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**Study Chair**

**The Lure of Evil**

The late Aleister Crowley tells us in "The Equinox of the Gods" of his life-long preoccupation with evil. His parents were narrow sectaries, and he was evidently out of sympathy with them from early childhood. In spite of this he records that he loved and respected his father, though he hated and despised his mother, whom he describes as having been "pedantically fanatical." After his father's death he says that he was "tortured with insensate persistency" till he found himself saying, "Evil be thou my good!" "I practiced wickedness furtively," he goes on, "even when it was distasteful." His mother spoke in such a way about the Church of England that he concluded that there, if anywhere, he could be really bad; there, surely, he could expect to meet and learn to know the essential Spirit of Evil. So, he tells us, "I would sneak into a church—a place my mother would not enter at the funeral service of her best-loved sister." "I confidently supposed that Anglicanism was a peculiarly violent form of devil-worship, and was in despair at being unable to discover where the abomination came in." Later he tried elsewhere, and more successfully, to get an inside knowledge of evil.

**Saints and Sinners**

His quest led him, if we are to credit his own statements, into a long life of experimental indulgence in every kind of viciousness till, at the last, he looks more foolish than wicked. He identified himself with "the Beast" and "666." His story is, perhaps, only unique in its sheer silliness and fatuity. The preoccupation with evil is common enough. It takes various forms. Even sincerely religious people, seekers of the highest good, avowed lovers of God, sometimes cannot avoid the fascination of sin, perversion, the very opposites of all that they value and revere. Widely read novels written with declared devout intent are often real "shockers," and are read as "shockers." The kick

to be got out of the horror and dreadfulness of evil attracts plenty of readers who have little or no interest in religion. This sort of thing makes sin too "demnition interesting," as Mr. Mantilini would have said. It ministers to a depraved appetite for its horrors. James Joyce makes evil disgusting. He "lays it on thick," but we feel that it sickens him. We can understand how Mr. T. S. Eliot can say that he regards his work as "penetrated with Christian feeling." He is, in fact, distressed by the contemplation of evil. He is not merely obsessed by it. There is, however, a kind of malign elation in the presence of evil in the work of many professedly Christian writers. "Even a venal temptation to which a sceptic could not easily give importance is for them a battlefield upon which clash all the armoured legions of Heaven and Hell." But they only "get going" and "warm up" when they set about making the best, and the worst, of a really full-blooded "mortal sin."

### **A Baptismal Promise**

The lure of evil is undoubtedly very strong. The urge to dissect it and display it is apparently irresistible to some otherwise devout and dedicated minds. That may be understandable, but it is also regrettable. Jesus Christ and Paul of Tarsus knew all about evil in the world and in man's life; but if anyone wishes to get detailed knowledge of it, or to have it turned inside out even for purposes of edification, he need not go to the Gospels, or to the Epistles. They have the kind of reticence that we have also in the Church Catechism, which could be made much more interesting, though much less soundly instructive in good living, if the section on the first baptismal promise had been enlarged upon like the other two. As it is, at the risk of dullness, it resists the temptation to make our flesh creep and our hair stand by giving the devil what may seem to be his due. We have no exciting, colourful account of his works, or of the poms and vanity of this wicked world, and "all the sinful lusts of the flesh" are renounced anonymously—in bulk. What an opportunity is missed! "Tell 'em about their sins," said a popular preacher to an admiring aspirant to the responsibilities of the pulpit. "They don't like to hear about them. Don't be too squeamish. The Church can't leave all the tit-bits to the Sunday papers." But we should never forget that the original preachers of the Gospel did not need to exploit "the lure of evil" in order to promote the glory of God.

VIATOR.