

Revolt Against Heaven

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SHARP commotion ran through the streets of heaven. The calmness of eternal day was broken by alarms and shouts, the gathering of angels in excited, hurried knots, the rushing to and fro of mighty-winged seraphs.

Two names were spoken in hushed and terrified voices, the name of the Most High and the name of His fairest and strongest angel, Lucifer. Glorious beyond all the other angels of heaven, endowed with brilliant intellect and compelling will, Lucifer had deserved his name and wore it proudly, Bearer-of-the-Light.

But where heaven yesterday had known peace, today excitement drew angels together in troubled groups and filled the very air with dread and wonder. A new problem, filled with fearsome possibilities, agitated their intellects and disturbed their wills.

For from the White Throne had gone forth word of a new Leader. He was, rumour said, to be chosen from the ranks of a race as yet uncreated. Mankind was to be the race's name. The Most High had announced that the Second Person of the Divine Trinity would pass by the nine orders of heavenly knighthood and unite Himself with this inferior nature of an inferior race. Uniformed in this lower rank, He would still claim place as God of heaven and commander of the celestial armies.

What of Lucifer?

Wonder that grew into consternation, questions that rose like the swift swelling of a hurricane, swept the far reaches of the Heavenly City. In every mind was one piercing doubt. What of Lucifer?

Would the mighty warrior of God take his commands from one who wore a uniform less splendid than his own? Would Lucifer drop his proud head in obedience to a being of inferior race? If sometimes with a glint of rising resentment he accepted the orders even of the Most High, what would he do when the orders fell from the lips of a man lower in human nature than the weakest and least noble angel among Lucifer's subordinates?

Though there was doubt in the minds of all, the passing of the day brought to Lucifer's friends a frightening certainty. God Himself might command Lucifer and be obeyed; but were the command sounded by a lesser voice than that of Omnipotence, Lucifer, his followers felt, would lift his head in proud refusal. He was not likely to recognise a substitute commander for the Almighty.

Suppose, ran the terrifying speculation, he refused to acknowledge this new commander in chief. Would God bow before his haughty resentment? Would God yield to His glorious favourite? And if God did not yield, that might mean war in heaven. Dared Lucifer make war upon the Almighty?

Was he — and here his followers felt a strange exultant thrill — strong enough to wrest to himself the sovereignty even of the Heavenly city?

“He would not dare rebel,” was the voiceless whisper that swept through heaven.

“He will keep his plume unbowed to any save the All-Highest, even if this means war,” his closest followers answered; and there was pride in their reply.

The Summons.

Across the measureless distances of heaven the ringing blasts of trumpets were flung from battlement to battlement. Excited knots instantly slipped into disciplined companies. The disorderly rushing to and fro became the steady flow of marshalled spirits toward the Throne from which radiated the white, vibrant light that filled heaven. Silence quickly chained the doubts and questions that still thrashed about in angelic minds, for the wordless voice of Omnipotence sounded above the trumpets and the wind-like rush of forward-moving legions.

Before the Throne the long lines halted. Light leaped from spear to spear and flashed back in brilliant repercussion from starlike shields. Great, massed choirs, whose voices were like the swell of an organ built by no human hands, now stood silent and waiting.

God from His throne looked upon the angels of His creation, and loved them as an artist loves the supreme work of his hands, and then loved them with the deeper love of a father for the brilliant, glorious sons of his begetting.

A wide, hollow square of angels framed the reviewing ground before the Throne. Into this square, his glory like the glory of a thousand suns, his strength and beauty involuntary tribute to God's great craftsmanship, stepped Lucifer. His sword flashed in a salute that had in it as much pride as reverence — flashed and was quickly buried once more in its scabbard. His head, unbowed, was lifted toward the face of the All-Beautiful.

A New Captain.

Then, above them all rolled the words of divine prophecy and command. In the fullness of time a man should be born, Jesus who is the Christ. He was to be the Second Divine Person, emptying Himself and taking the form of a slave to serve and redeem a fallen race. Clad in perishable flesh and human mortality, he was still to be King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Commander in Chief of the armies of earth and heaven. Now in vision they will see their new Leader. In vision they are free to accept or reject His divinely appointed leadership.

The glorious, haughty form of Lucifer stiffened. An almost imperceptible tremor ran through the serried ranks, quickening the light that broke in glinting sparks from spear tips and swaying the shields to the involuntary tautening of angelic arms.

Suddenly darkness, heaven's first and only darkness, flung its quenching cone over all. Then, like a powerful spotlight, a circle of radiance splashed the steps of the now hidden throne, and in the exact centre of the circle stood the figure of a Man.

The Man.

A long, seamless garment robed Him from throat to instep. Above the robe, His dignified head was crowned with the strangest crown — blood-red thorns matted into the gold of His hair. He carried, not in His hand, but against His shoulder, a terrifying standard: two heavy, crossed beams that He held with difficulty. And with the slow lifting of His head His eyes swept the angel ranks, not commandingly, but in tender, pitiful beseeching.

Again the voice of the, Almighty rolled and shook in power and majesty.

“Your Commander and your King!”

Tense, almost tangible, silence as the humble, beseeching eyes of the Man swept their lines hungrily. Then the vision was gone. Like the lash of a whip withdrawn, the circle of light was snapped away. Again the city was flooded with the light from the great White Throne. And in its searching brilliance the angels stood revealed.

Half of them knelt or stood with lifted spears offering royal salute. But myriads stood hesitant, shocked by the command to bend their proud strength to one of inferior nature. Still others had drawn back in instinctive repugnance and proud resentment. This weak, tortured man with thorns for a crown and crossed sticks for a standard, could he be the Commander in Chief of their strength and beauty and magnificence? It could not, must not be! What would Lucifer think or do or bid them do?

“Non Serviam.”

To him swung every eye. Would he kneel, raise his sword in salute to royalty, turn cold back on inferiority, or...

