

MONCURE D. CONWAY



**THE MYTHOLOGY
OF THE DEVIL**

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Preface.

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Three Friars, says a legend, hid themselves near the Witch Sabbath orgies that they might count the devils; but the Chief of these, discovering the friars, said—‘Reverend Brothers, our army is such that if all the Alps, their rocks and glaciers, were equally divided among us, none would have a pound’s weight.’ This was in one Alpine valley. Any one who has caught but a glimpse of the world’s Walpurgis Night, as revealed in Mythology and Folklore, must agree that this courteous devil did not overstate the case. Any attempt to catalogue the evil spectres which have haunted mankind were like trying to count the shadows cast upon the earth by the rising sun. This conviction has grown upon the author of this work at every step in his studies of the subject.

In 1859 I contributed, as one of the American ‘Tracts for the Times,’ a pamphlet entitled ‘The Natural History of the Devil.’ Probably the chief value of that essay was to myself, and this in that its preparation had revealed to me how pregnant with interest and importance was the subject selected. Subsequent researches in the same direction, after I had come to reside in Europe, revealed how slight had been my conception of the vastness of the domain upon which that early venture was made. In 1872, while preparing a series of lectures for the Royal Institution on Demonology, it appeared to me that the best I could do was to print those lectures with some notes and additions; but after they were delivered there still remained with me unused the greater part of materials collected in many countries, and the phantasmal creatures which I had evoked would not permit me to rest from my labours until I had dealt with them more thoroughly.

The fable of Thor's attempt to drink up a small spring, and his failure because it was fed by the ocean, seems aimed at such efforts as mine. But there is another aspect of the case which has yielded me more encouragement. These phantom hosts, however unmanageable as to number, when closely examined, present comparatively few types; they coalesce by hundreds; from being at first overwhelmed by their multiplicity, the classifier finds himself at length beating bushes to start a new variety. Around some single form—the physiognomy, it may be, of Hunger or Disease, of Lust or Cruelty—ignorant imagination has broken up nature into innumerable bits which, like mirrors of various surface, reflect the same in endless sizes and distortions; but they vanish if that central fact be withdrawn.

In trying to conquer, as it were, these imaginary monsters, they have sometimes swarmed and gibbered around me in a mad comedy which travestied their tragic sway over those who believed in their reality. Gargoyles extended their grin over the finest architecture, cornices coiled to serpents, the very words of speakers started out of their conventional sense into images that tripped my attention. Only as what I believed right solutions were given to their problems were my sphinxes laid; but through this psychological experience it appeared that when one was so laid his or her legion disappeared also. Long ago such phantasms ceased to haunt my nerves, because I discovered their unreality; I am now venturing to believe that their mythologic forms cease to haunt my studies, because I have found out their reality.

Why slay the slain? Such may be the question that will arise in the minds of many who see this book. A Scotch song says, 'The Devil is dead, and buried at Kirkcaldy;' if so, he did not die until he had created a world in his image. The natural world is overlaid by an unnatural religion, breeding bitterness around simplest thoughts, obstructions to science, estrangements not more reasonable than if they

resulted from varying notions of lunar figures,—all derived from the Devil-bequeathed dogma that certain beliefs and disbeliefs are of infernal instigation. Dogmas moulded in a fossil demonology make the foundation of institutions which divert wealth, learning, enterprise, to fictitious ends. It has not, therefore, been mere intellectual curiosity which has kept me working at this subject these many years, but an increasing conviction that the sequelæ of such superstitions are exercising a still formidable influence. When Father Delaporte lately published his book on the Devil, his Bishop wrote—‘Reverend Father, if every one busied himself with the Devil as you do, the kingdom of God would gain by it.’ Identifying the kingdom here spoken of as that of Truth, it has been with a certain concurrence in the Bishop’s sentiment that I have busied myself with the work now given to the public.

Part I. Demonolatry.

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Chapter I. Dualism.

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Origin of Deism—Evolution from the far to the near—Illustrations from witchcraft—The primitive Pantheism—The dawn of Dualism.

