

Dr John Thomas M.D. (1805 - 1871)

& Robert Roberts (1839 - 1888)

(who formulated Christadelphianism and had a hand in the development
of other groups)

By Branson Hopkins.

Robert Roberts, as a young man, became desirous of changing the world. He was eventually to become a presenter and protector of what he considered to be "the truth" under the directorship of Dr John Thomas. At ten years of age the opportunity for what seemed, to Roberts, a noble cause occurred. For the first time, whilst attending with his mother, a church in Aberdeen, he heard the message of the American missionary, John Thomas. Roberts slept through most of the meeting and did not consider he had been influenced by Thomas. ("*Nothing*," says Ben Carson, a brain surgeon and neurologist, "*that is seen or heard, is ever forgotten. Everything that ever went in can be recovered again from the brain.*" One suspects a form of long term hypnosis had taken place with Roberts, which was only broken at Thomas death. Thomas died whilst Roberts was writing his own life story (*My Days and My Ways*). From this point forward, until his own death twenty seven years later, he ceased his life memoirs and never returned to complete the work. Was this the point at which the spell was broken? The memoirs were completed by C.C.Walker). At ten years of age young Roberts was certainly not heading in a normal childhood direction. There was an observable morbidity already in place in his life, not subsequently changed by any spiritual experience. Born in Aberdeen on 8th of April, 1839, he mused in later life upon his birth. "*I believe the house is still standing in Link Street where the (for me as yet) unhappy event occurred.*"¹ Roberts, as he became more involved in setting up Thomas' Church, was to discover that his greatest asset lay in his writing abilities. His mother, a schoolteacher, had well prepared him. Employed first as a cordage worker and then by the local press, Roberts found his place with the pen, writing eventually, for both the secular and religious world. At an early age he took on the role (self elected) as an assistant to Dr Thomas in the creation of his religion. Its form was that of a legalistic church, practicing exclusiveness. Thomas' objective was to turn around the beliefs of existing churches to his own gospel. (Thomas once described how, when visiting Edinburgh, by using guile he sought to seduce some young person(s) into his religion, describing how he went looking for candidates for his kingdom. Dr Thomas wrote, "*it might be said, that being crafty I caught them with guile. Be it so. You must angle to catch trout, I was fishing for men for the kingdom of God, and baited my hook with its gospel things. Some swallowed the bait, but their struggles not being exhausted, they have not yet come quietly to the*

shore."² Roberts, from views expressed at the church, commented that it was thought that Thomas had some new gospel. Obviously the seed was sown! Roberts obtained, by the help of an old lady from a group of followers of Thomas, a copy of "Elpis Israel." This was Thomas' recently published book, which, at the age of twelve, Roberts read. From that time his mind was made up. Soon he was attending the group, becoming an intense follower of Thomas.

Dr Thomas had migrated to America in 1832 and was quickly caught into a religious revival, known as The Reformation. This was centred around a group known as The Disciples. Within a short time of association Dr Thomas was called upon as a speaker. To equip himself, Thomas, in haste, read a Bible Commentary by "Rollins", "*knowing little*", as he said, "*about religion, having spent little time in its study*". In future years Thomas made extensive use, without acknowledgement, of the writings of others, (plagiarism). He claimed originality.

For further information see:

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/259528032/The-Truth-Plagiarism-and-the-Christadelphian-founder>

Thomas' first address on end-of-world events was effectively delivered and it led to further calls for him to speak. He found that fascination with end-time events drew crowds to listen. Eventually understanding between Thomas and the original founders of The Disciples became tense and Thomas was rejected from the movement. After his rejection by The Disciples he became reactionary against their leaders formulating a series of opposing alternative doctrines. He drew up a limited set of beliefs indicating these to be the gospel of Jesus Christ. His claim was, that it had been lost 1800 years previously.

