

THE WITCH OF ENDOR.

OF the changes made in the late Revision of the New Testament none affects words in such constant use as that in the "Deliver us from evil" of the Lord's Prayer. The controversy as to the merits of that change is one into which there is no temptation to enter. It is not likely that the arguments can be more ably stated than they have been, on the one side, by Canon Cook in his letters to the Bishop of London, on the other by the Bishop of Durham in his letters to the *Guardian*, which we may now expect shortly to see republished. The discussion, however, of the sense which early Fathers attached to this petition in the Lord's Prayer is only part of a larger inquiry, viz. into the history of early Christian opinion as to the power of the evil one. This inquiry has many branches. It would include a discussion of the question of demoniacal possession; it would include an investigation of that theory of the atonement which represented our Lord's death as a ransom paid to Satan; and though it might not at once occur to a modern reader, it was difference of opinion as to the power possessed by Satan over righteous souls which was at the bottom of controversy on the question, Was it really the soul of Samuel which was called up by the Witch of Endor? The connexion of this last question with the larger inquiry constitutes my apology for venturing to lay before the readers of this Magazine an analysis¹ of patristic opinion about the Witch of Endor, or, as from the word used in the LXX. translation of the Book of Samuel she was commonly called, the *Ἐγγαστρίμυθος*.² It does not enter into

¹ A fuller account will be found in the "Syntagma de Engastrimytho" of Leo Allatius in the "Critici Sacri," where also are given at length the discussions of Origen and Eustathius of which I speak in the text.

² The Latin is Pythonissa, on the strength of which Voltaire has an amusing argument that, since the word Python could not have been known to the Hebrews in the days of Saul, this history cannot have been earlier than the time of Alexander, when the Greeks traded with the Hebrews.

my plan to speak of Jewish opinion about the history under discussion; but, for future reference, it is convenient to mention at once the three proofs given by Waterland ("Works," V. 763) that the Jews understood the words of the Book of Samuel in their most obvious sense, as relating that the soul of Samuel really appeared to Saul. (1) The son of Sirach says concerning Samuel (Ecclus. xlv. 20): "And after his death he prophesied, and shewed the king his end, and lifted up his voice from the earth in prophecy, to blot out the wickedness of the people." (2) In 1 Chronicles x. 13, where it is stated that Saul asked counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, the LXX. translator adds, without authority from the Hebrew, "And Samuel the prophet answered him." (3) Josephus, in telling the story, makes no doubt of the reality of Samuel's appearance.

The verse quoted from Ecclesiasticus will serve to illustrate the great revolution of opinion on the subject which took place in later times. It is the last verse of a chapter which, in the old Lectionary of the Church of England, was appointed to be read as the Lesson for Nov. 16; but with the omission of this one verse. There could not be a clearer indication of refusal to accept the doctrine which this verse contains. The omission here specified was first made in the liturgical revision of the reign of James I. The revisers of Charles II.'s reign, in addition to the verse with which we are concerned, marked for omission two other passages of the Book of Ecclesiasticus, one on account of its misogyny, the other apparently for reasons of delicacy. The reasons which induced the framers of the Lectionary to omit the verse about Samuel may be inferred from the notes in the Geneva Bible on the history in question; for I believe that these notes fairly represent the prevailing opinion of English divines at the time, as to the history under consideration. On 1 Samuel xxviii. 11: "And he answered, bring me up Samuel," the note is,

“He speaketh according to his gross ignorance, not considering the state of the saints after this life, and how Satan hath no power over them.” On Verse 14: “And Saul knew that it was Samuel,” the note is, “To his imagination: albeit it was Satan who, to blind his eyes, took upon him the form of Samuel, as he can do of an angel of light.” There was nothing new in these Geneva notes. In Mathew’s Bible the note had been, “St. Austen¹ affirmeth that it was the Devil in the likeness of Samuel.” The Bishops’ Bible, “To his imagination; albeit it was Sathan indeed.” On these notes I would remark that down to their date, though there was controversy in the Church as to whether the appearance was the work of God or of the devil, it was agreed on all hands that it was supernatural. I may set aside as modern solutions, altogether too late to come within the range of the present inquiry, the hypothesis that there was no real appearance at all, but that the woman had taken advantage of Saul’s excited superstitious feelings, had used jugglery, employed confederates, or so forth. Nor need I consider the hypothesis ingeniously maintained by the late Dr. Maitland, in his tract on Mesmerism, that the woman was a *clairvoyante*, though some of the ancient critics agreed with him in thinking that the story only tells of Saul’s hearing a voice, and that Samuel’s appearance was not seen by Saul, but only described to him by the woman. I have thought it well to set aside modern solutions, because I remember reading something on this subject in which the writer puts forward the view that Samuel really appeared, as one that ought to be held by way of protest against modern rationalism and dislike to believe in the supernatural. In the ancient Church, some of those who denied that Samuel really appeared were most remote from modern rationalism; for they ascribed the phenomenon to Satanic agency; and