A college in the State of Ohio has adopted for its motto the words 'Orient thyself.' This significant admonition to Western youth represents one condition of attaining truth in the science of mythology. Through neglect of it the glowing personifications and metaphors of the East have too generally migrated to the West only to find it a Medusa turning them to stone. Our prosaic literalism changes their ideals to idols. The time has come when we must learn rather to see ourselves in them: out of an age and civilisation where we live in habitual recognition of natural forces we may transport ourselves to a period and region where no sophisticated eye looks upon nature. The sun is a chariot drawn by shining steeds and driven by a refulgent deity; the stars ascend and move by arbitrary power or command; the tree is the bower of a spirit; the fountain leaps from the urn of a naiad. In such gay costumes did the laws of nature hold their carnival until Science struck the hour for unmasking. The costumes and masks have with us become materials for studying the history of the human mind, but to know them we must translate our senses back into that phase of our own early existence, so far as is consistent with carrying our culture with us.

Without conceding too much to Solar mythology, it may be pronounced tolerably clear that the earliest emotion of worship was born out of the wonder with which man looked up to the heavens above him. The splendours of the

morning and evening; the azure vault, painted with frescoes of cloud or blackened by the storm; the night, crowned with constellations: these awakened imagination, inspired awe, kindled admiration, and at length adoration, in the being who had reached intervals in which his eye was lifted above the earth. Amid the rapture of Vedic hymns to these sublimities we meet sharp questionings whether there be any such gods as the priests say, and suspicion is sometimes cast on sacrifices. The forms that peopled the celestial spaces may have been those of ancestors, kings, and great men, but anterior to all forms was the poetic enthusiasm which built heavenly mansions for them; and the crude cosmogonies of primitive science were probably caught up by this spirit, and consecrated as slowly as scientific generalisations now are.

Our modern ideas of evolution might suggest the reverse of this—that human worship began with things low and gradually ascended to high objects; that from rude ages, in which adoration was directed to stock and stone, tree and reptile, the human mind climbed by degrees to the contemplation and reverence of celestial grandeurs. But the accord of this view with our ideas of evolution is apparent only. The real progress seems here to have been from the far to the near, from the great to the small. It is, indeed, probably inexact to speak of the worship of stock and stone, weed and wort, insect and reptile, as primitive. There are many indications that such things were by no race considered intrinsically sacred, nor were they really worshipped until the origin of their sanctity was lost; and even now, ages after their oracular or symbolical character has been forgotten, the superstitions that have survived in connection with such insignificant objects point to an original association with the phenomena of the heavens. No religions could, at first glance, seem wider apart than the worship of the serpent and that of the glorious sun; yet many ancient temples are covered with symbols combining

sun and snake, and no form is more familiar in Egypt than the solar serpent standing erect upon its tail, with rays around its head.

Nor is this high relationship of the adored reptile found only in regions where it might have been raised up by ethnical combinations as the mere survival of a savage symbol. William Craft, an African who resided for some time in the kingdom of Dahomey, informed me of the following incident which he had witnessed there. The sacred serpents are kept in a grand house, which they sometimes leave to crawl in their neighbouring grounds. One day a negro from some distant region encountered one of these animals and killed it. The people learning that one of their gods had been slain, seized the stranger, and having surrounded him with a circle of brushwood, set it on fire. The poor wretch broke through the circle of fire and ran, pursued by the crowd, who struck him with heavy sticks. Smarting from the flames and blows, he rushed into a river; but no sooner had he entered there than the pursuit ceased, and he was told that, having gone through fire and water, he was purified, and might emerge with safety. Thus, even in that distant and savage region, serpent-worship was associated with fire-worship and river-worship, which have a wide representation in both Aryan and Semitic symbolism. To this day the orthodox Israelites set beside their dead, before burial, the lighted candle and a basin of pure water. These have been associated in rabbinical mythology with the angels Michael (genius of Water) and Gabriel (genius of Fire); but they refer both to the phenomenal glories and the purifying effects of the two elements as revered by the Africans in one direction and the Parsees in another.

