions which reveal their tendency towards spiritualisation. The differences presented by one of these legends which has survived among us in nearly its ancient form from the same which remains in a partly mystical form will illustrate the transitional phase. Thus, Garúra expelling the serpents from his realm in India is not a saintly legend; this exterminator of serpents is said to have compelled the reptile race to send him one of their number daily that he might eat it, and the rationalised tradition interprets this as the prince’s cannibalism. The expulsion of Nagas or serpents from Ceylon by Buddha, in order that he might consecrate that island to the holy law, marks the pious accentuation

of the fable. The expulsion of snakes from Ireland by St. Patrick is a legend conceived in the spirit of the curse pronounced upon the serpent in Eden, but in this case the modern myth is the more primitive morally, and more nearly represents the exploit of Garúra. St. Patrick expels the snakes that he may make Ireland a paradise physically, and establish his reputation as an apostle by fulfilling the signs of one named by Christ;¹ and in this particular it slightly rises above the Hindu story. In the case of the serpent cursed in Eden a further moralisation of the conflict is shown. The serpent is not present in Eden, as in the realms of Garúra and St. Patrick, for purposes of physical devastation or pain, but to bestow a pleasure on man with a view to success in a further issue between himself and the deity. Yet in this Eden myth the ancient combat is not yet fairly spiritualised; for the issue still relates, as in that between the Devas and Asuras, to the possession of a magical fruit which by no means confers sanctity. In the apocalyptic legend of the war in heaven,² the legend has become fairly spiritualised. The issue is no longer terrestrial, it is no longer for mere power; the Dragon is arrayed against the woman and child, and against the spiritual 'salvation' of mankind, of whom he is 'accuser' and 'deceiver.'

Surely nobody could be 'deceived' by 'a great fiery-red Dragon, having seven heads and ten horns'! In this vision the Dragon is pressed as far as the form can go in the symbolisation of evil. To devour the child is its legitimate work, but as 'accuser of the brethren before God day and night' the monstrous shape were surely out of place by any mythologic analogy; and one could hardly imagine such a physiognomy capable of deceiving

¹ Luke x. 19.

² Rev. xii.

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‘the whole world.’ It is not wonderful, therefore, that the Dragon’s presence in heaven is only mentioned in connection with his fall from it. It is significant that the wings are lost in this fall; for while his ‘angelic’ relationship suggests the previous wings, the woman is able to escape the fallen monster by the two wings given her.¹ Wingless now, ‘the old serpent’ once more, the monster’s shape has no adaptation to the moral and religious struggle which is to ensue. For his shape is a method, and it means the perfection of brute force. That, indeed, also remains in the sequel of this magnificent myth. As in the legend of the Hydra two heads spring up in place of that which falls, so in this christian legend out of the overthrown monster, henceforth himself concealed, two arise from his inspiration,—the seven-headed, ten-horned Beast who continues the work of wrath and pain; but also a lamb-like Beast, with only two horns (far less terrible), and able to deceive by his miracles, for he is even able to call down fire from heaven. The ancient Serpent-dragon, the expression of natural pain, thus goes to pieces. His older part remains to work mischief and hurt; and the cry is uttered, ‘Be merry, ye heavens, and ye that tabernacle in them: woe to the earth and the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath because he knows that he has a short time.’² But there is a lamb-like part of him too, and his relation to the Dragon is only known by his voice.

This subtle adaptation of the symbol of external pain to the representation of the moral struggle, wherein the hostile power may assume deceptive forms of beauty and pleasure, is only one impressive illustration of the transfer of human conceptions of evil from outward to inward

¹ Rev. xii. cf. verses 4, 9 and 14.

² Rev. xii. 12.

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nature. The transition is from a malevolent, fatal, principle of harmfulness to the body to a malevolent, fatal, principle of evil to the conscience. The Demon was natural; the Dragon was both physical and metaphysical; the Devil was and is theological. In the primitive Zoroastrian theology, where the Devil first appears in clear definition, he is the opponent of the Good Mind, and the combat between the two, Ormuzd and Ahriman, is the spiritualisation of the combat between Light and Darkness, Pain and Happiness, in the external world. As these visible antagonists were supposed to be exactly balanced against each other, so are their spiritual correlatives. The Two Minds are described as Twins.

‘Those old Spirits, who are twins, made known what is good and what is evil in thoughts, words, and deeds. Those who are good distinguished between the two; not so those who are evil-doers.

‘When these two Spirits came together they made first life and death, so that there should be at last the most wretched life for the bad, but for the good blessedness.

‘Of these two Spirits the evil one chose the worst deeds; the kind Spirit, he whose garment is the immovable sky, chose what is right.’¹

This metaphysical theory follows closely the primitive scientific observations on which it is based; it is the cold of the cold, the gloom of the darkness, the sting of death, translated into some order for the intellect which, having passed through the Dragon, we find appearing in this Persian Devil; and against his blackness the glory of the personality from whom all good things proceed shines out in a splendour no longer marred by association with the evil side of nature. Ormuzd is cele-

¹ ‘Zendavesta,’ *Yaçna* xxx.; Max Müller, ‘Science of Religion,’ p. 238.

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brated as 'father of the *pure* world,' who sustains 'the earth and the clouds that they do not fall,' and 'has made the *kindly* light and the darkness, the kindly sleep and the awaking;'¹ at every step being suggested the father of the *impure* world, the *unkindly* light, darkness or sleep.

