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*Possess the origin of all poems*

**Evan Lewis, ‘Examination of Strictures on the “Review”, &c.’ *The Friend, or, Advocate of Truth: a Religious Publication. From First to Eleventh Month, 1828.* Published by M. T. Gould, No. 6, North Eighth Street, 1828.**

*For the Friend, or Advocate of Truth.*  
*Examination of Strictures on the “Review”, &c.*

“Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God,”—Matt. xii. 77.

I come now to the examination of the evidence, in favour of the existence of a devil, or independent power of evil, distinct from man. My opponents rely upon the testimony of scripture to prove his existence, and gravely advise every individual, “seriously and calmly to consider the subject as set forth in holy writ, etc., before following such blind guides,” (as Elias Hicks and “our reviewer,”) and then very confidently declare, that “if they have faith in the authority of the scriptures,” they will be brought to believe “beyond a shadow of doubt,” in the reality of such a being, and his influence as an enemy of man's salvation. I very freely enter upon this examination and

am willing to abide the issue, and I hope my readers will “seriously and calmly,” weigh the evidence which I shall produce for the opinions I advocate, and patiently accompany me in the investigation, which will necessarily be extended to a considerable length, but which I design to make as concise, as a proper illustration of the subject will admit.

I hope the examination will neither be tedious nor uninteresting. And I wish it to be distinctly understood, that I do not consider a belief, either for or against the existence of a devil, a primary article of faith.

A man may either believe, or disbelieve in such a being, and be a very good Christian. But truth is always to be preferred to error, and sound and correct opinions, to absurd and superstitious notions. And as the opinion we are now to examine, is evidently a corruption of the purity of Christian doctrine, derived from the eastern Magi, which was received in the dark ages, and taken for granted rather than rationally believed in by succeeding generations, it becomes the duty of every Christian who desires to possess a reasonable and consistent faith, to examine the evidences by which such a belief is supported; and if these evidences are either deficient or deceptive, the opinion ought to be abandoned.

I shall not lose time in noticing the remarks of my opponents in number fifty, volume two, of the Orthodox “Friend.” These contain neither facts nor arguments which have any bearing upon the question at issue: and are a futile attempt to ridicule what they could not refute. In the second number of volume three, the subject is

pursued more consistently with the gravity of sober discussion.

I shall take their words for my text.

“But before following such blind guides, we would advise every individual seriously and calmly to consider this subject as set forth in holy writ, to examine carefully every instance in which the term ‘satan’ or devil is used, either in the old or new Testament, what is said of his origin, his influence upon mankind, his various transformations, his final sentence and doom, and they will be brought to believe, beyond a shadow of doubt, if they have faith in the authority of the scripture, that not only the world with its allurements, the flesh with its corruptions, but also the devil (the burden of the song) with his snares and stratagems, are equally the enemies of man's eternal salvation.” For the satisfaction of these learned scribes, let it be observed, that their advice in this case, is just the thing I wish to see complied with. If these “blind guides” had taken their own counsel, and examined the subject knowingly and *understandingly*, they would never have ventured to throw down the gauntlet so confidently. Let them “seriously and calmly” accompany me in the examination of every instance in which the term satan or devil is used in the scriptures and if they be candid seekers for truth, I trust they “will be brought to believe, beyond the shadow of doubt,” that no such doctrine as they defend, is taught in the Bible. The old Testament, especially, is the most hopeless authority that they could have chosen to support their doctrine. Milton would have served their purpose much better.

“Two instances,” say these writers, “where the devil is mentioned in scripture, will suffice to prove that he is an agent entirely distinct from man.”

The first instance, is that of the temptation of our first parents. The second I shall examine in its proper place. But it happens that Moses does not use the word at all in *his* account of the matter, nor any term of like signification.

These scribes say, that an evil being (meaning the devil) made subtle inquiries of Eve, with regard to the divine command. But Moses tells us, it was the *serpent*, or “a beast of the field” — and if so, a part of the creation of God, all of which he had pronounced very good. In this case, *Moses* and our learned scribes are at issue. Which is most to be relied on, let the reader determine. For I presume they construe the truth literally, otherwise they cannot be sound orthodox. — And if *literally*, then it was not the devil, but a *speaking serpent*, that persuaded Eve to transgress.

For Moses has left no trace of the idea that the serpent mentioned by him, was a fallen angel, or that such a being assumed the form of the serpent to deceive the woman. And it would be assuming rather high ground to suppose, he *said* one thing, and *meant* another. When Moses said the serpent beguiled Eve, what right have we to presume that he meant a fallen angel, when no hint of the existence of such a being is to be found in any of his five books. Besides, upon such a supposition, the old adversary must have contradicted the character for subtilty, given by Moses to the serpent. Upon a literal construction of his account, of all the methods that could be imagined, for beguiling the

woman from her allegiance to her creator, that of a literal serpent speaking to her, and contradicting the commands of Jehovah, is the most absurd and preposterous.