¹ A reference is given to a work now known not to be Augustine’s.

the admission of this solution is at the present day repugnant to the belief of many whose rationalism does not extend to a denial of the possibility of a manifestation of divine miraculous power.

In the ancient Church, however, there was difference of opinion on two questions: Did Samuel really come up or not? Was what took place the work of God or of the devil? Combining the different answers to these two questions we get four different views. (*a*) Samuel really appeared, being compelled to do so by the woman's incantations. (*b*) There was no real appearance of Samuel, but the devil or one of his angels assumed the prophet's form. (*c*) God confounded the diviner's art by sending one of his angels to deliver a true prophecy in the form of Samuel. Or (*d*) by sending up Samuel himself.

Though the views (*a*) and (*d*) agree in asserting a real appearance of Samuel, they are evidently quite distinct, and those of modern times who hold the view (*d*), do not act fairly when they cite as favouring their opinion ancient authors who hold the view (*a*).¹

(*a*) In favour of this opinion may be urged that it is that which best accords with the words of the narrative in Samuel. If it is contended that the words, understood in their most obvious sense, assert a real appearance of Samuel, it is equally clear that they seem to assert that the appearance was effected by the woman's magical art. Saul says to her, "Bring me up Samuel." When Samuel appears, he says, "Why hast thou disquieted me, and brought me up." Now it was a matter of general belief in the early Church, that the souls of the righteous men of the old dispensation remained in Hades until liberated by our Lord on his descent into hell. It was only to

¹ I refer in particular to Bishop Wordsworth, for I own that it was dissatisfaction with the account of patristic opinion given in his commentary which led to my attempting to draw up the present account.

add to this doctrine a belief that Satan possessed some sovereignty or power over souls detained in these lower regions, and an explanation was given how Samuel might be made to ascend to earth against his will.

The earliest Christian reference to the story of Endor is in Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho (c. 105). Justin is expounding the Messianic Prayer (Ps. xxii.), "Deliver my soul from the sword, and my only begotten from the hand of the dog; save me from the lion's mouth." And he says that Christ here prays that no one should get possession of his soul, in order to teach us at the hour of death to make the same petition of God, who can keep off every wicked angel from seizing our soul. He remarks that the story of Endor shews that the soul of Samuel, as well as the souls of other holy men and prophets, were then under the authority of such powers. So Christ when giving up his Spirit on the cross said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit": God teaching us by his Son that we should at our departure make like prayer that our souls should not fall under the dominion of evil angels. No controversialist can avoid being influenced to a certain extent by the opinions of those whose views he combats. In Justin's time the Church's great controversy was with Gnostic sects, almost all of which communicated, as their most precious secret, formulæ to preserve the departing soul from the dominion of hostile powers. With regard to the bearing of this passage on the controversy about the Lord's Prayer, the argument *ex silentio* is so precarious that I do not know whether stress can be laid on the remark, that Justin only speaks of prayer to be saved from the power of Satan as made at the hour of death, and says nothing about its being the subject of a Christian's daily prayer.

Substantially the same views as Justin's were entertained by Origen, of whom an interesting sermon on this narrative has been preserved. He begins by enumerating four dif-

ferent lessons read in Church on that day, and, as time would not permit all to be treated of, asks the Bishop to choose on which he shall speak. The Bishop chooses the story of Endor, and Origen proceeds to refute at length the arguments apparently of a previous writer who had not been able to believe that so great a man as Samuel could be detained in Hades and have come up from thence, and who therefore maintained that the assertion that it was Samuel who spoke was but a lie of the demon who spoke in his name. But Origen contends that this assertion is made by the sacred historian himself, and not merely put into the mouth of the woman. He points out that there is nothing disparaging to Samuel in believing him to have been beneath in Hades, since a greater than he, our Lord Himself, had gone there. It is for us so to live that we may not descend to that place where were all the patriarchs who died before his coming, but may pass uninjured through the flaming sword that guards the tree of life, which before Him none could pass. The fact that the shade delivered a true prophecy is another reason which convinces Origen that it was not a demon.