Like lightning on a summer’s evening, Lucifer whirled. His sword leaped from its scabbard and the flame of its blade cut like a sulphurous flash through heaven.

Instantly the resentful and the wavering angels knew. That flashing sword was their rallying signal. His angry, black look swept the ranks, searching for and singling out his followers. Then back he whirled toward the Throne, knowing that with him was half of heaven’s army, and his voice, was dashed with all his power into the very face of God.

“I will not serve!” he shouted.

And from the hosts of his followers came the answering cry, “Nor will we serve!”

War Breaks Out.

Instantly heaven seemed chaos. From their knees or from their exalted gestures of salute leaped the obedient angels. The banner of Michael, chosen, in one of God’s instants, captain of His faithful warriors, cracked in the wind of conflict. Pure white, it bore for the first time the purple symbol of the Cross.

Over the swiftly marshalled hosts of Lucifer leaped like a tongue of devouring flame the red banner of defiance. Trumpet answered trumpet in angry screams as the two armies rushed with the force of a tempest through a narrow canyon into fierce embrace. The shock of that meeting seemed to rock the foundations of heaven.

It was war the more terrible because the issue was not death — death could not touch immortal spirits — but ruin of power and beauty and spiritual dignity.

Lines swung back and charged again like breakers against a rocky cliff. Angels, a moment before brothers, rushed at each other with levelled spears. But in the hands of Lucifer and his army these spears melted as candles melt in the hottest flame; while the spears of Michael’s followers dug deep wounds that all eternity would never heal.

Back were flung the lines of the rebellious angels. A moment they hesitated on the brink of God’s city. One final charge of loyal lances against dishonoured shields, and Michael saw his opponents

fall like lightning from the clouds, and the gates of hell, shell-hole of this battle of immortals, swung open and swung shut to cut off the last repetition of that cry, despairing now and crazed in agony, but shrill and bitter in its defiance. "I will not serve." And the echoes of the universe flung it back and then far beyond the reaches of obedient space.

The armies of God and evil had met in their first deadly conflict. Creatures for the first time had dared defy their Creator. They had dreamed of driving Him out of His own creation!

Free Choice.

Sin with quick fingers fashioned the blood-red banner of rebellion. The first sad army of the proud and rebellious had looked upon the leadership of Christ and had cried defiantly, "Him we will not serve." And the battle cry and the rebellion had initiated a war that never yet has ended.

From the very start God placed no compulsion upon His creatures. He wanted only free service. He preferred to be served by willing spirits. Beautifully, He despised the service of slaves.

So for the angels there was a perfectly free choice. They could accept Him or reject Him, lift their swords in allegiance to His divinely appointed Leader or turn their swords against His Sacred Heart. They could league themselves with their Creator or join forces with the rebellious Lucifer. They could stand under the standard marked with the purple cross or under the red flag of rebellion.

Retribution.

They made the choice. Those who chose the leadership of Christ were assured of eternal happiness. Michael and Raphael and Gabriel, the angels who later were to be men's guardians, the mighty spirits of the Apocalypse, were given an eternity of God's friendship and glory and of faithful devotion to the interests of man. The very moment that saw the rebellious angels draw their swords against Christ, saw them transformed by the ugliness and destructive power of their own malice into the devils of hell.

From that day to this the rival banners have flown: the pure white banner bearing the purple cross, and the flaming red flag of revolt. Around each has gathered an eager army. One accepts gladly as captain and leader the crucified Christ. The other picks up and echoes in each new age the battle cry of the fallen angels, "We will not serve!" Christ or Lucifer, there are no other leaders, only subordinates. God's cause or the cause of evil; the choice is inevitable.

The Captain Comes.

He came, that Commander of the angelic vision, and Lucifer watched Him with hatred and tricky plotting. Thrice they met face to face in the insult of Christ's triple temptation. Conquered from that moment, Lucifer worked, as Lucifer has cleverly learned to work, through and behind his willing lieutenants.

Christ's first call to His followers was the cry of the Babe of Bethlehem swept through the world on a wintry wind. Then from His hidden life He walked out into the rough highway, searching for followers. He entered fearlessly the bloody battlefield of Calvary, and for a moment Lucifer must have exulted in the thought that perhaps at last his red banner was floating in victory.

During those three years of searching and struggling, success and failure fought for apparent mastery. Men and women flocked to Christ's side, loving His humility and humanity. But far more turned from Him, contemptuous of His work-hardened hands and the ragged followers He drew

after Him. His stalwart courage and tender heart, the divine power that manifested itself in His miracles and the human and divine pity that dropped those miracles upon mankind's bent shoulders won Him deep and passionate love. But it won Him enmities in high places, and suspicion where suspicion quickly bred hate and hate bred death.

For every twelve who hailed Him as King on Palm Sunday, a hundred gathered in dark corners of temple or pretorium to league themselves in ugly plots against His life. They hated the thought of a king born in a manger. They could yield no throne to Him except the cross on which they meant to exalt Him. They resented His talk of the pure of heart and His denunciation of divorce. They were furious that He wasted time on fishermen and peasants, while they waited vainly in palaces for a sight of His miracles or the recital of one of His parables. They wanted a king who would smash their enemies, not one who preached love even for those who had wronged them.

Again the Armies.

His very first appearance on earth was the signal for the gathering of those two rival armies as the first vision of Him in heaven had split the heavenly hosts into relentless civil war. Lucifer was not ready now to let the Captain gain an easy victory. He had his army ready to fight every step of the way. And that army rose quickly at his command.

If Magi came from afar seeking Christ, the filthy Herod sent his soldiers seeking Him too. One group came bearing gifts to a Child; the others came with bared swords for the throats of infants. And Lucifer exulted when the first brush with the armies of evil sent Christ into apparent retreat to Egypt.

The World is Split.