Having never received the "new birth" where the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth and becomes our teacher, Thomas declared, "*the gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased when the Christian body attained to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God*". In this he chose to walk his own way and formulate his own doctrines.³

Dr Thomas preached his gospel and adjured the leaders of The Disciples and general membership. *"There may be"*, he said mockingly, in reference to Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott and other Disciple leaders, *"some immaculates who, being wise in their own conceit, consider themselves as being free from these (errors), and who regard with pious horror the possibility of "heresy" being an ingredient of their religion. But it was not so with the Editor of "The Herald of The Coming Age." (Thomas' magazine) and it affords him great and pleasant satisfaction to announce to his readers that by the profitable assistance of the sacred writings, he has discovered some mistakes, which if not corrected, would prove fatal to his eternal well being. Because that most excellent man (Walter Scott) we think did not then, neither does he now, appear to know, nor did we, what the Gospel of God is concerning his Son."*⁴

From then on, only upon their understanding of his teaching and the acceptance of his terms were others allowed to join with him, which included any former associate. He was exclusive.

In the following years, along with practicing medicine, Thomas wrote magazines and pamphlets and engaged in farming. In 1848 he made a decision to return, for a short while, to England, with his "new gospel."

On a hot summers day in New York, in June, 1848, Thomas and his daughter, Eusibia, boarded the ship the De Witt Clinton, for Liverpool. It was a good trip. Twenty one days later they arrived in the Port. After a stop-over on their way to the South of England they finally arrived in London where accommodation was provided by John Thomas' brother. The home was not far from the Elstree Street Disciples Church.

In Britain, wanting to get his message out, Thomas approached the Elstree Church leaders. Already rumours, from America, had reached the ears of the leaders. In discussion Thomas parried with them for access to the pulpit. They did not then have sufficient information to come to a conclusion to say no, unaware then, that Thomas had been rejected in America. The eldership therefore decided to allow Thomas the pulpit but investigated. Communication took time, several weeks elapsed, eventually the truth emerged.

When the elders finally obtained the circumstances of Thomas' dealings with The Disciples in America, they found them to be quite contrary to the way they had been led to believe. They learned that Thomas had been rejected. They learned that Thomas had devised a new doctrine and practice for baptism. That he had engaged in adjurement of the brethren for their failure to follow his understanding. Dr Thomas' new gospel required from those who heard and accepted his message, a new form of baptism. He taught that it was fundamental to the rite of passage of a convert. He had further inflamed the situation by teaching that all of his former associates were in a wrong position and wrongly baptised. He preached: "*That ye also be immersed in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, that you may become the recipient of repentance and remission of sins, or an importation of righteousness through the Name of Jesus Christ.*"⁵ There was no repentance only appropriation after baptism. It was false. The elders wrote to Thomas who, by this time, was engaged in other speaking appointments derived from his original contact with the Elstree Church.

For Christians, the experience of baptism is very, very, different, to Thomas' practice. Prior to, or during baptism, when in a place of repentance, they are washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, and receive forgiveness. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit they are forgiven, cleansed, justified, redeemed, sanctified, covered by the righteousness of Jesus and added to the church - His Church. This is the gift of salvation. It is not an appropriation, it is The Gospel with power. It was not as Thomas taught. His way held people back from salvation. Robert Roberts, after a major debate on The Atonement, which debate he exited in great anger, wrote a booklet "The Blood of Christ". Found in the 1921 Edition, at page 21, are Roberts words:

The idea that Christ has bourn our punishment and paid our debts and that all we have to do is believe it, is demoralising. It nullifies that most important element of truth, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God, and that he only is righteous who doeth righteousness.

Was this True or False?⁶

It was False! This came from Thomas and Roberts proclaiming that everything was future. It was not true. Everything was already sealed in Christ.

On the Cross it was finished. He had won the victory. It was His temple. It was His kingdom. The receiving of the Holy Spirit was now. Salvation was now. The Kingdom of God is within you. The Kingdom of God is love, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. Thomas and Roberts were leading their followers to live under law which they contended would qualify them for a future kingdom. For Thomas and Roberts their kingdom was not now. With Thomas it was his future, "The Hope". They avoided the message of Grace. Amazing Grace. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."* Romans Ch 8:1

The Elstree brethren were clear in their letter to Thomas. It was obvious that what they had heard from America did not accord with what they had heard from Dr Thomas. By then he had moved on, nevertheless they wrote to him.

