

THE DEVIL AND SIN.

BY REVEREND SAMUEL SLOCOMBE.

IN recent years his Satanic majesty has always been associated in my mind with a worthy Presbyterian elder of my acquaintance—a stern old man of Scottish descent and extreme Calvinistic proclivities. This peculiar association of ideas began as follows: Elder McCloud, a California rancher and the father-in-law of several others, was one day holding forth volubly upon his pet doctrine of total depravity in the presence of one of his sons-in-law, who was the father of ten children. "All children," said the old man, "are born into the world children of the devil." "What?" exclaimed the son-in-law, "do you mean to say that the devil is the father of my ten?" "Every wan of them, my lad," answered the old grandfather promptly. "No, sir," was the younger one's prompt retort. "You may say that they are the devil's grandchildren if you like, but I'd have you know that I'm their father." Tableau! And the old man had the good sense to join heartily in the laugh that followed at his own expense.

Elder McCloud believed what he said. But, imagine, if it were true, what new meaning we should have to read into Christ's phrase, "the devil and his angels." Imagine, further, the topsy-turvy interpretation we should have to give to Christ's benediction upon children and to his immortal words, "Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Should we not have to say "the kingdom of hell" instead?

The personality of the devil is to many people a question of real and present interest. To Luther Satan was a lively personality, if that story of the ink-pot be anything more than a fable, and that story has its counterpart in thousands of lives when the conflict between good and evil becomes real and intense. I once knew a very Hercules of a village blacksmith to whom "Old Nick" was just as real as he had been to Luther. For years Elias Browning pointed with triumph to a scoured place on the wall in an angle of his smithy as proof that he had "knocked the devil out," and could do it again. Such stories are not mere realistic than that of the "Tom" action in the wilderness," as related in the New Testament. Whether they prove the existence of a personal devil or only the active play of lively imaginations is a question upon which there is no approach to unanimity of agreement among even the best and wisest of religious people. Of course there is much to be said in favor of the idea that there is such a being. In the first place he is a familiar and venerable tradition. His cunning pranks and their tragic results in the Book of Genesis, his walks and talks and desperate doings in the Book of Job, and his Waterloo in the Gospel of Matthew, all belong to the old theology, which appealed to the imagination and called art to its aid. Moreover, older people now living all recall childish memories of horror and dread associated with bogie stories and pictures of a villainous figure with horns, hoofs and a tail. To unthink all that, so to speak, or to regard it all as allegory is to sure a strain upon the faith of lots of very religious people. Further, the idea of a personal devil is a cat around a kitchen where some delicacy has disappeared, or a dish has been broken—a sort of universal scape-goat. Adam blamed the woman, and Eve blamed the serpent. Most of us deem Adam an uncharitable coward, but we ourselves have a sneaking satisfaction in denouncing the serpent; it feels so good to have some one else to blame for the wrong things that are being said and done in the world from day to day, as well as those that have been perpetrated in the past long history of the world at large. Besides, to abandon the doctrine of a personal devil is to be thrown upon the disagreeable alternative of "Every man his own devil," which is a distinctly less flattering sentiment than "Every man his own God." Therefore, whatever may be said for or against the doctrine of a mighty and subtle spiritual personality as the embodiment and propagator of evil that doctrine is apt to be largely believed for a long time to come, both because Bible statements seem to favor it and because many sorts of people would rather construe those statements literally than figuratively.

But the question of the devil's personality is, after all, only incidental to that vastly larger subject—the existence of evil in the world in the forms of sin and its consequences. The good old Methodist lady who, according to the story, was taken to task by her pastor for praying for the conversion of "that pesky old Beelzebub" was less radical in her ideas than she supposed. Of course, her notion was that an answer to her prayer would put an end to sin at its very source, and great was her surprise at being rebuked for an ambition so laudable. But the philosophical limitations of her pastor's faith forbade such flights of presumptuous daring. And both the church and the world are to-day on the pastor's side. We get at the unknown through the known, and our struggle with evil is inspired by the grim realization that the devil must be fought and conquered in the persons of his human representatives. Sin incarnated in the personal conduct and character of human lives is what the world has to meet and grapple with in its efforts toward progress, whether individual or universal.

And what is sin? The question looks simple, but it really is complex and difficult. According to an old theological definition sin is any violation of or want of conformity with the law of God. An older definition still is that of the Apostle John in the New Testament—terse expressed in the revised version in three words—"Sin is lawlessness." The difficulty about such definitions is that they are philosophically incomplete, while their excellence consists in the fact that

they provide a good starting point for that kind of investigation which is impelled by practical intent. If we would construe the term sin with literal exactness it may be a sin to catch cold or to neglect the closing of a door. Law—the law of God—material and moral—is universal. Presumably there is no part of the universe, near or far, visible or invisible, that is not affected by it; no form of being to which it does not apply. To perfectly obey all such law with intelligence and moral purpose would be to lead a sinless life. But to living creatures that have left the trails of brute instinct the universe is for the most part a labyrinth. Its laws and the relations of its several parts to each other are yet but very partially and imperfectly understood by the best and most enlightened of mankind. When man fully understands his nature and his place of purpose in the universe there will be no sin except that which may possibly proceed from moral perversity. But until then a vast proportion of the evil remaining in the world must continue to be the outcome of sheer human ignorance of the laws and conditions of human well-being: Whether with the attainment of perfect knowledge of these matters moral perversity would entirely disappear is a question that cannot be answered in the affirmative. While some forms of sin seem to diminish others certainly seem to increase with the spread of knowledge and the improvement of the physical conditions of human life, the progress of knowledge being for the most part a piecemeal and lopsided affair, with moral reflection lagging far in the rear.