Not less significant are the facts which were attested at the witch-trials. It was shown that for their pretended divinations they used plants—as rue and vervain—well known in the ancient Northern religions, and often recognised as examples of tree-worship; but it also

appeared that around the cauldron a mock zodiacal circle was drawn, and that every herb employed was alleged to have derived its potency from having been gathered at a certain hour of the night or day, a particular quarter of the moon, or from some spot where sun or moon did or did not shine upon it. Ancient planet-worship is, indeed, still reflected in the habit of village herbalists, who gather their simples at certain phases of the moon, or at certain of those holy periods of the year which conform more or less to the pre-Christian festivals.

These are a few out of many indications that the small and senseless things which have become almost or quite fetishes were by no means such at first, but were mystically connected with the heavenly elements and splendours, like the animal forms in the zodiac. In one of the earliest hymns of the Rig-Veda it is said—'This earth belongs to Varuna (Οὐρανός) the king, and the wide sky: he is contained also in this drop of water.' As the sky was seen reflected in the shining curve of a dew-drop, even so in the shape or colour of a leaf or flower, the transformation of a chrysalis, or the burial and resurrection of a scarabæus' egg, some sign could be detected making it answer in place of the typical image which could not yet be painted or carved.

The necessities of expression would, of course, operate to invest the primitive conceptions and interpretations of celestial phenomena with those pictorial images drawn from earthly objects of which the early languages are chiefly composed. In many cases that are met in the most ancient hymns, the designations of exalted objects are so little descriptive of them, that we may refer them to a period anterior to the formation of that refined and complex symbolism by which primitive religions have acquired a representation in definite characters. The Vedic comparisons of the various colours of the dawn to horses, or the rain-clouds to cows, denotes a much less mature development of thought than the fine observation implied in the connection

of the forked lightning with the forked serpent-tongue and forked mistletoe, or symbolisation of the universe in the concentric folds of an onion. It is the presence of these more mystical and complex ideas in religions which indicate a progress of the human mind from the large and obvious to the more delicate and occult, and the growth of the higher vision which can see small things in their large relationships. Although the exaltation in the Vedas of Varuna as king of heaven, and as contained also in a drop of water, is in one verse, we may well recognise an immense distance in time between the two ideas there embodied. The first represents that primitive pantheism which is the counterpart of ignorance. An unclassified outward universe is the reflection of a mind without form and void: it is while all within is as yet indiscriminating wonder that the religious vesture of nature will be this undefined pantheism. The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has not yet been tasted. In some of the earlier hymns of the Rig-Veda, the Maruts, the storm-deities, are praised along with Indra, the sun; Yama, king of Death, is equally adored with the goddess of Dawn. 'No real foe of yours is known in heaven, nor in earth.' 'The storms are thy allies.' Such is the high optimism of sentences found even in sacred books which elsewhere mask the dawn of the Dualism which ultimately superseded the harmony of the elemental Powers. 'I create light and I create darkness, I create good and I create evil.' 'Look unto Yezdan, who causeth the shadow to fall.' But it is easy to see what must be the result when this happy family of sun-god and storm-god and fire-god, and their innumerable coordinate divinities, shall be divided by discord. When each shall have become associated with some earthly object or fact, he or she will appear as friend or foe, and their connection with the sources of human pleasure and pain will be reflected in collisions and wars in the heavens. The rebel clouds will be transformed to Titans and Dragons. The adored Maruts will be no longer storm-heroes with

unsheathed swords of lightning, marching as the retinue of Indra, but fire-breathing monsters—Vritras and Ahis,—and the morning and evening shadows from faithful watch-dogs become the treacherous hell-hounds, like Orthros and Cerberus. The vehement antagonisms between animals and men and of tribe against tribe, will be expressed in the conception of struggles among gods, who will thus be classified as good or evil deities.

This was precisely what did occur. The primitive pantheism was broken up: in its place the later ages beheld the universe as the arena of a tremendous conflict between good and evil Powers, who severally, in the process of time, marshalled each and everything, from a world to a worm, under their flaming banners.

Chapter II.

The Genesis of Demons.

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Their good names euphemistic—Their mixed character—
Illustrations: Beelzebub, Loki—Demon-germs—The knowledge of
good and evil—Distinction between Demon and Devil.