Dear Brother Thomas, No 4, vol iii, of the Herald of the Future Age, containing your 'Confession and Abjuration' was presented at a meeting of the London Church last Monday evening. The meeting was entirely of the opinion that the paper contains the very abjuration of the brethren in the United States which you most positively denied ever having made. It appears to them to be a duty to order this note be sent immediately to you, expressing their surprise and sorrow in finding such a matter in print, and to give you an opportunity to explain should you desire. In absence of any explanation, they will feel it their duty to announce that your fellowship with them was obtained by misrepresentation.⁷

The misrepresentation amounted to lying

Thomas replied to this first letter from the elders. Robert Roberts, some years later, when writing a biography of Thomas, and the new religion was up and running, reported that, the copy of this letter Thomas sent to the elders *was lost and therefore we were not able to see what he wrote*. But we can discern how the elders viewed Thomas' letter on the basis of their second letter to Thomas. In substance they were clear on what Thomas had written to them. He obviously had failed to be direct on the elders questions which left them no other conclusion than that he had deceived them. Their letter chides

him for avoiding the plain and obvious. Years later, because of the disappearance of the letter, Roberts wrote a covering piece for the Thomas biography. It was inevitably slanted to favour Thomas. Thomas was still alive at the time this was written. The biography was prepared prior to Thomas death.

*"The substance is on record," wrote Roberts. "however, the doctor never did deny the confession and abjuration. He denied, 'having denied the fellowship of Campbellites in America, which was in accordance with fact, for wherever they received him, he met with them, (Thomas actually dealt with the leaders. A) not having yet reached the conviction which afterwards led him to separate from all who did not understand, believe, and obey the hope of Israel. The confession and abjuration had reference to principles and transactions, not to persons and communities, though, doubtless enunciating principles, which in their ultimate application, affected persons and communities."*⁸

Anyone of reason would see that this was a cover up by Roberts. Thomas named and abjured persons before and after he had been rejected from amongst the Campbellites and was still doing the same to others years later. To Roberts he once wrote.... *"... We have a great many speculators in the faith on this side of the Atlantic - mere theorists who are sort of an amalgam made up of a little Storrism, a little Adventism, a little Campbellism, and a hodge -podge of traditions of which water, pork alcohol, salt, raisins, and "the everlasting nigger" are the prolific head centres.* (Thomas did not favour the abolition of slavery). He likewise attacked The Disciples understanding, though it does not seem to be that he was qualified to do so because he had not received the "new birth", the transaction at salvation, between God and man.⁹

Then, from the Elstree elders, a second letter to Thomas.

London . Dec 6th 1848

Dr J. Thomas. - Dear Sir - Yours of November 22nd 1848, was presented to the church on the 28th of the same month, and am requested to say to you as follows.

First - That in examination of your abjuration, the church did not (as you suppose) confound persons with opinions. They fully understood your words in the lines pointed to in your letter as referring to errors and mistakes, and not persons

Second - They consider you to have adjured the brethren in the United States and were also, by pointing to their position as being one which would forbid any Christian fellowship with them. For instance, many of our churches in this country unanimously hold the "existence of an immortal soul in corruptible man", nearly every church has a large number of its members of the same opinion. You say, "no man can hold this dogma and acceptably believe the gospel", you also abjure it as a "damnable heresy", ergo, most, if not all, of the churches with which we stand connected, do not believe the gospel acceptably, are unbelievers, and holding a "damnable heresy", are damnable heretics. Now, as no Christian may fellowship heretics and unbelievers, the brethren in this country, and those of similar character wherever existing, are adjured by you. Again, men are saved by the hope, being ignorant in toto of that hope, he (Dr Thomas) was not saved by it, and while he writes this, must be in his sins. You teach that as you were with respect to "the hope", our churches now are - that receive not what you call "the hope". You call the system into which you were baptised an "erroneous one", they were baptised into, and remain in the same system, therefore are yet in their sins. You claim to be a Christian, and as Christians cannot fellowship men while in their sins, you thus adjure the churches connected with us.

Signed and approved by a meeting held November 28th 1848.¹⁰

Thomas replied to the elders second letter. It showed Thomas as intractable. No apology for his obvious deceit. It included fiery darts in the form of threat, sarcasm, belittling and self-justification and his self-importance in the work of God. Thomas had been caught out in untruths. He was a liar and a deceiver. Robert Roberts endorsed Thomas in this affair.

From Newark, in Nottinghamshire, Thomas wrote the elders his second and final letter. It is that of a man caught out and not willing to admit it.

Dear Friends,

You have your views of fellowship, they may or not be mine. I discuss them not. My duty is to state and advocate what I believe to be God's truth according to the manner which it appears to me (not you) most scriptural. It is for me to state, illustrate, and prove principles, and to interpretate the word, and to leave men's conscience to make the application - it is not for me to adjudge them to ecclesiastical pains and penalties.