This absurdity is not altered, whether we assume the serpent to be a simple reptile such as we now see, or a fallen angel, assuming his shape and character. There are a thousand ways, in which the devil, if there were such a being, could have hoped to succeed in his temptation, more effectually, than by taking upon himself the form of a vile reptile, and undertaking to argue with a reasonable being, to persuade her, that the command of the Almighty might be broken with impunity. Where was his *cunning*, his address, his contrivance, his subtilty? He assumes the form of a snake — crawls up to the woman — speaks out — and tells her that if she eats of the fruit which she sees hanging on a tree before her in the garden, and which God had forbidden her to eat, she should not die, as had been told her by the Almighty. And she believes this reptile contrary to the words of Jehovah — takes the fruit, and eats it: gives it to her husband, who eats of it also: and by this single act, they entail guilt and misery upon all their posterity. This is the true orthodox construction. If it be not, I should be glad to be corrected and informed how it ought to be construed in the *orthodox creed*. They should keep to their literal construction, or cease condemning us, when we construe it “rationally.” But all such literal and outward explications of the scripture account of the fall, make Moses write unintelligibly, and convert the beautiful allegorical description which he has left us, of the garden of Eden, and the temptation of our first parents, into a mass of absurdities.

How then is this account to be understood rationally, and consistently with the

experience, of every reasonable being? What idea does Moses mean to convey by the serpent, which is said to be more subtle than any beast of the field?

That it was not a fallen angel is proved from the fact, that neither Moses, nor any inspired writer, from him to the author of the Apocalypse, assert, or even intimate, that the devil or a fallen angel, had any agency in beguiling our first parents.

The first reference to the account given by Moses, we find in Job, xxxi. 33. "If I covered my transgression as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom." In the margin of our Bibles, "after the manner of men," is put instead of "as Adam." No hint of a devil, having any agency in it.

The next allusion to the fall, is in Rom. v. 12. "Wherefore as by one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that (or because) all have sinned." (See v. 14.) The apostle here says, sin entered by one man, not by the devil. And in 2 Cor. xii. 3. he says, "But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." In this passage Paul takes the account as he finds it, and leaves it just where Moses left it.

No hint of a devil or fallen angel, having any thing to do with it. Again, 1 Cor. xv. 22. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." This passage makes no allusion to any devil, but has evidently a spiritual signification similar

to that in the forty-fifth verse of the chapter, where he says, “The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.” From all which, it plainly appears that there is no shadow of authority in the Bible, for supposing that Moses meant to represent a fallen angel by the word serpent. After proving what he did *not* mean by the word, the inquiry naturally recurs, “what *did* he mean?” This inquiry I shall briefly answer, in conformity with what appears to be the plain and obvious construction of the text. In the “review” I have said that the *serpent* was used as a symbol, and that self was the thing signified. This term I used for want of one more appropriate and definite. *Self* is the *thing* that desires to be gratified, and to attain its object, is more *subtle* than any beast of the field. We may use the term *lust*, or a *desire* to indulge *self* in the gratification of some appetite or passion, beyond the limits of divine wisdom. Perhaps *lust*, or a desire to indulge self, in unlawful gratification, would convey as clear and definite an idea of the *thing*, as any term we can adopt: and my object in the use of terms is, to make myself to be understood; and leave the reader to form his own conclusions from the evidence adduced. *Lust* then, or desire to indulge in self gratification, may be taken as an illustration of what is meant by the word *self*. This *lust*, or desire to please *self*, is more subtle than all the beasts of the field which the Lord God hath made; and assumes a thousand shapes in its deceitful workings, and transformations *in man*. I can safely appeal to every man’s experience, if a desire for the gratification of self, in some way or manner — the indulgence of some appetite or passion, beyond the limitations of divine truth — has not been the efficient cause of all the sin, that he has ever committed. Trace all the sins and wickedness we see in the world around us, to their source, and we shall find *self*,

or a desire to gratify *self* in unlawful indulgence, to be the root from which they all spring. The lust for dominion and power, prompts the ambitious man to wade through fields of blood, and to trample upon the rights of his fellow man, for the possession of empire.