High was the purpose that flamed in the heart of Christ the Saviour. He had from the moment of the Incarnation one multiple purpose: to drive sin and its sad consequences from the world, to bring happiness to human hearts, to restore to our race the lost sonship of God and the heavenly inheritance which Adam lost when for a moment he rejoined the rebellious forces of Lucifer. His divine mission was to bring to the world the blessed peace of His Beatitudes.

Yet He foresaw mankind split into hot enmities because of Him. The army of Lucifer lay solidly entrenched throughout a world that had gone over in rank treason to idolatry and sin. Glorious armies of white-clad virgins would follow Him singing; but armies of martyrs would grow red under the swords of His enemies or in the midst of torturing flames.

He visioned the cross carried before peaceful armies led by Paul and Patrick and Augustine and Boniface as they marched to conquer new lands. But he saw hairy hands clasping the handles of Asiatic lances and Mohammedan swords to cut through Christian civilisations a path for oriental barbarism or the rising Crescent.

He watched golden pens racing across vellum to write His praise, but the harsh scratch of other pens reached His ears, pens dipped in acid and venom as they attacked His personality, His doctrines, His Church, His truth, and corroded with their poison the minds of His followers.

No Coercion.

He was, He well knew, the storm centre of the world, a sign to be contradicted, a person set for the rise and fall of many in Israel and in the whole world. Lucifer had refused Him homage; Lucifer

would struggle with all his subtle, if sin-twisted, intellect to turn mankind from His service and His praise.

At any moment Christ could have wrested from the world a slave service. But this He would not do. He wanted free men and women to follow Him. He had not wanted the angels to be slaves; He would not allow mankind to be slaves, either. They must answer His quiet "Follow Me" as John did or Magdalen. He would bind no one to His service except with the chains of love and devoted loyalty.

Force would have been easy. His was the power that struck the raging waves into cowering tranquillity. He spoke quiet words to the thundering tempest, and it shrank back to its mountains, cowed and frightened. Once, in the garden, when His enemies leaped forward at the signal kiss to bind Him, He spoke gently and they fell back upon the ground helpless to touch Him. Even then, however, He released them and stood patiently for the beginning of the bloody work on which they were obstinately bent.

He could have forced men to follow Him, broken their wills to His commands, and dragged them after Him by the same divine force that commanded demons, sent swine thundering into the sea, shook free the grip of disease, changed the very nature of water by bidding it be wine, and forced a few loaves and fishes to feed a multitude.

Instead, almost humbly, He asked men to follow Him. "Come," He said gently again and again as He walked along the road or skirted a lake. A handful of fishermen, out of all the fishing fleets of Galilee, heard the invitation and accepted. One tax-gatherer from Rome's multitudes forsook his money table for a place in the apostolate. And of those who did accept, one sold out to His enemies as a spy, preferring thirty pieces of silver to the riches of a spiritual kingdom.

Lucifer, self-confessed lord of the world, had won the vast majority to his side. With gold he held them, or with the laughter of dancing girls, or the promise of kingdoms bounded only by the limits of civilisation, or with cleverness calling itself wisdom and drugging the mind, or the sweet insistence of wine. Men gladly fought the wars of evil, lured on, as warriors all too often are lured, by Lucifer's promise of the spoils that belong to the conquerors of earth.

The Crest of the Conflict.

Never did the eyes of Christ so clearly see the rival armies as He did from the lookout of the Cross. Embattled Rome was there, guarding with its world-conquering legionaries this spiritual world conqueror from possible rescue by His tattered followers. Embattled Israel stood at alert attention, the soldiers of the high priests with swords and clubs ready to smite down any disciple who dared to slink back in the futile hope of saving his Master.

In the blackness that covered Calvary, Lucifer brooded over his suspiciously easy victory and wondered why he had been allowed to win. He had gloated in quiet confidence as he saw his work taken completely from his hands by able lieutenants. His war against Christ was safely carried on without his personal care as long as he trusted one regiment to Herod, wedded to incestuous lust, and another to Pilate, cynical of anything except a place in the good graces of Caesar, and a third to the high priests, who had grown to prefer power to the truth, the wealth and revenue of the temples to religion, the certain luxuries and eminences of this life to the doubtful blessings of eternity. Never, and he knew it, had Lucifer seen his army more adequately commanded. Yet, even so, he was puzzled by the swiftness and apparent completeness of his victory.

The twin powers of the world, political Rome and religious Israel, had looked upon the leadership of Christ and rejected it. Like Lucifer, they would have none of a king born in a stable, nurtured in a cottage, trained in a carpenter shop, sun-browned by foot-journeys through the hill country, companioned by illiterate fishermen, acclaimed by women and children, leading the life of a poor, itinerant preacher, pitiful toward the poor whom they despised, and pitiless toward their transparent hypocrisy.

Rejection.

So, when Christ turned toward them and said, "Come, follow Me," Lucifer knew that their answer would be the same as his own.

"We will not serve," they shouted. But Lucifer must have seen the irony of their further cry, "We have no king but Caesar," when he knew how vigorously and tirelessly they were fighting for him.

Never was a leader rejected with such relentless finality. They levelled against Him Roman short swords and heart-piercing lances. They beat Him down with Jewish clubs and scourges. No consecrating oil of royalty anointed His head or filled His palms. They had only one anointing for Him, the purple blood spilled from His own body. Before Him they bowed indeed, but in the taunting homage of mockery and the jeers of unbelief as they substituted for grateful praise their laughter and obscene ridicule.

A vast armed host, led by a Roman Governor, and blessed by outstretched priestly hands, sprang up to repel Him just as the legions of Lucifer had rallied against Him in that first heavenly vision. He asked for followers, and they willingly followed Him along the Via Crucis. He pleaded for companionship, and they crowded about Him only when He was safely fastened to a cross. His divine eloquence was directed against the horrible effects of sin, and sin achieved its masterpiece, the murder of a God-man.

His Defeated Army.

Lucifer stood by in panting approval as Christ's mercy actually inflamed hatred and His gentleness aroused force. Dying, He saw for His bodyguard the coldly indifferent executioners and priests who, like fox hunters, had tracked their quarry to the death. Did He see the sinister smile of Lucifer, proud of this day's work as his revenge for the defeat of heaven?