You say your churches do not receive what I call "the hope". Very well. Now, suppose it should turn out that what I demonstrate is indeed "the hope" of the calling (which Platonism, new or old is not) and you admit that "we are saved by "the hope" what becomes of you and your churches? But you are unacquainted with what I call "the hope"; why, then jump to conclusions and construction at present? You may regret it some day (as others have done so already) when your logic, peradventure may be directed by a more scriptural and experienced zeal.

Trusting that whatsoever you may do may be to the glory of God and the furtherance of the truth, and not out of the gratification of personal pique, and leaving you, henceforth, to work out your own conclusion as you may deem most expedient, but declining any further correspondence in the case, I subscribe myself, dear friends. Yours faithfully. John Thomas.¹¹

There was a cursory attempt to deal with what he had been accused of. No apology. It was more psychological threats. Simply an attempt to reverse the charges against him by making others seem to be in the wrong. What would this man create as he moved through the country? He had been caught out.

David King was one of those elders who interviewed Thomas and was therefore fully informed and cognisant with events surrounding the Thomas affair. David King gives this first hand view of events leading to the British ex-communication of Thomas.

"He (Dr Thomas) arrived in London in 1848, and immediately applied to the Church of the Disciples there for fellowship. That church, and the churches in Great Britain generally, knew nothing of his published abjuration (of the Disciples in America). The writer of these pages, who was at that time, a

member of the London Church, had heard from America some indefinite time (before, A) information that the Dr had denounced the Disciples as not holding the gospel and as without valid baptism, etc. This he made known to the church, and was appointed one of a deputation to see Dr Thomas.

The deputation was charged to say that if he had denounced the Disciples in America, the church in London must decline his fellowship, as it would be inconsistent to fellowship with persons here who held the faith and baptism he had then adjured. But reception by that church was important to his purpose. It would give him access to the churches generally, that he might apply himself to rending them as far as possible. Consequently, he gave vehement assurance that he had not denounced the Disciples in America, that there were a few who denounced him, but only a few, and that he recognised them everywhere. On his assurance he was received, being informed that while the church did not agree with the views attributed to him, they were willing to hear him, and that, on the understanding that he held views not of faith but merely as opinions, he might occupy Lord's Day mornings and evenings discoursing thereupon.

Thus he occupied their attention for some three weeks, and then, full of profession of friendship and brotherhood, left to visit the churches to which his having been received by the London church gave him access. During his stay he completely concealed that his views were held of the faith and essential to valid baptism. But before the expiration of the year there came to hand from America his own paper containing the abjuration published the year before he came to England. The document was put before the London church, when all were amazed. Some could not bring themselves to believe that such an impression could have emanated from the fair spoken man who had treated them in every respect as brethren, and who had never hinted that he could not count their faith and baptism as valid. They, therefore, directed a kindly letter to be addressed to him, asking how, having published his abjuration of the faith and baptism of their brethren in America, he could deny that fact and obtain fellowship in a church of precisely the faith and order he had abjured?

They received answer to the **effect** that they need not trouble about his fellowship with them, as he had received nothing at their hands but some small

portions of bread and wine which his contributions had more than paid for, and that as to his having fellowship with them, they should remember "that the Lord had fellowship with Judas." It was, thereupon, resolved to the effect that Dr Thomas, being guilty of deliberate untruth, is unworthy of further fellowship. Several of the churches to which he thus gained access were by his subtleties divided, or small parties taken off and re-baptised into what he terms the Hope of Israel, and thus Thomasism obtained a footing in England and Scotland." (An extract taken from *The History and Mystery of Thomasism*, by David King).¹²

Thomas was a liar and deceiver, yet he knew that if he presented lectures on end-times he would always get an audience. At this time some aspects of his doctrines and sundry views had not been laid out, they were not yet fully resolved but opportunity afforded him contact with the Millerites, (today's Adventists. A.), to give lectures on latter day events. This was what his Millerite audiences wanted to hear but afterwards numbers quickly faded away. At a sizeable meeting in Glasgow he was asked to put his views in print. The Coates family, of cotton and thread fame, offered to finance a book. At the time of their offer Thomas had lectured more than two hundred times and felt this could be an opportunity to recuperate and produce a written work. He went back to London and immediately set out to present his views in a book, "Elpis Israel" (The Hope of Israel). When published it created a furore. The Coates family were horrified at the substance of the book and quickly destroyed all their copies, as did many others, though sales of the book helped to fund Thomas' European tour. Thomas wrote of the financial security which sales of the book gave him and which allowed him to attempt to catch others by his continued preaching of The Hope. In Aberdeen a copy of the book came into the hands of Robert Roberts, who read it as a revelation. He was captured by its message, lies, plagiarism and error. His local group were concerned about him.