It is with the moral aspects of sin—with sin as wickedness, that is—that re-



cedes? For the most part, without question, they are rather the product of misguided passion than of mere ignorance. Foul spite doing its dirty work, base slander assassinating character, cruel oppression grinding the faces of the poor—what are these but the natural effects of active human perversity?—of that moral condition to which the old Bible text refers when it describes the heart as "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." If every human being always followed the best promptings of his nature these things would soon cease to be, the work of moral education would be lightened as if by a miracle and peace and harmony would flood the world as naturally as does morning light from the ascending sun.

Here, however, we reach a point where collision with some of President Jordan's positions in his recent Sunday evening address on "Education" seems inevitable. I have a profound respect for Dr. Jordan's breadth, depth and judgment as a thinker upon the ethical side of social questions, and therefore I venture to hope that Jordan upon Spencer has been misreported in such expressions as the following: "Education means everything." "A sound body means a sound life." "There is no such thing as vice, for vice is but the effort to get happiness without earning it." These short statements, which have the uncanny appearance of half-truths, are culled from The Call's report of President Jordan's lecture, not for the purpose of evoking odium theologium, nor with any unfriendly intent whatsoever, but because they seem capable of being so interpreted as to give to the lecture an anti-religious complexion and thus to falsify Dr. Jordan's commonly understood attitude toward religion. Herbert Spencer purposely omitted direct consideration of the element of religion from his chapter on "Moral Education," but he included in it the following sentences, which have a very suggestive bearing upon the relative tasks of education and religion for the uplifting of mankind: "We are not," says Spencer, "among those who believe in Lord Palmerston's dogma that all children are born good. On the whole, the opposite dogma, untenable as it is, seems to us less wide of the truth. Nor do we agree with those who think that, by skillful discipline, children may be made altogether what they should be. Contrariwise, we are satisfied that though imperfections of nature may be diminished by wise management, they cannot be removed by it. The notion that an ideal humanity might be forthwith produced by a perfect system of education is akin to that shadowed forth in the poems of Shelley, that would mankind give up their old institutions, prejudices and errors, all the evils in the world would at once disappear; neither notion being acceptable to such as have dispassionately studied human affairs."

These are wise words and they imply that education is not "everything"; that there is such a thing as vice, and that there is in human nature a root of bitterness which physiological culture is not likely to eradicate. For want of knowing better, therefore, I must perforce adhere to the old idea that there is in man evil which education alone, however broad, many sided and thorough, cannot remove, and that sin in the form of moral perversity is so far innate in human nature that nothing short of the spiritual forces of religion can reach it with an effective cure. The grand, ever-expanding and ever-varying work of education belongs to the incidents, conditions and environment of human life, while the task of religion is with the moral springs of conduct, the spiritual pulsations of our being. Neither can do without the other; therefore, let not the teacher despise the spiritual physician.

London's Underground Railway.

Rarely before has London been so pleased with a novelty submitted for its approval as it is with the new Central train open for public use. From the time the first train started from the Shepherd's Bush terminus, at 5:15 a. m., until the last train from the bank end, half an hour after midnight, no fewer than 84,500 passengers had sampled the new line on its opening day. Thousands more had looked on. As the line is open seven days a week these numbers, if regarded as average traffic figures, would mean a yearly passenger return of 30,000,000. To some extent this traffic was doubtless attracted by the novelty of the thing. Still the management before the opening estimated an annual passenger total of over 50,000,000. They now see no reason for modifying their anticipations, unless it is to raise them.

To get down to the level of the trains, which varies from sixty feet to ninety-six feet below the street, either stairs or lifts are available. Most people take the fine, large, airy elevators. For the stairs are long, numbering from 100 to 150 treads, a formidable flight to walk up at all events, whatever may be said about going down them. Arrived on the platform, one's first sensation is that of a delicious coolness. The thermometer may be soaring in the eighties or nineties overhead in the street, but down on this line it is always round about 45 degrees. Then the electric lights suddenly flash into greater brilliancy, in comes the train—they run every two and a half minutes during the busy hours—and off it goes again before time has been given to observe fully how handsome it is with its seven elegant cars, each built to seat forty-eight persons.—London Mail.

ligion is chiefly concerned. The Bible, for example, prohibits certain acts and courses of conduct and prescribes certain others without always giving the why and wherefore of so doing. The reason is not far to seek. It came to the knowledge of one man at a given time and place or to a few men at different places and various times—whether by inspiration or experience matters not to our present purpose—that certain things were good for men to do and certain other things the reverse. Therefore, certain commands and prohibitions for the government of men were framed and promulgated. Some of these dealt with the motives and principles of conduct and others with words and acts only. The closeness of relation that existed between the Creator and his creatures in the most ancient ideas and forms of Bible religion sufficiently ac-

counts for the divine sanction and ultimate authority assumed by those prohibitions and commands. In proportion as it came to be understood or believed that God had enacted laws of human conduct, obedience to those laws came to be regarded as righteousness and disobedience as sin. In the religious sense of the term, therefore, roughly speaking, sin is neither more nor less than moral perversity. "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." is a familiar Bible text. As the proper sphere of religion is the spiritual in man it naturally belongs to the offices of religion to deal with the moral qualities of human conduct. And now, as ever in the past, moral perversity is intrinsically the worst quality of human sin, as it is also the worst in its blighting effects upon the wellbeing of mankind. Our sins of ignorance are many

and varied and they are responsible for a large share of the stagnation and misery of human life; but these are not for a moment to be compared with the stupendous aggregation of crime and cruelty and agony which is the daily and hourly result of conscious and willful wrongdoing. "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn." Whence come wars between nations, conflicts between classes, strifes among individuals, jealousies in families, murders and sus-