Yet, from the Cross Christ saw what Lucifer could not possibly see nor guess, the rising of another army that would pick up this blood-stained cross and carry it to triumphant victory. Strangely impotent in appearance, but wonderfully potent in the powers of their soul, the nucleus of that army was near Him as He died: Mary the Mother; John, His young captain; the Holy Women, who loved Him unselfishly, and a centurion whose spear through His side opened the way to his own faith and the world's way to the Sacred Heart.

Lucifer would have, had he so much as noticed them, despised that pitiful handful. Lucifer has a way of missing the strength of God's saints.

But the rest of Christ's army was in apparent rout. His bodyguard of apostles had been scattered in the first sharp brush of conflict. The disciples, his skeleton regiment, were flung back into complete disorder. Hopelessly outnumbered, they crouched in their hiding places as the conquering armies of Lucifer's lieutenants swept to and fro unchallenged.

In heaven the conflict between His faithful angels and the insurgent forces of Lucifer had been sharp but quickly decisive. Michael's army, in an irresistible charge, had swept Lucifer's proud regiments over the brink to utter defeat. From Calvary He saw His army beaten not so much by their vigorous foes as by the terrors and cowardice of their own hearts.

Never had an army been so hopelessly outnumbered and outfought. Never had a victory so completely shattered the vanquished while it carried the defeated commander, not to a noble death under fire, but to a slave's death by torture.

Victory Beyond Defeat.

Yet Christ, as He looked from the Cross upon the world's most decisive battlefield, must have smiled through His pain and shame. He must have smiled at the puzzled gloating of Lucifer, the open exultation of the priests, and the cold assurance of the legionaries. For beyond the defeat He saw the slow re-forming of His scattered bodyguard, the re-gathering of His skeleton regiment, augmented by the first converts of Pentecost, and the counter-attack that was to sweep across the world.

He foresaw that tiny army starting off with high hearts and His own noble purposes. He saw it attack Israel in its temple and Rome in its impregnable citadels. He saw that army turning aside sword stroke with uplifted crucifix, sapping in the dark tunnels of the catacombs under the very centre of Roman dominion, matching the naked bodies of martyrs against the tridents of steel-clad gladiators, pitting virgins in victorious conflict against the lions of the arena and the beasts in men's hearts, beating the imperial legions with an army of slaves released from the slave marts by the freedom of Christ.

He saw, as Lucifer could not possibly see, how one morning Rome would wake to find its emperor kneeling before the Pope, His personal representative on earth, and asking for baptism. He saw the Roman eagles disappearing from the standards of the Empire to give place to the Labarum of the Cross. Israel He saw as it hurled its power against the Rock of Calvary and then against the Rock of Peter, breaking into a thousand scattered, exiled groups without temple or priesthood or fatherland.

Lucifer, puzzled as he was by his too easy conquest, could not see this, but he was soon to feel that counter-attack upon his allies.

The Victorious March.

The fishermen Christ had chosen soon became the inspired preachers and writers of His Gospel. John of the rower's bench became the lofty eagle of God, and Peter from the helm of a fishing craft became Peter guiding the destinies of His Church. The scattered handful of His fighting men and women, broken by the victorious plotters of Good Friday, reformed into the irresistible Church marching through history, attacked and persecuted, outnumbered and outshouted always, yet moving from victory to victory.

The peaceful regiments of His priests and religious, His devoted fathers and mothers, His high-minded young men and pure young women took up His victorious war. They made relentless battle upon sin; they hated from their hearts the forces of evil; they struggled with undimmed hopes for the conquest of the world. And when they conquered, they imposed upon the vanquished, not the chains of the oppressor, but the reign of Christ's beatitudes and the kingdom of His peace.

All this is history. History, too, is the brilliant way in which after each defeat Lucifer musters new armies and initiates a new campaign. Seldom, though, does he announce his war in terms of loyalty to himself. Instead, he makes the war centre, as spiritual war will always centre, around the figure of Christ. He did not say, as he rallied to his side Nero and the persecuting emperors, Julian the Apostate and the cynical philosophers of his court, all the powers of pagan lust and pagan cynicism, "Here is my banner; follow it." Instead, he cried, "There is His Cross; attack it."

So, since Calvary, there has been a warfare against Christ to which there is neither truce nor armistice. Always Lucifer, seen or unseen, acknowledged or lurking behind some chosen subaltern, has been the leader of the attack on Christ, which is really an attack upon all that is best in humanity.

New Armies.

Often the war was bloody. More often it was fought with subtler weapons than swords or lances. Arianism made war on the divinity of Christ and carried forward that war on the rugged war ponies of Teutonic barbarians. But a thousand other heresies, all directed against the person of Christ, used brilliant books and scholarly-sounding lectures, political intrigue and polished rhetoric.

Mohammed might rouse wild Arab tribesmen to a holy war against the Cross and Christ; his far more potent weapon was the lust of the harem and the promise of an earthly paradise followed by an eternity of unending sense of gratification.

There have been armies like that of Genghis Khan, marching forward under oath to stable their horses on the altar steps of St. Peter's. Lucifer surely approved that oath. But there have been the far more deadly armies of a pagan renaissance, attacking the love of Christ by offering instead the love of decadent Greek and Roman gods and goddesses, proposing the rotten novels of Petronius Arbiter for the Gospel according to St. John, and the brilliant smut of the Decameron for the parables of Christ. The perverted brilliance of Lucifer surely approved all that with much more enthusiasm.

The War Goes On.

Today, however much humanitarianism may soften the hearts of men and pacifism outlaw armies and navies and beat swords and guns into pen points, the war between good and evil, between Christ and Lucifer, between those who accept the Saviour's leadership and those who reject it, goes on unendingly. Around the person of Christ still gather His faithful armies. Against Him are directed, not crude spears or ten-inch guns, but the crafty dislike and resentment and far subtler warfare of clever minds and rotten morals, by men who hate His law and refuse to permit His intrusion into their lives or loves.