Roberts moved from Aberdeen to Huddersfield and became involved in note taking for phrenologists, Fowler and Wells. He also ventured out to give a series of twelve lectures which he eventually published as "Christendom Astray" at age 22 years. His postal contacts with Thomas, who had returned to the States, developed. There he wrote to him for guidance.

It was on the first ministry trip to Britain, that Thomas, expounding his new doctrines, ran into great opposition. He presented understandings, mainly through his book, which were quite alien to those held by others. Sometimes his views on some matters were quite wrong, as was his teaching on "Electricity" being the Holy Spirit. He was certainly not inspired. But where he aroused greatest opposition was in claiming that, Satan, or the Devil, was merely "*Sin in the flesh*". Robert Roberts, in one of his twelve lectures, extended Thomas' idea, incorporating teaching from Dr John Epps who, had been a leading practitioner of Homeopathy and Phrenology and presenter of his own controversial religious views.

As Jesus taught at a lakeside location in Israel many gathered to hear his message. It was presented to the people in an intriguing form. It was a story (parable) containing a personal message for each listener but it required thought to unravel its meaning. The story was about a farmer who went out to plant seed.

The kingdom of heaven is likened to a man which sowed good seed in his field. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares amongst the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the householder came and said, unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in this field? From whence then hath the tares come? He said unto them, an enemy hath done this. Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them but gather the wheat into my barn. Matthew 13: 37-39

It was clear that some of Jesus' followers did not understand the story so they asked for an explanation. In plain terms Jesus explained

There were no riddles. No mysteries. No room for alternatives.

He that sows the good seed is the son of man.

The field is the world.

The good seed are the children of the kingdom.

The tares are the children of the wicked one.

The enemy that sowed them is The Devil.

The harvest is the end world.

The reapers are The angels.

Matthew 13: 37-39

Jesus had said, *the enemy that sowed them is The Devil.*

This was an unacceptable to Thomas and Roberts. He and Roberts were actually willing to say Jesus was wrong and instead do their own foundation laying. It is a serious matter to lay foundations on error and speculation which are then used as fundamentals.

When Benjamin Franklin defined the flow of electricity from positive to negative, which most today believe, they are wrong. In fact it flows from negative to positive, which has enormous implications in the world of electronics.

Andress Tannerbaum, a Professor of Computer Science at Vrije, University, Amsterdam writes. When Benjamin Franklin made his conjecture regarding the direction of Charge flow from the smooth wax to the rough wool he set a precedent for electrical notation that exists to this day.

By the time direction of electron flow was discovered, the nomenclature of "positive" and "negative" had already been well established in the scientific community that no effort was made to change it.¹³

Thomas and Roberts choose to teach, that the understanding of Satan the Devil, as it had literally been believed until that day, was wrong. These two men wanted a new understanding in place. Thomas, to achieve his purposes had to have Satan's persona disappear. A disappearing trick was coming!

Beware the wiles of the Devil.

In playing God no expositional change was beyond Thomas, He could do anything. Had he not advised the Elstree leaders that this was so.

Thomas was a little less able than Roberts in providing the disappearing act. Eventually Roberts provided an illusion, a straw man, to achieve their objective.

Thomas commenced with an attempt to persuade readers the evil side of man was a sinner. He made sin a person and then wrote, "*this is the accuser, adversary and culminator of God, whose stronghold is the flesh. It is the Devil and Satan within human nature, so that when a man is tempted, he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed*". Thomas went ever further.¹⁴

Originally scriptures were written in Hebrew. From this language translations were made. Between the second and third centuries B.C. by order of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, in Egypt, to seventy scholars, a translation was made, into Greek. The translation was given the Latin name Septuagint after the seventy men. At this point in history the personal name Satan, as it appeared in Hebrew, was translated to The Devil, the closest word with a similar meaning in Greek. Derived from the Septuagint version the English translation gave both for the same persona, appearing as Satan or The Devil. The intertwining of both Hebrew and Greek language being observed at this point. (The Oxford Dictionary of Word Origins is helpful in settling this translation variant).