The first pantheon of each race was built of intellectual speculations. In a moral sense, each form in it might be described as more or less demonic; and, indeed, it may almost be affirmed that religion, considered as a service rendered to superhuman beings, began with the propitiation of demons, albeit they might be called gods. Man found that in the earth good things came with difficulty, while thorns and weeds sprang up everywhere. The evil powers seemed to be the strongest. The best deity had a touch of the demon in him. The sun is the most beneficent, yet he bears the sunstroke along with the sunbeam, and withers the blooms he calls forth. The splendour, the might, the majesty, the menace, the grandeur and wrath of the heavens and the elements were blended in these personifications, and reflected in the trembling adoration paid to them. The flattering names given to these powers by their worshippers must be interpreted by the costly sacrifices with which men sought to propitiate them. No sacrifice would have been offered originally to a purely benevolent power. The Furies were called the Eumenides, 'the well-meaning,' and there arises a temptation to regard the name as preserving the primitive meaning of the Sanskrit original of Erinyes, namely, *Saranyu*, which signifies the morning light stealing over the sky. But the descriptions of the Erinyes by the Greek poets—especially of Æschylus, who pictures them as black, serpent-locked, with eyes

dropping blood, and calls them hounds—show that *Saranyu* as morning light, and thus the revealer of deeds of darkness, had gradually been degraded into a personification of the Curse. And yet, while recognising the name Eumenides as euphemistic, we may admire none the less the growth of that rationalism which ultimately found in the epithet a suggestion of the soul of good in things evil, and almost restored the beneficent sense of Saranyu. ‘I have settled in this place,’ says Athene in the ‘Eumenides’ of Æschylus, ‘these mighty deities, hard to be appeased; they have obtained by lot to administer all things concerning men. But he who has not found them gentle knows not whence come the ills of life.’ But before the dread Erinyes of Homer’s age had become the ‘venerable goddesses’ (σεμναὶ θεαὶ) of popular phrase in Athens, or the Eumenides of the later poet’s high insight, piercing their Gorgon form as portrayed by himself, they had passed through all the phases of human terror. Cowering generations had tried to soothe the remorseless avengers by complimentary phrases. The worship of the serpent, originating in the same fear, similarly raised that animal into the region where poets could invest it with many profound and beautiful significances. But these more distinctly terrible deities are found in the shadowy border-land of mythology, from which we may look back into ages when the fear in which worship is born had not yet been separated into its elements of awe and admiration, nor the heaven of supreme forces divided into ranks of benevolent and malevolent beings; and, on the other hand, we may look forward to the ages in which the moral consciousness of man begins to form the distinctions between good and evil, right and wrong, which changes cosmogony into religion, and impresses every deity of the mind’s creation to do his or her part in reflecting the physical and moral struggles of mankind.



Fig. 1.—Beelzebub (Calmet).

The intermediate processes by which the good and evil were detached, and advanced to separate personification, cannot always be traced, but the indications of their work are in most cases sufficiently clear. The relationship, for instance, between Baal and Baal-zebub cannot be doubted. The one represents the Sun in his glory as quickener of Nature and painter of its beauty, the other the insect-breeding power of the Sun. Baal-zebub is the Fly-god. Only at a comparatively recent period did the deity of the Philistines, whose oracle was consulted by Ahaziah (2 Kings i.), suffer under the reputation of being 'the Prince of

Devils,' his name being changed by a mere pun to Beelzebul (dung-god). It is not impossible that the modern Egyptian mother's hesitation to disturb flies settling on her sleeping child, and the sanctity attributed to various insects, originated in the awe felt for him. The title Fly-god is paralleled by the reverent epithet ἀπόμυιος, applied to Zeus as worshipped at Elis,¹ the *Myiagrus deus* of the Romans,² and the *Myiodes* mentioned by Pliny.³ Our picture is probably from a protecting charm, and evidently by the god's believers. There is a story of a peasant woman in a French church who was found kneeling before a marble group, and was warned by a priest that she was worshipping the wrong figure—namely, Beelzebub. 'Never mind,' she replied, 'it is well enough to have friends on both sides.' The story, though now only *ben trovato*, would represent the actual state of mind in many a Babylonian invoking the protection of the Fly-god against formidable swarms of his venomous subjects.