They may scarcely know His name or recognise His face. They may violently deny or contemptuously laugh at the idea that there is or ever was a Lucifer. They are none the less making war upon Christ and carrying on the warfare begun in heaven. They are fighting the things which He came to bring to the world: purity and charity and faith and the love of realities beyond this world. They are fighting for the things by which Lucifer conquers men for himself: pride and sin and lust and power and dominance and gold and pleasure and the things of the immediate Now rather than the things of the ultimate Then.

With or Against.

Christ stated the fact of this unending war in one clear phrase: "He that is not with Me is against Me." There is no middle ground. We can no more be on the side of Christ today and at the same time on the side of His enemies than we could, in the year 33, have been a disciple of Christ and approved the treachery of the priests and the death sentence passed by Pilate.

Pacifists in this war between good and evil are monstrosities. Either we accept the standard of His Cross or we are really under the red banner of Lucifer. We promote His kingdom upon earth or we make war upon it. With Him or against Him. There is no third choice.

The Fight is Fiercest.

Never was the fight as fierce or as bitter as it is today. War against God has reached incredible heights of intensity and hatred. Organised atheism captures Russia in 1917, walks in doctor's hood into college classrooms, and shoots the poisoned bullets of its propaganda from behind the shelter of newspapers, pamphlets, books and magazines, [television and film].

Defiant of all laws of civilised warfare, it carries its war to women and children and organises them into battalions of death. Lucifer admitted God even when he fought Him. The foes of Christ had first to lay their hands upon Him before they could put Him to death. Atheism, by a supreme contradiction, makes war upon a God whose existence it denies. It says there is no God and then, with personal venom and fury, attacks Him.

Surely Lucifer must gloat over this magnificent reinforcement of his army. War was never fought more unscrupulously.

The War of Contempt.

Where God is not flatly denied, war is made upon Him by a much more subtle method. His presence in the world is ignored. His rights over His own creation are emphatically questioned. That He has anything to say about His own creatures is regarded as a relic of obsolete superstitions. Whether he made the world or not is of little importance; it is important that He have no right to rule it. He may have redeemed the world, but the world has no desire for that redemption.

Cashiering Christ.

Lucifer, who once cast his glance covetously on the control of heaven, must have a sneaking admiration for those who have tried to grasp the control of earth by the simple expedient of asking God to mind His own affairs and let mankind alone.

One reads much of modern literature wondering if the authors ever heard of God or Christ. Clearly they know there is a fight between the issues of Christ and the issues of evil, but just as clearly they are not interested in Christ's side. He is thrust aside as carelessly as if He were a myth like William Tell or an outmoded philosopher like Philo the Greek. Man is encouraged to trace his relationship with the orangutan; his relationship with His Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, is regarded almost as a blot on the escutcheon.

Lucifer tried by the magnificently conceived and executed conspiracy of Calvary to drive Christ from the world. He failed. Modern society has taken up his task most willingly.

Frankly Ignored.

Christ spoke very clear words on a great many subjects. He expected, apparently, those words to be heard, accepted, and obeyed by His followers. Otherwise they could hardly call themselves His followers. Are they heard?

With almost brutal frankness He called marriage following divorce adultery. Almost every so-called Christian country has written divorce into its laws. Most of them have speeded up their divorce courts to the point of vying in efficiency with a modern automobile factory.

Millstones.

Christ talked beautifully of personal purity and laid down strict laws for its preservation. A thousand writers of the day regard His views as childish and amusingly out of date. The hero of your modern novel changes his mistress when he changes his tie. The heroine of your best seller kicks purity under her party slippers or mules and tears it into ribbons as something less important than the favour of a New Year's party.

Christ recommended millstones for the necks of those who scandalised little children. Today little children, when they are graciously permitted entrance into this modern world, are in a million cases deprived of any knowledge of God their Father or of their eternal destiny, and are subjected to the most insidious and disheartening attacks upon their innocence. It is not hard to imagine the approval which Lucifer gives to all this.

Christ demanded faith. Faith is widely regarded as the refuge of cowardly minds and a survival of stale superstition. He praised the poor in spirit; our monuments rise and our incense is burned to honour those who have built fortunes by the doubtful methods and brash buccaneering of modern business. Lucifer would hardly disapprove of that.

Christ is not admitted to the public schools or State universities of Christian lands. His image may not appear on the walls of our State institutions. He is permitted no place at the council tables of the nations, and His presence in diplomatic circles would be often, to put it mildly, embarrassing for all concerned.

Ignored Or Disliked.

Lust, that tore Christ's back with scourges, is no longer regarded as very terrible. In fact, it is treated as distinctly amusing and undoubtedly delightful. (The world cries: Let lust make war upon Him if it will. Perhaps Herod was right when he treated the pure Christ as a fool.) Pride, that crowned His head with thorns, is a modern sign of bravery and courage. (The world say: The soldiers may not have been far wrong when they laughed at the meek Christ and struck His bowed and thorn-crowned head with reeds.)

Doubt, that led the callous Pilate to let an innocent man go out to die, is now regarded as a sign of broadmindedness and an enlightened attitude toward life. (The world: Perhaps Pilate knew what he was doing when he sent this man who taught an embarrassing and annoying sort of truth to crucifixion.)

Honesty is good enough for underlings. One does not rob a news-stand, but one may without qualms of conscience pillage the stock market. (The world: Clearly the real crime of Judas was not that he sold Christ, but that he failed to demand a decent price for his sale.)

State worship, which once placed a statue of the emperor in Roman temples, has become the religion of millions, and the State rises supreme over all things, Church, conscience, the right of

mothers and fathers to their own children, property, the natural right of a sick man or an imbecile to life. (The world: Can it be that we have no king but Caesar?)