The interchange of personal names from one language to another is readily observed in the English, Gaelic and Irish languages. James to the English, becomes Shammus to the Irish and Hamish to the Scots. John, in English, becomes Sean to the Irish and Iain to the Scots, In Hebrew the personal name Satan, becomes Devil to the Greeks and Shiva to the Hindus. But nowhere is there given the relationship that makes the Devil and sin the same, that was Thomas's formulation. It does not conform to the Temptation of Christ.

Then was Jesus led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil and later Jesus, in the same temptation, said, *Get thee hence Satan, for it is written.....*Matthew Ch 4:1-10 Here the Devil and Satan are the same

person. Nowhere here are the Devil and sin the same, rather, Jesus is being tempted by Satan to sin. What Thomas and Roberts have to acknowledge is that some other persona, besides Jesus, is present. Now watch the wriggling.

The book of Job is the oldest book in the Bible. In its very first chapter, when the sons of God were gathered, Satan, also known as the Devil, was one of those present. He was given leave to test Job.

Thomas discovered that anyone or thing which was an adversary could also be called a satan. This was useful. In a somersault of words which was the equivalent of a sleight of hand, Thomas now transposed the personal name Satan into the word adversary (satan). Thomas asserted the word adversary was a word of general usage and not a personal name. By this subterfuge (jiggery-pokery) he was therefore able to reduce the personal name of Satan to merely an adversary, a non-supernatural but powerful adversary. Except, he had a problem. Who was this adversary who challenged Job. Clearly it is obvious that there was someone present. Thomas, and later Roberts in another attempt, had to deal with this awkward problem. To the reader it is obvious the account indicates there was someone there. Thomas proffered a solution. *Maybe it was an angel of light who took the position of Satan*, he suggested. Dr Eppes merely said, *"The trials of the Lord are shown to be mere mental states through which his mind passed."*¹⁵

"Someone." Thomas said, *"came to Jesus who was his adversary and who desired his ruin, or at least, acted the part of one on the same principle that the adversary was permitted to put the fidelity of Job to the proof"*.¹⁶

What Thomas acknowledged was that there was someone there. The question is, who this may be? The record says it is Satan.

Thomas speculates instead, *"that Satan might have changed into an angel of light"*.¹⁷

Here is a glaring misuse of Scripture. Yes, Thomas could do anything except hide the truth. His failure to acknowledge "the definite 'ha', which is not in place before the personal name Satan made it look as though he could use adversary (satan) to achieve his ends. This ignores *Devil*, where the

"definitive" makes the same persona, The Devil. It was by these means that Thomas produced his own faulty teaching, or was more sinister? With this teaching Thomas was able to turn thousands away from what the Bible actually taught. With the Temptation of Christ, Thomas is faced with the same problem.

Again he suggests that, *"Satan might have changed into an angel of light."*

To attempt to provide more cover and justification for Thomas's use of the word adversary, Roberts eventually assembled a selection of scriptural incidents where the word adversary, in the form of satan, (little "s") was used correctly to address events that were in opposition to the wishes or will of others. An example lies in Jesus reprimanding Peter, where he says, *"Get thee behind me satan for thou savourest not the things that be of God"*. Again Jesus, with reference to Judas, the disciple who betrayed him, said, *"have I not chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil"*. Judas was not The Devil. Sometimes a naughty boy may be described as, a little devil. Or an awkward job as, a devil of a job. Or a ruckus, a devil of a noise.

Anthony Buzzard, in an article entitled *"Satan the Personal Devil"* explains the error in Roberts exposition this way

"What goes unnoticed by readers not conversant with the original language is that the personal name Satan, who is the Devil, in Hebrew has the definite article 'ha' to preface the name Satan, thus making the translation the Satan. In the Temptation account the definite article is present. There Satan is presented as the Devil. Roberts for his own obvious reasons dropped the definite article.