Not less clear is the illustration supplied by Scandinavian mythology. In Sæmund's Edda the evil-minded Loki says:—

Odin! dost thou remember
When we in early days
Blended our blood together?

The two became detached very slowly; for their separation implied the crumbling away of a great religion, and its distribution into new forms; and a religion requires, relatively, as long to decay as it does to grow, as we who live under a crumbling religion have good reason to know. Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, of the Brahmo-Somaj, in an address in London, said, 'The Indian Pantheon has many millions of deities, and no space is left for the Devil.' He might have added that these deities have distributed between them all the work that the Devil could perform if he

were admitted. His remark recalled to me the Eddaic story of Loki's entrance into the assembly of gods in the halls of Oegir. Loki—destined in a later age to be identified with Satan—is angrily received by the deities, but he goes round and mentions incidents in the life of each one which show them to be little if any better than himself. The gods and goddesses, unable to reply, confirm the cynic's criticisms in theologic fashion by tying him up with a serpent for cord.

The late Theodore Parker is said to have replied to a Calvinist who sought to convert him—'The difference between us is simple: your god is my devil.' There can be little question that the Hebrews, from whom the Calvinist inherited his deity, had no devil in their mythology, because the jealous and vindictive Jehovah was quite equal to any work of that kind,—as the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, bringing plagues upon the land, or deceiving a prophet and then destroying him for his false prophecies.⁴ The same accommodating relation of the primitive deities to all natural phenomena will account for the absence of distinct representatives of evil of the most primitive religions.

The earliest exceptions to this primeval harmony of the gods, implying moral chaos in man, were trifling enough: the occasional monster seems worthy of mention only to display the valour of the god who slew him. But such were demon-germs, born out of the structural action of the human mind so soon as it began to form some philosophy concerning a universe upon which it had at first looked with simple wonder, and destined to an evolution of vast import when the work of moralising upon them should follow.

Let us take our stand beside our barbarian, but no longer savage, ancestor in the far past. We have watched the rosy morning as it waxed to a blazing noon: then swiftly the sun is blotted out, the tempest rages, it is a sudden night lit only by the forked lightning that strikes tree, house, man, with angry thunder-peal. From an instructed age man can look

upon the storm blackening the sky not as an enemy of the sun, but one of its own superlative effects; but some thousands of years ago, when we were all living in Eastern barbarism, we could not conceive that a luminary whose very business it was to give light, could be a party to his own obscuration. We then looked with pity upon the ignorance of our ancestors, who had sung hymns to the storm-dragons, hoping to flatter them into quietness; and we came by irresistible logic to that Dualism which long divided the visible, and still divides the moral, universe into two hostile camps.

This is the mother-principle out of which demons (in the ordinary sense of the term) proceeded. At first few, as distinguished from the host of deities by exceptional harmfulness, they were multiplied with man's growth in the classification of his world. Their principle of existence is capable of indefinite expansion, until it shall include all the realms of darkness, fear, and pain. In the names of demons, and in the fables concerning them, the struggles of man in his ages of weakness with peril, want, and death, are recorded more fully than in any inscriptions on stone. Dualism is a creed which all superficial appearances attest. Side by side the desert and the fruitful land, the sunshine and the frost, sorrow and joy, life and death, sit weaving around every life its vesture of bright and sombre threads, and Science alone can detect how each of these casts the shuttle to the other. Enemies to each other they will appear in every realm which knowledge has not mastered. There is a refrain, gathered from many ages, in William Blake's apostrophe to the tiger:—

Tiger! tiger! burning bright
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye
Framed thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burned that fire within thine eyes?
On what wings dared he aspire?
What the hand dared seize the fire?

When the stars threw down their spears
And water heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the lamb make thee?

