

THE CATHOLIC STUDENT

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The Catholic student by Michael Hickey

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MICHAEL HICKEY

**THE CATHOLIC
STUDENT**

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BY

REV. MICHAEL HICKEY, D.D., D.PH.

*Professor, Holy Cross College, Clonliffe
Dean of Residence, University College, Dublin*

“Malo membrum esse Ecclesiae
quam caput totius Imperii”

Theodosius Imperator

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PREFACE

THE following lectures on the leading truths of the Catholic religion have been compiled from notes derived from Holy Scripture, and from extracts taken from the works of the Fathers and other eminent writers on sacred subjects. I have endeavoured in every case to show by quotation marks any passages taken from these works, and where possible to give the names of the writers to whom I am indebted. I trust I have not failed to acknowledge the source in any notable instance.

The lectures will, I hope, prove helpful to our Catholic youth, and especially to the Catholic students of University College to whom I dedicate this little work with feelings of affectionate esteem.

MICHAEL HICKEY.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE,
DUBLIN,
Feast of St. Patrick, 1920.

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The Catholic Student

LECTURE I

SERPENS DECEPIT ME

"The serpent deceived me."—GEN. iii. 13.

I

THE great enemy of our salvation is the demon of deceit. Lucifer fell from heaven, deceived by his own vanity, and since his fall he has been ever working to deceive others. *Serpens decepit me*—such was the cry of our first mother Eve, when she sinned in the garden, and such will be the cry of her lost children in hell for all eternity. All sinners are indeed the victims of the demon of deceit, but of some it may truly be said that they are obsessed by this demon; like the Pharisees of old, they turn God's choicest blessings into so many idols of their own vanity. Why did Our Divine Master single out the Pharisees for such severe public censure from among all other sinners? "Woe to you, blind Pharisees!" The reason is not far to seek. In all other vices there may be, and is, an element of good underneath; and when the storm of passion is over, that element of good may

be nurtured, and the sinner become a true penitent ; but false goodness, which proceeds from vanity, by its very nature bids defiance to all the workings of grace less than the miraculous. His spiritual vanity was the impenetrable shield with which the Pharisee resisted all the salutary darts of the God of Love, seeking to save him. Jesus Christ came with a very special message to him above all other sinners, to wrench from him that shield by the most unsparing public censure.

“ The deaf may hear the Saviour’s voice,
The fettered tongue its chain may break ;
But the deaf heart, the dumb by choice,
The laggard soul that will not wake,
The guilt that scorns to be forgiven—
These baffle even the spells of Heaven.”

Now, it is not likely that the condemnation of the Pharisee would have obtained such a prominent place in the Gospel, if Christ did not mean to give a lesson by it to all future generations : for though the character of the Pharisee may change in externals down through the ages, its essence is ever the same—the Pharisee in every age is one whose whole life rests on a basis of self-deception, one who is completely the victim of the demon of deceit. Just as the Pharisee in the days of Our Lord allowed himself to be deceived through a false spirituality, so may the Pharisee of another age, and in other conditions, be deceived none the less through a false intellectualism, a false patriotism, or through any gift of God ; once blinded by the Prince of darkness, he makes of such

a gift the lever of his own vanity. Almighty God, through Moses, set up the brazen serpent in the desert that the Israelites might reverently look on it and be healed: they ended by adoring it as a god, and thus perverted God's blessing into a curse. There are diversities of gifts vainly used, but one and the same evil spirit—the demon of deceit.

St. Paul knew quite well what awful sufferings awaited the *Pusillus Grex* of Christ from the powers of earth, and yet he warned the Ephesians not to fear such powers at all, but rather the demon of deceit, as the real enemy of their salvation. "Put you on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil, for our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against Principalities and Powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places,"¹ i.e., fighting against us from a high vantage ground, when we consider the superiority of their nature as spiritual beings. As in the days of St. Paul, so has it been down through the centuries: "the Church has ever had to be militant, especially in the field of thought, to keep from being deceived men terribly prone to be deceived, and incapable, without her light and guidance, of discerning God's message of salvation in the world." How is it that the human intellect never vaunts its freedom so triumphantly as when it is in conflict with divine revelation? If a man by the power of his genius solves some difficult mathematical problem, composes a literary work of great value, or becomes the author of some very useful mechanical invention, he will receive

¹ Eph. vi. 11, 12.