A desire to possess an undue share of the things of this world, impels the avaricious man to resort to frauds and stratagems for the acquisition of wealth. The same lust for the gratification of self in the possession of the property of another, lifts the hand of the midnight robber and assassin. The improper indulgence of the appetite for food leads to gluttony; of the thirst for drink to intoxication, and all its consequent evils. The strongest appetites and propensities of our nature which in themselves are good, and even necessary to our existence and the continuance of our race, when indulged to excess, lead to wretchedness, and crimes innumerable. It is the desire to gratify self in the unlawful indulgence of these propensities, appetites, and passions, that causes all the sin and misery that exists in the world. If we were all to keep the garden of our own hearts, and dress it in obedience to this divine law, given to every accountable being, this earth would still be a paradise.

Let us apply this reasoning to the case of our first parents. That they had all the passions, appetites, and propensities common to their race, will not be denied. These were necessary to their very existence: without them they would neither have been accountable nor happy beings. Hence they were good, because the product of infinite wisdom and goodness. The keeping and dressing of the garden — the regulation and

government of their appetites, passions, and propensities, in obedience to the divine law, constituted their probationary state. A state in which they had a perfect freedom to choose between obedience to the divine will, and an improper indulgence of their own lusts and desires. For without this perfect freedom of choice, there could be no such thing as virtue or vice in their actions — happiness or accountability in their lives. Their happiness depended upon their obedience; their accountability on their power of choice. A right choice insures happiness and peace; a wrong choice, misery and spiritual death — death to that innocent life in the soul, which is the image of God. Now how were they tempted? By lusting, or desiring to gratify self in the indulgence of their passions, appetites, or propensities, beyond the limits prescribed by the divine law in them.

And this is well described by the apostle James, i. 14,15. “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Thus the case of our first parents is perfectly clear and plain. No mystery nor mysticism about it. The question is easily solved; what was the serpent that beguiled Eve? Self, or a desire to indulge self in the gratification of some appetite, passion or propensity, in a manner, or to an extent, which she knew to be forbidden by the law of God. And this desire we shall call lusting after that which was forbidden. This is the temptation. But *lust*, before it has produced a consequent act, does not bring forth *sin*. She reasons thus with herself — startle not ye cavillers at the idea of an intelligent being reasoning with herself; every man can apply the case in his own experience — she reasons thus with herself. Yea is it

so that God hath said thou shalt not do this act, or indulge this desire, to gratify self? Her first reply to the suggestions of her lust, is, that it is forbidden. But the desire for self gratification, always gains strength by parleying with the temptation: and she at length brings herself to the conclusion, that no harm will result to her; but that she will become wiser by following the suggestions of her desires to gratify self. She yields to the subtle reasoning, if so it may be called, of her own lust, and is thus beguiled from, her allegiance to her God. She chooses to act in her own will and time, instead of waiting for divine council. Her husband, influenced by her example, and his own selfish desire, falls into the same snare, and they both loose their happy innocence: “For lust when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin” and both experience a spiritual death, in their own souls, as had been foretold them: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” “For sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” They did not die a natural death, having lived many hundred years after. Neither did they then become *subject* to natural death, for they were created mortal beings as we are.

In the same manner, and by the same process as that described by Moses, with regard to our first parents, have all their sons and daughters from that day to this, been beguiled into sin, by being drawn away of their own lusts and enticed by the subtle working of their desire to gratify *self* in a manner forbidden by the law of God in their own souls. For by *this law* is the knowledge of sin.

There is no need to go beyond our own minds for a tempter. The case of Balaam, is almost a paraphrase upon that of Eve. The remote or proximate cause of his guilt, was

the offer of Balak: but the immediate or exciting temptation arose from his desire to gratify self in the possession of wealth and honour, as the reward of divination. At first when he asked council of God, he was forbidden to go to Balak. And here he ought to have rested content to forego the offered recompense; and he would have been preserved; seeing the Lord had said, "shalt not go." But like Eve, he reasoned and importuned, to find out some way by which to obtain the rewards which he lusted after, instead of standing simply obedient to the divine will, till he was at length permitted to follow his own lust to his ruin. Thus he eat of the forbidden fruit, and died a spiritual death.

Previously to this temptation, I have no doubt of Balaam's being a true prophet of God. My reasons for this opinion, which to me are conclusive, I would state, but that it would be a digression from my present design. It does not appear that the devil had any agency in this business at all. He is not even suspected, by the sacred historian, of being concerned in Balaam's temptation and fall.

From the evidence adduced, it plainly appears that the first instance produced by my opponents, to establish their belief in a devil, proves nothing but the ignorance of those "blind guides," who presume to teach for doctrine, the inventions of men. We expect to make it to appear that their second instance, is as little to the purpose as the first.

EVAN LEWIS