The average reader of the book of Job and of the temptation accounts in Matthew and Luke will find it very difficult to believe that the Satan who acted as the Tempter was an unknown human being, as Christadelphians propose. John Thomas and his followers, have regrettably distorted the Scripture by doing away with the definite article. This we dare not do. The Satan, the adversary, is the external personality who tempted Jesus and Job. A tragic mistake was made by Roberts when he wrote: "Why may not the tempter of

Jesus have been a man? His being called 'devil' proves nothing. He was not, however, called 'devil', but the devil. Roberts has effaced the word "the" from the text and by implication from the sixty or more occurrences of the Satan and the Devil throughout the New Testament."

"Who?" Roberts questioned, "was the devil who busied himself to subvert Jesus from the path of obedience? The answer is, it is impossible to say positively who he was. As in the case of Job's Satan we can only be positive as to who he was not".¹⁸ Having achieved the transition to adversary the two men thought they were free to power on and so say who it was not.

Roberts is not happy with Thomas' "angel of light" and prepares to swing thought in another direction.

For Thomas, and now Roberts, to achieve their doctrine and pull the wool over the eyes of potential followers, effectively blinding them, it was needful for the pair to downplay the importance and nature of the Devil. Roberts, in turn, created a divisionary figure, a straw man, (otherwise known as an Aunt Sally) to achieve his change.

The definition of a straw man expresses it in this way. *"The straw man fallacy is put in place when a person simply ignores a person's actual position and substitutes a distorted, exaggerated or misrepresented version of that position. This sort of 'reasoning' is fallacious because attacking a distorted version of a position simply does not constitute an attack on the position itself. One might as well expect an attack on a poor drawing of a person to hurt the person."*¹⁹

The second definition of a straw man says: *"By exaggerating, misrepresenting, or just completely fabricating someone's argument, its much easier to present your own position as being reasonable or valid. This kind of dishonesty not only undermines rational discourse, it also harms one's own position because it brings your credibility into question - if you're willing to misrepresent your opponents argument in the negative, might you also be willing to exaggerate your own in the positive."*²⁰

Roberts introduces his straw man, almost in the form of a charade. His objective is to destroy, for those who held it, a reality of the Devil. He must also put down, thus scoring by mocking, the concept the Devil as nothing more than a myth, a laughable myth. So Roberts introduces his straw man.

He commences, with, *"a notable instance of the word adversary. It is found in the narrative of Job's trials. "Satan" here plays a conspicuous part, and of course the English reader thinks (And now comes the straw man A) of the creature variously denominated the Devil, Lucifer. Old Harry, the Old Gentleman, the Prince of Darkness, Old Nick, Old Scratch, Sooty, the Gentleman in Black etc. He sees the monster with horns, hoofs and tail, bloodshot eyes, and fiery sceptre every time he encounters the word "Satan" in the narrative; and a vivid imagination will supply the clanking of chains, the hissing of fire and smoke, and the general accessories of Satanic dignity, according to popular conceptions. This is purely owing to a mistaken use of the word, borrowed from bygone days of intense darkness. If the reader will substitute "the adversary" for "Satan" which is done marginally in the Authorised Version of the Bible he will read strictly according to the original and escape popular devilism.*²¹

Neither in the Job record nor the Temptation records does Satan appear as Roberts would have us believe. It is only what we might have been led to think by Roberts straw man. It was Roberts means of ridiculing to produce a smoke screen. In fact there were those who, rather than escaping popular devilism, as Roberts belittlingly described belief in the Devil, questioned *whether Christadelphianism were not of the Devil*".

It didn't stop there. Like Thomas, Roberts had to find a solution to the problem. He put out the suggestion that what was described as the Devil or Satan in the temptation of Christ, was a human of some considerable power. Almost unbelievably he made a series of suggestions that were, in his view, possibilities. He was sure it could not have been the Devil even though the record confirms it to be.