If the French Revolutionists took a courtesan and placed her upon the altar of Notre Dame, we have seen notorious courtesans placed in the electric lights of Broadway, honoured by the admiration and adulation of millions of men and women, and held up on stage and screen for the delighted admiration of the young. (The world: It may be possible that God made a mistake in selecting His Mother.)

Worship of Self.

Most of all, Christ has seen Himself supplanted in modern life, not by the service of even so brilliant a leader as Lucifer. When the angels turned from God to Lucifer, they were picking a bad second choice, yet a second choice of brilliance and beauty and power. Today Lucifer has cleverly substituted for himself and God the contemptible service of self, the debasing worship of self.

“Why should you serve the Creator?” Lucifer insinuates into receptive ears. “Serve your own interests, and only your own interests. What right has God to give you commandments? Make your own laws. What right has Christ to lay down hard laws for you? Decide for yourself which of His commands you will accept and which you will reject. The Church pretends to speak with an infallible voice. Don’t allow your life to be governed by so thoroughly mediaeval an institution.”

And his suggestions, accepted and repeated by thousands of brilliant subordinates, ring through modern life and modern literature. Lucifer is content gracefully to appear to step aside, provided that the service of self means the thrusting of God into second place.

For His Defence.

This is the black picture of the warfare, the presentation of just one side of the conflict. Fortunately there is another side, too, the ever-growing army sworn to stand at the side of Christ and fight His war to the death. There are the modern successors, millions of them, of the good angels and of those faithful few who loved and clung to Him when the whole world was conspiring for His death.

For, if every sin is a blow struck at Christ, every good action is a blow struck in His defence. If impurity, by rotting bodies, brutalising souls, destroying homes, and spoiling the future of little children, drags down the work He came to do, every pure man or woman is an intimate associate of the pure Christ and places a pure body between the wolves of the world and the future generation.

Dishonesty takes sides with the lying witnesses who swore away the life of Christ; honesty cries out in His defence. Doubt wags its head and walks no more with Him; faith says staunchly, “To whom else shall we go? For You have the words of eternal life.” If the grafting politician and the tricky statesman ape the betrayal of Judas, the honourable man of affairs stands with John near the Cross, admitting his part with Christ crucified.

High Stakes.

Men and women are prone to forget the tremendous issues at stake in this warfare. Christ is the concrete expression of what is finest and best in humanity. We cannot make war upon Him without attacking human purity, unselfishness, love of neighbour, high honour, service of country, gratitude for favours, the desire to benefit mankind, tenderness of heart, strength of purpose, respect for women, gentleness to the unfortunate, comradeship among men, reverence for little children,

loyalty to friends, forgiveness of enemies, all that He Himself expressed in the idea of the fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of men.

Nor can we make war on any of these things without making war on Him.

The man who betrays a woman betrays Christ's reverent love of womankind. A man who tricks his neighbour, tricks the Christ who bade us love our neighbour. No man closes his heart to the cries of the unfortunate or to the needs of little children without closing his heart to the Christ who comforted the unfortunate and loved little children. If a man refuses forgiveness to his enemies, he dare not ask forgiveness of the Christ from whom he himself so desperately needs forgiveness.

"As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me." Christ's statement is unequivocal and inclusive. For the good it should be the highest joy; for the evil, a frightening consideration.

So, if one adopts the side of Christ, one stands for all that is best in human conduct.

If one takes any low standard, at that moment he has turned against Christ and taken his place with the lustful Herod, the tricky Judas, the sceptical Pilate, the ambitious priests; and Lucifer the proud holds out welcoming arms to another recruit.

Christ's army is not battling merely to scale the heights of heaven. It is fighting with all its magnificent strength to bring decency to earth, and honour and cleanness of body and soul. It is warring for the protection of children and women and homes, of the weak and defenceless, of the precious things on which the happiness of the world is grounded and without which the earth becomes a pigsty and a terrifying cage of lawless wild animals.

Again the Vision.

So, before the world today appears, as it appeared in that first vision of heaven, the calm, strong, beautiful, appealing figure of Jesus Christ. He looks straight into the heart of every man and woman in the world. Each heart hears Him say, "Come, follow Me."

No invitation could be clearer than this royal invitation to enlist as the saints have done, under the standard that signifies happiness for the world and the conquest of that world for the Heavenly Father. Strangely enough, that invitation sounds in the hearts of millions who never knew the name of Jesus Christ and other millions who know Him only imperfectly. It is the rallying cry of all the good and fine throughout the world.

Invitation and Response.

Yet it is, we must remember, an invitation. No coercion is exercised here. No force binds or compels. No chain drags any soul to slavery. All must join Him freely. He invites men and women to accept His captancy. He offers them His comradeship as well as His leadership. But they must answer spontaneously, moved by the charm of the Leader and the glory of His cause.

And from a million loyal followers goes up the answer, in rousing shout, in quietly whispered prayer, in gallant gesture, in the quick bending of the knee: "Lead on, for we will follow You."

Dominance.

From another million go up low rumbles of protest, wild shouts of indignant refusal, sneering laughter tinged with contempt, indignant repudiation of all the invitation implies. Cowards turn

away afraid of the conflict. Laggards glance back over their shoulders at the beautiful things of the world (made in that moment especially fascinating by command of Lucifer) and sigh, "Must I give up all these to follow You?" Proud heads are flung upwards as Lucifer's was flung, and the cry, "I will not serve!" is hurled in the face of Christ.

Now, as in every age, Christ's is the dominant figure. In love or hatred men look up at Him, see Him, and lift their hands flung high in royal salute or clenched in threatening fist. Cowards may run away, but there is no place for them to run except into the ranks of His enemies. Men may seek to avoid the conflict; they find themselves in the end leagued, by their destructive apathy, with His enemies.

Now and always "He that is not with Me is against Me."

New Weapons.