That which one of the devoutest men of genius whom England has produced thus asked was silently answered in India by the serpent-worshipper kneeling with his tongue held in his hand; in Egypt, by Osiris seated on a throne of chequer.⁵

It is necessary to distinguish clearly between the Demon and the Devil, though, for some purposes, they must be mentioned together. The world was haunted with demons for many ages before there was any embodiment of their spirit in any central form, much less any conception of a Principle of Evil in the universe. The early demons had no moral character, not any more than the man-eating tiger. There is no outburst of moral indignation mingling with the shout of victory when Indra slays Vritra, and Apollo's face is serene when his dart pierces the Python. It required a much higher development of the moral sentiment to give rise to the conception of a devil. Only that intensest light could cast so black a shadow athwart the world as the belief in a purely malignant spirit. To such a conception—love of evil for its own sake—the word Devil is limited in this work; Demon is applied to beings whose harmfulness is not gratuitous, but incidental to their own satisfactions.

Deity and Demon are from words once interchangeable, and the latter has simply suffered degradation by the conventional use of it to designate the less beneficent powers and qualities, which originally inhered in every deity,

after they were detached from these and separately personified. Every bright god had his shadow, so to say; and under the influence of Dualism this shadow attained a distinct existence and personality in the popular imagination. The principle having once been established, that what seemed beneficent and what seemed the reverse must be ascribed to different powers, it is obvious that the evolution of demons must be continuous, and their distribution co-extensive with the ills that flesh is heir to.



1. Pausan. v. 14, 2.
2. Solin. Polyhistor, i.
3. Pliny, xxix. 6, 34, init.
4. Ezekiel xiv. 9.
5. As in the Bembine Tablet in the Bodleian Library.

Chapter III. Degradation.

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The degradation of deities—Indicated in names—Legends of their fall—Incidental signs of the divine origin of demons and devils.

The atmospheric conditions having been prepared in the human mind for the production of demons, the particular shapes or names they would assume would be determined by a variety of circumstances, ethnical, climatic, political, or even accidental. They would, indeed, be rarely accidental; but Professor Max Müller, in his notes to the Rig-Veda, has called attention to a remarkable instance in which the formation of an imposing mythological figure of this kind had its name determined by what, in all probability, was an accident. There appears in the earliest Vedic hymns the name of Aditi, as the holy Mother of many gods, and thrice there is mentioned the female name Diti. But there is reason to believe that Diti is a mere reflex of Aditi, the *a* being dropped originally by a reciter's license. The later reciters, however, regarding every letter in so sacred a book, or even the omission of a letter, as of eternal significance, Diti—this decapitated Aditi—was evolved into a separate and powerful being, and, every niche of beneficence being occupied by its god or goddess, the new form was at once relegated to the newly-defined realm of evil, where she remained as the mother of the enemies of the gods, the Daityas. Unhappily this accident followed the ancient tendency by which the Furies and Vices have, with scandalous constancy, been described in the feminine gender.

The close resemblance between these two names of Hindu mythology, severally representing the best and the

worst, may be thus accidental, and only serve to show how the demon-forming tendency, after it began, was able to press even the most trivial incidents into its service. But generally the names of demons, and for whole races of demons, report far more than this; and in no inquiry more than that before us is it necessary to remember that names are things. The philological facts supply a remarkable confirmation of the statements already made as to the original identity of demon and deity. The word 'demon' itself, as we have said, originally bore a good instead of an evil meaning. The Sanskrit *deva*, 'the shining one,' Zend *daêva*, correspond with the Greek θεός, Latin *deus*, Anglo-Saxon *Tiw*; and remain in 'deity,' 'deuce' (probably; it exists in Armorican, *teuz*, a phantom), 'devel' (the gipsy name for God), and Persian *dīv*, demon. The Demon of Socrates represents the personification of a being still good, but no doubt on the path of decline from pure divinity. Plato declares that good men when they die become 'demons,' and he says 'demons are reporters and carriers between gods and men.' Our familiar word *bogey*, a sort of nickname for an evil spirit, comes from the Slavonic word for God—*bog*. Appearing here in the West as bogey (Welsh *bwg*, a goblin), this word *bog* began, probably, as the 'Baga' of cuneiform inscriptions, a name of the Supreme Being, or possibly the Hindu 'Bhaga,' Lord of Life. In the 'Bishop's Bible' the passage occurs, 'Thou shalt not be afraid of any *bugs* by night:' the word has been altered to 'terror.' When we come to the particular names of demons, we find many of them bearing traces of the splendours from which they have declined. 'Siva,' the Hindu god of destruction, has a meaning ('auspicious') derived from *Svī*, 'thrive'—thus related ideally to Pluto, 'wealth'—and, indeed, in later ages, appears to have gained the greatest elevation. In a story of the Persian poem *Masnavi*, Ahriman is mentioned with Bahman as a fire-fiend, of which class are the Magian demons and the Jinns generally; which, the sanctity of fire