The ecstasy which attended man's first vision of an ideal life defied the contradictory facts of outward and inward nature. So soon as he had beheld a purer image of himself rising above his own animalism, he must not only regard that animalism as an instigation of a devil, but also the like of it in nature; and this conception will proceed *pari passu* with the creation of pure deities in the image of that higher self. There was as yet no philosophy demanding unity in the Cosmos, or forbidding man to hold as accursed so much of nature as did not obviously accord with his ideals.

Mr. Edward B. Tylor has traced the growth of Animism from man's shadow and his breathing; Sir John Lubbock has traced the influence of dreams in forming around him a ghostly world; Mr. Herbert Spencer has given an analysis of the probable processes by which this invisible environment was shaped for the mental conception in accordance with family and social conditions. But it is necessary that we should here recognise the shadow that walked by the moral nature, the breathings of religious aspiration, and the dreams which visited a man whose moral sense was so generally at variance with his animal desires. The code established for the common good, while necessarily having a relation to every individual conscience, is a restriction upon individual liberty. The conflict between selfishness and duty is thus inaugurated; it continues in the struggle between the 'law in the mem-

¹ Yaçna xliii.

bers and the law in the spirit,' which led Paul to beat his body (*υποπαιξομαι*) to keep it in subjection; it passes from the Latin poet to the Englishman, who turns his experience to a rune—

I see the right, and I approve it too;
 Condemn the wrong, and yet the wrong pursue.

As the light which cast it was intense, even so intense was the shadow it cast beneath all it could not penetrate. Passionate as was the saintliest man's love of good, even so passionate was his spiritual enemy's love of evil. High as was the azure vault that mingled with his dreams of purity, so deep was the abyss beneath his lower nature. The superficial equalities of phenomena, painful and pleasurable, to his animal nature had cast the mould into which his theories of the inward and the moral phenomena must be cast; and thus man—in an august moment—surrendered himself to the dreadful conception of a supreme Principle of Wickedness: wherever good was there stood its adversary; wherever truth, there its denier; no light shone without the dark presence that would quench it; innocence had its official accuser, virtue its accomplished tempter, peace its breaker, faith its disturber and mocker. Nay, to this impersonation was added the last feature of fiendishness, a nature which found its supreme satisfaction in ultimately torturing human beings for the sins instigated by himself.

It is open to question how far any average of mankind really conceived this theological dogma. Easy as it is to put into clear verbal statement; readily as the analogies of nature supply arguments for and illustrations of a balance between moral light and darkness, love and hatred; yet is man limited in subjective conceptions to his own possibilities, and it may almost be said that to

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genuinely believe in an absolute Fiend a man would have to be potentially one himself. But any human being, animated by causeless and purposeless desire to inflict pain on others, would be universally regarded as insane, much more one who would without motive corrupt as well as afflict.

Even theological statements of the personality of Evil, and what that implies, are rare. The following is brave enough to be put on record, apart from its suggestiveness.

‘It cannot be denied that as there is an inspiration of holy love, so is there an inspiration of hatred, or frantic pleasure, with which men surrender themselves to the impulses of destructiveness; and when the popular language speaks of possessions of Satan, of incarnate devils, there lies at the bottom of this the grave truth that men, by continued sinning, may pass the ordinary limit between human and diabolic depravity, and lay open in themselves a deep abyss of hatred which, without any mixture of self-interest, finds its gratification in devastation and woe.’¹

On this it may be said that the popular commentary on cases of the kind is contained in the very phrase alluded to, ‘possession,’—the implication being that such disinterested depravity is nowise possible within the range of simple human experience,—and, in modern times, ‘possessions’ are treated in asylums. Morbid conditions, however, are of such varied degrees that it is probable many have imagined a Being in whom their worst impulses are unrestrained, and thus there have been sufficient popular approximations to an imaginative conception of a Devil to enable the theological dogma, which few can analyse, to survive.

It must not be supposed, however, that the moral and

¹ ‘Die Christliche Lehre von der Sünde.’ Von Julius Müller, Breslau, 1844, i. 193.

spiritual ideals, to which allusion has just been made, are normally represented in the various Devils which we have to consider. It is the characteristic of personifications, whether celestial or infernal, to supersede gradually the ideas out of which they spring. As in the fable of Agni, who is said to have devoured his parents when he was born, a metaphor of fire consuming the two sticks which produce it, religious history shows both deities and devils, by the flame of personal devotion or hatred they engender, burning up the ideas that originate them. When instead of unconscious forces and inanimate laws working to results called good and evil, men see great personal Wills engaged in personal conflict, the universe becomes a government of combat; the stars of heaven, the angels and the imps, men and women, the very plants and animals, are caught up in the battle, to be marshalled on one side or the other; and in the military spirit and fury of the struggle the spiritual ideals become as insignificant beneath the phantom-hosts they evoked as the violets and daisies which an army tramples in its march. There is little difference at last between the moral characteristics of the respective armies of Ormuzd and Ahriman, Michael and Satan; their strategy and ferocity are the same.¹ Wherever the conception is that of a universe divided into hostile camps, the appropriate passions are kindled, and in the thick of the field, where Cruelty and Gentleness met, is seen at last a horned Beast confronted by a horned Lamb.² On both sides is exaltation of the horn.

¹ 'Ormazd brought help to me; by the grace of Ormazd my troops entirely defeated the rebel army and took Sitratames, and brought him before me. Then I cut off his nose and his ears, and I scourged him. He was kept chained at my door. All the kingdom beheld him. Afterwards I crucified him at Arbela.' So says the tablet of Darius Hystaspes. But what could Darius have done 'by the grace of Ahriman'?

² Cf. Rev. v. 6 and xii. 15.