Day after day the din of battle rises all about the modern man and woman. From filthy news stands the poison gas of rotten literature floats in deadly green clouds. Sharpshooters from a decadent stage snipe virtue, innocence, and the decencies. Scholarly professors fire deadly shrapnel into crowded classrooms, with deadly effect upon the souls of youth.

Dishonest business enlists the brains and brilliance of men in a war that makes might right and sees in success the supreme justification for any method of attack. Dark conspiracies hurl mobs against personal property. The hobnailed armies of Communism march steadily on against State and Church and the home and the commonest rights of humanity.

With Michael and His Hosts.

With masterly generalship Lucifer enlists on his side great forces of cleverness and wit and beauty and wealth and envy and passion and discontent and pride. He knows that even with them he can never ultimately defeat God or His chosen Leader, Jesus Christ. But he also knows that they can hurt God's best beloved sons and daughters. They can impede the work of His Church. They can spoil the peace and happiness of earth. They can drive men into the mad charge of battle, until, blinded by the smoke and deafened by the din, they regain full consciousness only as the gates of hell clang to behind them. Recruiting his army on earth, Lucifer knows he is recruiting his slaves for eternity.

But that side which was powerful enough to attract God's warrior, Michael, and the best of the angelic hosts is daily augmented by the best of earth. New missionaries, cross aloft, advance steadily to the conquest of fresh lands. Each morning, at a million altars, the priests bring down the Commander in Chief for an early council before the day's battle. Religious priests and brothers and nuns train young men and women to fight the battle of life with high courage.

Brave, splendid men fire a decisive no into the teeth of temptation. Young men face the hot rebellion within their own souls, curb it with strong, pure hands, and turn what might have been ruinous passion into the devoted service of God and humanity. The same emotional strength which, perverted, would have made them rakes and roués and despoilers of innocence makes them, enlisted in the cause of Christ, tender husbands, sympathetic fathers, sincere lovers of their fellow-men.

And though they may not wear silver armour or stride a white horse, young women and older women, like modern Joans of Arc, do mighty battle for God's cause. Devoted, unselfish mothers,

they guard courageously and vigilantly the little fortresses that are their homes. Tenderly they bind the wounds that sin has made in human souls.

Purity with them is the golden shield protecting their bodies for the sake of the man they will love and the children they will give to the Lover of little children. Charity for them is the daily walking at the side of the Divine Physician, touching with cool, healing hands the aching heads and sick hearts of humanity, bringing to sin-sodden mankind the tenderness that lies in the soul only of good women.

Stainless nuns hold the far outposts of Christ's far-flung battle line in hospitals, orphanages, refuges, schools, contemplative convents. Splendid mothers stand protectingly between their children and the soldiers of a modern Herod come to slay them. Young women walk into the world, and their shining purity and intelligent faith strike victoriously for Christ with wounds that bring life, not death, safety, not ruin, to the future.

Defence by Attack.

In this war, as in all wars, the best defence is fearless attack. The army of Christ does not merely stand its ground in safe entrenchments. It carries the fight to the enemy. It even wins from the side of Lucifer new recruits for the army of God.

Sterling example carried into business and social life by those who stand by the side of the perhaps invisible Christ captures where arguments might be fired without results. Bad literature is met with the return barrage of good literature. Deeds of charity compel an acknowledgment of the love of God and of humanity that inspired them. Faltering souls are strengthened by the example of heroic courage that they see in Christ's followers. Hesitant souls are swayed to the army that is Christ's.

Through History.

Through the ages brave men and women have responded with all the high enthusiasm of their hearts to this war that throws them into the companionship and under the captaincy of Christ. Paul rose from the dust to turn the sword of persecution with which he had been smiting the Christians into the gloriously sweeping sword of world-conquest. Lucifer knew he had lost one of his brilliant allies when he heard the changed voice of Saul crying, "Lord, what will You have me to do?"

The martyrs went out into the battlefield glad to shed their blood in so glorious a cause.

Missionaries walked fearlessly into savage lands where Lucifer was worshipped under a thousand hideous shapes and with a thousand vile rites, to fling down his obscene images from the temples and put in their place the symbol of Redemption.

Husbands and fathers, coming from their homes beautifully like the house of Nazareth, preached to the world by example and by deed the beauty of the faith that inspired their conduct.

And the glorious army of women, from those first brave souls on Calvary to the last courageous girl entering religious life or the modern Madonna accepting the children God sends her, have carried on the fight with a strength that cannot be resisted. Agnes and Cecilia and Theresa and Catherine of Genoa, Gertrude and Brigid, Margaret and Elizabeth, Jane Frances and Frances of Rome, Joan of Arc and Catherine of Siena, the nun who trained you in third grade, the mother whose devoted self-sacrifice made your youth safe and happy, are Christ's willing warriors on the only important battlefield in the world.

A Reconnoitre of the Enemy.

But before us, more truly now than ever, the army of Lucifer gathers in restless energy and skilled plans of attack. Brilliantly the light gleams from their armour, though that armour covers hearts filled with hatred of God and His law, and with open purposes that mean the destruction of the human race through an attack on faith, on charity, on innocence, on marriage, on the home.

Scarcely less beautiful and strong do they seem than were the angels who rallied to the side of Lucifer when he began his war upon God. They bear a strong resemblance to those haughty priests who held fast the rich corridors and sanctuaries of the Temple of Jerusalem and to those clever, cynical, magnificently strong Romans who looked upon the figure of a Carpenter-King and thought Him more than a little absurd. And like the priests and the governors, these moderns are leagued together in a frank conspiracy to destroy the Christ who still has the temerity to speak to a morally emancipated world of purity and faith and the humble acceptance of His law.

What right-minded man or woman cares that the handle of the sword is beautifully carved and its blade of Toledo steel if its blows are directed toward the heart of Christ and of humanity? What matters it that tongues are clever if they sneer at the Saviour? What does literary brilliance avail, the almost diabolic cleverness of many a modern book, if that brilliance is used to attack God and ridicule the honest man and the pure woman?