Reiterating the teachings of Thomas, Roberts adds to what he sees as the fuller explanation. As Roberts expresses it, it forms something of a side track, *"Who"*, he questioned, *"was the devil who thus busied himself to subvert Jesus from the path of obedience? The answer is, it is impossible to say*

positively who he was. As in the case of Job's Satan, we can only be positive who he was not. Various probabilities are suggested by the circumstances of the temptation according to the phase in which they are contemplated. Some (Dr Epps and Dr Thomas. A) think the devil in the case was Christ's own inclinations, but this is untenable in view of the statement that, "When the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season. (Luke 6:13) It is untenable in view of the harmony that existed between the mind of Christ and the will of the Father. (John 8:29) It has been suggested(Roberts A) from the fact that the tempter had the power to allot the provinces of the Roman world, and that he was a leading functionary of the state, or the Roman Emperor himself. (This Roman Emperor must have had some incredible powers besides rulership! A.) Others have contended that, not the Roman Emperor, but the angel controlling his position, could say concerning all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, these are delivered unto me, and to whosoever I will, I give them. A fourth suggestion has been that the temptation took place in vision or trance, etc, etc." Simply Roberts did not have an answer!²²

(There are various outlets which publish Christendom Astray. In some recent editions this quotation is deleted. A)

Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Truth, taught the angels were real, The reapers, he said, *are the angels. The Enemy*, he explained *is...the Devil*.

In "*Nazareth Re-visited*", a book written some years after Christendom Astray, Roberts comments upon the dramatic deliverance by Jesus, of Legion, a man possessed of many demons. The diminishing of this account by Roberts reveals a damning inconsistency in his exposition. The people of that day definitely believed there was a Devil and demons. Roberts wrote, "*Bible words and Pagan theories are put together and made to fit; and superficially considered, the result is striking and impressive, and highly demonstrative of a personal devil. It is, however, a mere juggle and a deception of the most mischievous kind.*"²³

Roberts imposed his own thinking:

1. "*Bible words and Pagan theories are put together*". Really!

2. "*The result is striking and impressive, and highly demonstrative of a personal devil*". Really!

3. "*It is, however, a mere juggle and a deception of the most mischievous kind*". Really!

These are the comments of a man who would later take issue with Robert Ashcroft, a Christadelphian convert from a previous religion, accusing him of not believing the inspiration of the scriptures. An issue over which there was a division.

Robert Roberts was in denial that the scriptures did indeed teach a personal devil, which led to all his inconsistencies or cover-ups. Finally, it was said after Jesus' encounter with the Devil that *he came no more to him until the day of His death*. It was on that day, there amongst those who mocked Jesus nailed to the Cross, that Satan would be found. In the giving up of self, without sin, Jesus had finished one work to start another. Being sinless and yet dying it was not right that He should be dead. The Father, who is Just, then raised Jesus from the dead. Today Jesus is alive and receives those that call upon His Name. They are saved. Satan is the loser. We would be losers if we allow Satan and his angels stop our way to eternal life." I am the Way, the Truth and the Life", said Jesus.

After Thomas' second trip to Britain, and a disagreement with Roberts, there was little correspondence between the two for some time. Finally Thomas replied to letters Roberts had written him. In these was also the vitriol against a group of Scots people known as Dowites. They also sent Thomas back to America with a flea" in his ear. This appears in subsequent letters Thomas eventually wrote to Roberts.

"Had I replied to the former (Letter. A.), I should have had to do battle with you to bring you into the position you now occupy with regard to those blind leaders of the blind, Duncan, Dowie, Fordyce and Co. When the truth is in question, the benefit of all doubts should be given to it, not to those whose influence to it is only evil and that continually. You erred in giving them any benefit of the doubt in the premises, but I rejoice that you have seen the error,

and will no more send enquirers after the truth to inquire at such Gospel nullifiers as they,"

I have a copy to your letter to Dowie. It is straight forward and to the point. We can have no fellowship with men holding such trashy stuff as the April number of the falsely styled Messenger of the Churches' exhibits. A man who believes in the Devil of the religious world and that he has the powers of disease an death, etc, is ignorant of 'the things of the Name of Jesus Christ'. If what are styled 'the churches' are not delivered from the influence of the above firm of pretentious ignornace, our endeavours to revive apostolic faith and practice in Britain will be a miserable failure. No one should recognised as one of Christ's brethren who is not sound in the first principles of the Gospel before immersion. The Kingdom and the Name are the great central topics of the Testimony of Deity. These are the things to be elaborated, and he that is not well and deeply versed in these only shows his folly and presumption in plunging head over heels into prophetic and apocalyptic symbols and mysteries"²⁴.

1 Peter 5:8 is a warning to each one of us. "Be sober, be vigilant: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. Whom resist steadfast in the faith,.....

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound who shall prepare himself for battle?

In grace.

Branson Hopkins

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