being considered, is an evidence of their high origin. Avicenna says that the genii are ethereal animals. Lucifer—light-bearing—is the fallen angel of the morning star. Loki—the nearest to an evil power of the Scandinavian personifications—is the German *leucht*, or light. Azazel—a word inaccurately rendered ‘scape-goat’ in the Bible—appears to have been originally a deity, as the Israelites were originally required to offer up one goat to Jehovah and another to Azazel, a name which appears to signify the ‘strength of God.’ Gesenius and Ewald regard Azazel as a demon belonging to the pre-Mosaic religion, but it can hardly be doubted that the four arch-demons mentioned by the Rabbins—Samaël, Azazel, Asaël, and Maccathiel—are personifications of the elements as energies of the deity. Samaël would appear to mean the ‘left hand of God;’ Azazel, his strength; Asaël, his reproductive force; and Maccathiel, his retributive power, but the origin of these names is doubtful..

Although Azazel is now one of the Mussulman names for a devil, it would appear to be nearly related to Al Uzza of the Koran, one of the goddesses of whom the significant tradition exists, that once when Mohammed had read, from the Sura called ‘The Star,’ the question, ‘What think ye of Allat, Al Uzza, and Manah, that other third goddess?’ he himself added, ‘These are the most high and beauteous damsels, whose intercession is to be hoped for,’ the response being afterwards attributed to a suggestion of Satan.¹ Belial is merely a word for godlessness; it has become personified through the misunderstanding of the phrase in the Old Testament by the translators of the Septuagint, and thus passed into christian use, as in 2 Cor. vi. 15, ‘What concord hath Christ with Belial?’ The word is not used as a proper name in the Old Testament, and the late creation of a demon out of it may be set down to accident.

Even where the names of demons and devils bear no such traces of their degradation from the state of deities, there are apt to be characteristics attributed to them, or myths connected with them, which point in the direction indicated. Such is the case with Satan, of whom much must be said hereafter, whose Hebrew name signifies the adversary, but who, in the Book of Job, appears among the sons of God. The name given to the devil in the Koran—Eblis—is almost certainly *diabolos* Arabicised; and while this Greek word is found in Pindar² (5th century B.C.), meaning a slanderer, the fables in the Koran concerning Eblis describe him as a fallen angel of the highest rank.

One of the most striking indications of the fall of demons from heaven is the wide-spread belief that they are lame. Mr. Tylor has pointed out the curious persistence of this idea in various ethnical lines of development.³ Hephaistos was lamed by his fall when hurled by Zeus from Olympos; and it is not a little singular that in the English travesty of limping Vulcan, represented in *Wayland the Smith*,⁴ there should appear the suggestion, remarked by Mr. Cox, of the name 'Vala' (coverer), one of the designations of the dragon destroyed by Indra. 'In Sir Walter Scott's romance,' says Mr. Cox, 'Wayland is a mere impostor, who avails himself of a popular superstition to keep up an air of mystery about himself and his work, but the character to which he makes pretence belongs to the genuine Teutonic legend.'⁵ The Persian demon Aeshma—the Asmodeus of the Book of Tobit—appears with the same characteristic of lameness in the 'Diable Boiteux' of Le Sage. The christian devil's clubbed or cloven foot is notorious.

Even the horns popularly attributed to the devil may possibly have originated with the aureole which indicates the glory of his 'first estate.' Satan is depicted in various relics of early art wearing the aureole, as in a miniature of the tenth century (from Bible No. 6, Bib. Roy.), given by M.

Didron.⁶ The same author has shown that Pan and the Satyrs, who had so much to do with the shaping of our horned and hoofed devil, originally got their horns from the same high source as Moses in the old Bibles,⁷ and in the great statue of him at Rome by Michel Angelo.