What ultimately does it profit a business man to build his fortune to the clouds and fill his nights with pleasure, when in the end he must give a strict balance-sheet of his life to the God whose accounting takes exact reckoning only of good and evil deeds? What will it avail the famous beauty to have her name written in the lights of Broadway if it is not also written in the Book of Life?

The Modern Challenge.

The call to modern battle rings out in the challenge of Christ's chief of staff, the Holy Father. "Catholic Action!" he cries, and the followers of Christ respond.

This is no vague and mysteriously ambiguous call. It is simply the ringing challenge to be ashamed of sloth and apathy, when the army of Lucifer moves with restless energy and resourcefulness. It is the call to a life of active service, whatever one's vocation may be, service dedicated to Christ and His cause.

And the challenge has drawn to the side of Christ great new armies of warriors. Their own lives are the clear expression of the faith that is in their souls and of the love of God that dominates that faith. They are active in their campaign for souls, whether it be by supporting the missions, working for their parish church, taking part in great Catholic movements, spreading Catholic literature, talking of their faith to others, learning to know it better so that they may better explain it to inquirers, doing charity work among God's poor, or any of the thousand aggressive things by which new fields are won for Christ.

Ultimate Decision.

When the soul faces its Judge it will not want to say in trembling admission, "I waged war against You." It will want to say, humbly but confidently, "Christ, my Leader, to the best of my ability I fought at Your side.

This is no deathbed decision. One does not become a fighter as the last grim warrior known as Death grapples the body for a final throw. It is a decision for youth, for full maturity, for vigorously

alive manhood and glowing womanhood. And it is a decision that must be made with perfect freedom.

Christ will not force your decision. You make it freely, without coercion. Now as always He wants willing service. Now as always He will accept no other. Christ wants brothers in arms, sisters in service, not slaves nor driven mercenaries.

The whole conquest of the world might have been accomplished by Christ alone. Christ was omnipotent, He was God made man; He might have crushed His enemies with a gesture, won the whole kingdom during his lifetime, marched into heaven in proud and complete triumph.

That, however, was not His purpose. He determined to share the glory with us, His creatures. He permitted us to take part in the conflict, to bear honourable scars, to win sectors of the battlefield for Him. He unfurled the banner of the Cross as a signal for volunteers. He wanted free companions. He asked for brave souls loyal to His Father and devoted to their fellow men.

My Captain.

And with a thrill of pride I realise my high privilege. I may stand at the very side of Christ Himself. I may make His cause my cause, His glorious purposes my objectives. I may claim as my commander no selfish general bent on looting the world, nor harsh dictator whose eyes are aflame with lust of power and whose hand rises in mail-clad power above a crushed world. I follow no philosopher groping for truth nor scientist piddling about till he grasps some infinitesimal fraction of the universe and weighs it in inaccurate scales.

I follow the glorious Son of God, whose eyes are filled with tender pity, whose hands are scarred with the wounds of His sacrifice for mankind, whose feet are tireless in the pursuit of the world's needy, whose back is loaded with the weight of the world's ills, whose mind fountains divine truth, whose heart glows with burning love for all the children of His Heavenly Father.

I follow the Leader who hates only evil and makes war only upon those things that will ruin mankind. I give my loyalty to the world's most illustrious man. I follow Him, perhaps through the dangers and terrors of Gethsemane and the apparent defeat of Calvary, but to a victory as certain as Easter's and as glorious as the Resurrection.

Not the most beautiful or clever or brilliant or persuasive or powerful of Lucifer's modern lieutenants can turn me aside from that Leader. No eloquent tongue can seduce me. No enthralling book can persuade my treason. For those who fight Christ hardly knowing Him I feel deep and prayerful pity. For those who fight Him with hatred in their heart I have the firm resolve to meet war with war, their relentless attack upon Christ with my tireless defence of Him.

Your Choice.

My captain is Christ. Let those follow Lucifer who do not know the Saviour or who, knowing Him, reject Him.

So the choice must be made, and made by you. This is no allegory or flight of fancy or dramatic unreality. It is stern and terrifying fact.

As truly as in that vision of heaven, you must choose either Christ or Lucifer.

Then, where do you stand? Whom do you choose?

Lucifer and his followers? Those rebellious and ungrateful angels? Cain, the first murderer? The builders of the Tower of Babel? The loathsome sinners of Sodom? The priests of occult and filthy cults? Pilate and Judas? Herod and Nero? Arius and the early heretics? Voltaire and the unhappy Christ-haters and God-baiters of literature? The do-nothing kings and their lustful courts? Henry of England, faithful neither to wives nor to Church? The brilliant modern writers who make their hatred of morality dominate their hatred of truth, and who lead young men and women deliberately astray? The murderers, convicted or unconvicted, whose hands are soiled with the blood of bodies and the invisible death of souls? Surely they do not appear attractive.

Or shall it be the army of Christ? Michael the Archangel, and the faithful band of warrior angels? The Patriarchs struggling against a world grovelling at the feet of idols and offering Lucifer the sweet incense of their sacrificed children and their raped virgins? Peter and the Apostles marching out to reconstruct the world? Sebastian and Lawrence? Felicity, Perpetua, Agatha, Lucy, Agnes, Cecilia, Anastasia and Philomena? Xavier and Aloysius? The Little Flower and young Gabriel of the Seven Sorrows? The world-conquering missionaries and the fathers happy in their children? The great abbesses of mediaeval days and the splendid mothers of holy families? The writers who loved truth better than cleverness, and true beauty more than the daintiest smut? The scholars who could see beyond the atom under their microscope to the God who sent the atom's particles spinning in a tiny solar system? Saints and poets and the vast army of the pure and strong and good?

Mary is there. So are the great and virtuous who perhaps never heard the name of Christ, but who loved their fellow-men and worshipped truth and beauty with disinterested service.

Both groups ask you to join their ranks.

There is no escaping.

It is war to the death.

Which army is yours?

Which leader claims your allegiance?
