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OF  
SUNDAY READING.

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## THE ACCUSER AND THE ADVOCATE.

BY THE REV. CHARLES BRIDGES, M.A., RECTOR OF HINTON-MARTEL.

Zech. III. 1-7.

IF we could see what is passing in the invisible world, there would be much matter for fear and trembling; still more for rejoicing confidence. Here, then, is the vision in a miraculous way put before our eyes. It is the cause of Zion pleaded in heaven against most powerful opposition, and with a most triumphant issue. The angel Jehovah (called Jehovah in the next verse) is the great and glorious Advocate. Joshua stands before him as the representative of the people of God. Like him, they are all "*brands plucked out of the fire.*" Against them all the power of Satan is employed to *resist*. On their behalf the boundless grace of the Omnipotent Jehovah is called into exercise. Here, therefore, we have before us *the resistance and the victory.*

I. *The Resistance of Satan*—resistance from a quarter where we could not have expected it. Think of Satan standing in the accuser's place (see Ps. cix. 6, 7),—acting against us here even at the mercy-seat! Accused spirit! Well does every Christian know him to be his enemy! Through him evil first came into the world; through him it still holds its empire. All the hindrances in any good work, such as those which Joshua and Zerubbabel met with, we know from whence they come; and yet more, all the hindrances in our own hearts. There is the proof of his working still nearer and more painful.

But could we have thought that "the adversary" would have made heaven itself—the holy place, the dwelling of the holy God—the scene of his enmity? What! the very mercy-seat besieged with his ceaseless accusations? Yet so the Scripture represents it. God's throne is a throne of justice (Ps. lxxxix. 14); and justice requires that, ere the suitor can gain his cause, all that can be urged against him, as well as all that is in his favour, should be brought into court. Hence Satan's accusations must be heard; and they are always at

hand. His name is "the adversary" (1 Peter v. 8). His office is, "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. xii. 10). In the earliest times, "when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan came with them" (Job i. 6). His pleas were in readiness against the patriarch of Uz (i. 8-12; ii. 1-8). In the text he stands forth against Joshua, and still does he present himself against the children of God, with a malignity as fierce as ever to *resist* us, when we are pleading before heaven's mercy-seat, or labouring with energy and perseverance in our Master's cause.

1. What was the matter of accusation against Joshua and his fellows, we may gather from the history. We read of their early zeal when they returned from the captivity, and laid again the foundations of the Lord's house. But the opposition of their enemies slackened the good work. Lukewarmness became the prevailing habit. Worldliness crept in, and with it unbelief. "This people say"—while living themselves in cieled houses—"the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built" (Hag. i. 2-4). In this low and heartless state, do not we see how much material the great enemy had for his accusing work? But let us search closely near at home.

2. What may he not have to say against us? We do not clothe him with the omniscience of God; yet proof enough have we of him as a spirit deeply conversant with our hearts, thoughts, and purposes. In our natural state, awful indeed is our connection with him. He dwells, works, and rules within us—"taking us captive at his will" (Eph. ii. 2; 2 Cor. iv. 4; 2 Tim. ii. 26). And even when One "stronger than he" has cast him out, yet will "he return to his house, from whence he came out" (Luke xi. 21-24), hoping to find entrance there.

Mark his continued assaults upon the children of God—how he follows them in their business and their pleasures, in solitude and in society, to the house of God

ners are safe, and that he is sure to get them at last, he allows them to float on quietly upon an unruffled current; but the moment they attempt to throw off his yoke, and to assert their independence of him, they must expect his wrath to wax exceeding hot, and his assaults to fall thick and fast upon their heads. Let them not be ignorant of his devices. He goes about "as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."—*Presbyterian Herald.*