It is through this mythologic history that the most powerful demons have been associated in the popular imagination with stars, planets,—Ketu in India, Saturn and Mercury the 'Infortunes,'—comets, and other celestial phenomena. The examples of this are so numerous that it is impossible to deal with them here, where I can only hope to offer a few illustrations of the principles affirmed; and in this case it is of less importance for the English reader, because of the interesting volume in which the subject has been specially dealt with.⁸ Incidentally, too, the astrological demons and devils must recur from time to time in the process of our inquiry. But it will probably be within the knowledge of some of my readers that the dread of comets and of meteoric showers yet lingers in many parts of Christendom, and that fear of unlucky stars has not passed away with astrologers. There is a Scottish legend told by Hugh Miller of an avenging meteoric demon. A shipmaster who had moored his vessel near Morial's Den, amused himself by watching the lights of the scattered farmhouses. After all the rest had gone out one light lingered for some time. When that light too had disappeared, the shipmaster beheld a large meteor, which, with a hissing noise, moved towards the cottage. A dog howled, an owl whooped; but when the fire-ball had almost reached the roof, a cock crew from within the cottage, and the meteor rose again. Thrice this was repeated, the meteor at the third cock-crow ascending among the stars. On the following day the shipmaster went on shore, purchased the cock, and took it away with him. Returned from his voyage, he looked for the cottage, and found nothing but a few blackened stones.

Nearly sixty years ago a human skeleton was found near the spot, doubled up as if the body had been huddled into a hole: this revived the legend, and probably added some of those traits which make it a true bit of mosaic in the mythology of Astræa.⁹

The fabled 'fall of Lucifer' really signifies a process similar to that which has been noticed in the case of Saranyu. The morning star, like the morning light, as revealer of the deeds of darkness, becomes an avenger, and by evolution an instigator of the evil it originally disclosed and punished. It may be remarked also that though we have inherited the phrase 'Demons of Darkness,' it was an ancient rabbinical belief that the demons went abroad in darkness not only because it facilitated their attacks on man, but because being of luminous forms, they could recognise each other better with a background of darkness.

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1. See Sale's Koran, p. 281.
 2. Pindar, Fragm., 270.
 3. Tylor's 'Early Hist. of Mankind,' p. 358; 'Prim. Cult.,' vol. ii. p. 230.
 4. The Gascons of Labourd call the devil 'Seigneur Voland,' and some revere him as a patron.
 5. 'Myth. of the Aryan Nations,' vol. ii. p. 327.
 6. 'Christian Iconography,' Bohn, p. 158.
 7. 'Videbant faciem egredientis Moysis esse cornutam.'—Vulg. Exod. xxxiv. 35.
 8. 'Myths and Marvels of Astronomy.' By R. A. Proctor. Chatto & Windus, 1878.
 9. 'Scenes and Legends,' &c., p. 73.

Chapter IV. The Abgott.

Table of Contents

The ex-god—Deities demonised by conquest—Theological animosity—Illustration from the Avesta—Devil-worship an arrested Deism—Sheik Adi—Why demons were painted ugly—Survivals of their beauty.

The phenomena of the transformation of deities into demons meet the student of Demonology at every step. We shall have to consider many examples of a kind similar to those which have been mentioned in the preceding chapter; but it is necessary to present at this stage of our inquiry a sufficient number of examples to establish the fact that in every country forces have been at work to degrade the primitive gods into types of evil, as preliminary to a consideration of the nature of those forces.

We find the history of the phenomena suggested in the German word for idol, Abgott—ex-god. Then we have 'pagan,' villager, and 'heathen,' of the heath, denoting those who stood by their old gods after others had transferred their faith to the new. These words bring us to consider the influence upon religious conceptions of the struggles which have occurred between races and nations, and consequently between their religions. It must be borne in mind that by the time any tribes had gathered to the consistency of a nation, one of the strongest forces of its coherence would be its priesthood. So soon as it became a general belief that there were in the universe good and evil Powers, there must arise a popular demand for the means of obtaining their favour; and this demand has never failed to obtain a supply of priesthods claiming to bind or influence the præternatural beings. These priesthods represent the