#### AN EVENING WITH CHRIST.

It was about the time of the Passover. The soft airs of the vernal equinox began to breathe from the plains of Sharon, laden with the aroma of the young vines, and of the opening roses. On the silent city falls the moonlight, making Moriah's temple top to tower like a mountain of silver above the green vale of the Kedron. A few lone women are grinding their evening meal in the doorways here and there; a Pharisee that has lingered long at his vespers (a papist before the Papacy), is hastening homewards; a belated fisherman from the Jordan is driving his beast toward the city gates to get outside them, ere they are bolted for the night. The Roman sentinel on the Temple wall calls the watch-word, *All's well.* The evening glides on. Through the silent street—gathering his robe up close about him to conceal his face, and keeping out of the moonlight, a ruler of the Jews passes stealthily along. Into a retired court—out of the aristocratic quarter—and hard by where God's poor are crowded close together, the ruler knocks at a lowly door. A plain, serene personage puts forth his hand to take the ruler's jewelled fingers, and a rich turban bows low to the floor in reverence. "Rabbi!" says the Pharisee to the meek Nazarene in his coarse raiment,—“Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”

Without waiting for any further preliminaries, without wasting time in idle talk, the omniscient teacher proves his divine wisdom by the solemn declaration, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man *be born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Surprise steals over the ruler's face, as he fixes his keen Jewish eyes on the Master. "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?" The poor pitiful idea of a second bodily birth enters into the mind of Nicodemus. He cannot get hold of the spiritual new birth. It is an enigma. Christ patiently explains it to his anxious inquirer. He reveals to the listening ruler that in order to be saved a man must be radically changed; that he must get a new heart, or in other words, a new controlling disposition in his soul. There must be not only a change of conduct, but a change of that which lies behind, and controls all daily conduct. A new heart was the one essential. Not a new organism, not a new mental faculty thrust in; but a new principle laid as a founda-

tion in the moral nature of the soul, to produce godly acts and godly exercises. Nicodemus was enjoined to do something more than to reform his life—more than to substitute sweet charities for loud liturgies in the market place—more than to bestow his goods to feed the pauper at his gate. A new *habit* was to be implanted within him by the Holy Ghost—a habit of loving God and keeping his commandments. This change of the will and the affections the theologian would call REGENERATION. Jesus describes it as being "born of water and of the Spirit."

Here is another puzzle to the Pharisee. He does not seize the idea of the Spirit's agency. But Christ explains to him that many other powerful agencies are mysterious and invisible. There, for example, is the night-wind. As it sweeps on its viewless path, the old olives on the ridge of Olivet bend to its fury, and the "sound thereof" wakes the startled sleepers in their beds; but no man can tell "whence it cometh, or whither it goeth." So is it with the hidden power of the Spirit. It is a mighty agency, all unseen, but felt. In this too it is like the wind, that it sweeps away the evil vapours of sin, and purifies the soul. Of such a change—so deep, so thorough, so vital, so beneficent—God is the author. His Spirit works on the awakened and the inquiring heart. The heart thus awakened, however active it may be in uttering its cry of penitence or its call for pardon, however active in renouncing favourite sins, or in mortifying self-righteousness, can never be renewed until God does the blessed work. For lest Judea's ruler should feed his proud heart with the supposition that he could regenerate himself, Jesus cautions him against the fatal mistake by telling him that the new-born are not "born of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Into the ruler's mind the impression must have been carried that in this new birth the sinner is both active and passive too. He is a living, breathing, choosing, free agent. As such he comes to Christ. But he never would have come "unless the Father drew him." As a free agent he prays the prayer of faith. Yet that faith is the "gift of God." As a free agent he asks for pardon. It is the province of God only to forgive sin. As a free agent he approaches the cross of Calvary. When there, the Holy Spirit confers the gift of regeneration, and the man is renewed. The heart thus wrought upon by the divine power turns to God. And this self-conscious turning of the renewed heart to the service and the love of Christ is true conversion. The combined operation—by which God makes a man willing to repent and believe, and the man thus made willing does actually turn to him—is what our Saviour taught to Nicodemus as the being "born again."

The Pharisee listens to it all. We may imagine that the turban was laid aside, and the eager face bent to catch the words of life from the lips of the Nazarene. Evening wears on toward midnight, ere Nicodemus puts on his sandals to depart. He rises to go away, a wiser

man. He goes away to remember the solemn and weighty teachings—not to forget. He goes away convinced, but not yet converted. He goes away saved out of Pharisaism, though not yet saved into Christianity. Already is the hand of Christ upon his heart; and when we afterwards see him rising up in the Sanhedrim to demand a fair treatment of the persecuted Saviour, and at last bringing sweet spices to embalm the mangled form just rescued from the cross, we only see the glorious outcome of that evening with Jesus Christ.

Perhaps some reader of this sketch is now sitting where Nicodemus sat that night—on the seat of honest inquiry. He has sat there long already, but delay has not improved his guilty heart. He knows the theory of salvation, but the *practical steps* he does not get hold of. My friend! you may perish in that very seat. You may sink to the pit from the place of the inquirer, if you make it too the place of the palterer, and the trifler with the Holy Spirit. What you want is — *action*. You have waited long enough. Go straightway to Christ. Lay hold of the first duty to which conscience calls, and do it. Begin at once to serve God. If your will rebels, pray God to subdue your stubborn will. If Satan hinder, “resist the devil; he will flee from you.” If business beguile you, set your face like a flint to the one great business of securing the salvation of your soul. The very attempt to serve God will bring out the wickedness and the weakness of your heart, as no other process possibly can. But try it. Every attempt will bring you nearer to Christ. Persevere! Like Bunyan’s pilgrim, you will find that the way to heaven “lies through this very valley.” Struggle on! And when you can perform one solitary act, however humble, from no other motive than the glory of God—when you can renounce a single sin from no other motive than honouring the Saviour, then have you experienced the new birth; then will your feet be safely planted in that straight path that leads to life eternal.—*Rev. Theodore L. Cuyler.*

#### WALKING IN LIGHT.

WHEN we seek with loving heart,  
Each to act a child-like part,  
Daily duty, daily care,  
For our Lord to do or bear;—

All his pleasure to fulfil,  
Do or suffer all his will,—  
Serve him here with earnest love,  
Till we dwell with him above,—

When the ransomed look before,  
View by faith the heavenly shore,  
Catch the echoes of the song  
They shall join in there, ere long,—

Then, of small account appear  
All our mortal toils or tears;

Homeward hasting day by day,  
What are trials by the way?

He—the great High Priest—draws nigh,  
Brings for every want, supply;  
Healing oil, and cheering wine—  
Living water, bread divine.

Then together all rejoice,  
Singing praise with heart and voice,  
Finding ere our work be done,  
Present heaven on earth begun.

Often by our Saviour blest  
With a sweet Sabbath rest,  
Every burden we can bear  
To his heart, and leave it there.

And arising, onward haste,  
When that blessed hour is past  
Ready, with uplifted hands,  
For the Master’s next commanda.

Ready, at his midnight call,  
Joyfully to part from all—  
Then, with him, the festal door  
Enter, to go out no more.

H. L. L.

(*Moravian. From the German*)

#### THE DUTY FOR US.

WEARILY the Christian pilgrim surveys the Church about him. As he looks on his own heart, he sees there so much that is sinful, that he wonders how he can himself be saved. As he looks upon others, harder influences come into play. Each heresy—each inconsistency—assumes to him exaggerated proportions. “Lord, can he who holds this or that doctrine—who yields to this or that sin—can he be saved?”

Nor is this inquiry always unamiable. We see an error, and, often from love to our fellow men, we hasten to denounce it as soul-destroying. From the error we come to the errorist. We draw the pall of death over all Rome, until at last it covers Fenelon and Pascal. These sentences we pronounce punitively, until at last it would seem as if it were our duty to utter a gospel, not of salvation, but of condemnation.

That this is right as to doctrine, there can be no doubt. But our Lord has told us when we go to apply these tests to *individuals*, to apply them first to *ourselves*. “Enter ye at the strait gate.” Two ways does this come home to us. The first is in applying to ourselves the doctrine—art thou in Christ? for there is no other way by which man can be saved. The second is by applying this test to those to whom we are appointed to speak. It is not—*is A. in the way of salvation? or is B.?* but *ART THOU?*