(b) Notwithstanding Justin's authority, the doctrine was very repugnant to the Christian mind, that the devil could have had power over the souls of righteous men even of the old dispensation. It was one of the old dispensation who said (Wisdom iii. 1), "The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them." We have no evidence as to whose arguments it is that Origen is replying to. It might possibly have been Hippolytus, who wrote a tract *De Engastrimytho*, but we have no means of knowing what view he took. But Tertullian (*De Anima*, 57) energetically repels the idea that the devil could have had power over the soul of any man, much less of so great a prophet. He who can transform himself into an angel of light might easily transform him-

self into a man of light ; nay, he is to shew himself that he is God, to shew signs and wonders such as if it were possible would deceive the elect.

But the most elaborate refutation of Origen is in a treatise by the great Eustathius of Antioch, who, according to the opinion of some, presided over the Council of Nicæa, and who certainly played a leading part there. Eustathius, even more energetically than Tertullian, denied that the devil had power to bring up the soul not to say of a prophet like Samuel, or even of any man, but even of an ant or a flea. Against those who insisted that the narrative asserted a real coming up of the soul of Samuel, and not merely a deceptive appearance, he asks if they maintained that the body as well as the soul of Samuel was brought up. If the soul only, it would not have been an object of vision. And in any case, what about the mantle in which the prophet was clad ; was that also real ? Did they suppose that Samuel's mantle had been buried with him with a view to its use on this occasion ? He concludes, then, that it was the devil who transformed himself into Samuel's shape and uttered a prophecy in his name. This is further proved by the fact that the supposed Samuel accepted the worship which Saul offered him, a countenance to idolatry which the real Samuel would have been incapable of giving. Nor are we to be disturbed by the fact that the prophecy uttered by the pseudo Samuel was tolerably correct. Caiaphas could prophesy ; God might force an unwilling mouthpiece to utter a truth ; or, again, devils might, by their own sagacity and by remembering true prophecies which they had heard, have some knowledge of near approaching events. And that this is the true account in the present case is proved by the fact that the prediction was a blundering one after all. It was not on the morrow that Saul and his sons died, but some days after. And, lastly, the prediction, "Thou and thy sons shall be with me," is incon-

sistent with what we know of the "great gulf" which in the other world separates the righteous and the wicked. Later critics, conceding to Eustathius that neither Saul nor even his sons could be imagined to be sharers of happiness with Samuel, maintained, no doubt correctly, that "with me" means no more than joined with me in the common lot of death. I am sorry to be obliged to agree with them, for I could have wished success to a different way of meeting the argument of Eustathius, suggested by Charles Wesley's lines:—

"What do those solemn words portend?
A ray of hope when life shall end?
Thou and thy sons, though slain, shall be
To-morrow in repose with me.

Not in a state of hellish pain,
If Saul with Samuel remain;
Not in a state of damned despair
If loving Jonathan be there."

The theory of Eustathius may be said to have become the generally accepted one. Basil, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory Nyssen, are a few of the names that may be cited as adopting it. Philaster not only regards the appearance as a diabolical illusion, but counts as a heresy the opinion that Samuel really was brought up.

The opinions of Augustine deserve to be stated in a little more detail. He first discussed this subject in answer to a question put to him by Simplicianus, Bishop of Milan, and as far as I can perceive shews a knowledge only of solutions (a) and (b), either of which seems to him to be admissible. As for the first, he sees no difficulty in a righteous soul being brought up by an evil spirit, the soul not indeed being constrained by magical incantation, but coming voluntarily in accordance with God's will. In this life good men have perpetually to come at the call of bad men. Our Lord suffered Himself to be bound by wicked

men and led away by them to crucifixion; and, what is more to the point, He suffered the evil spirit to take Him to a high mountain, and to set Him on a pinnacle of the temple. Why should it be supposed an indignity for a departed saint to submit to what his Master submitted to? But it is perhaps simpler to suppose that what appeared was but a phantom created by diabolical art, and only called Samuel because images are always called by the name of what they represent. If we look at a picture, we say without hesitation, That is Cicero, or, That is Achilles; if we relate a dream, we say, I saw Augustine, though in all these cases what has been seen is not the man himself but only his likeness. In a later work, *De Cura Pro Mortuis*, Augustine retracts the preference he gives to solution (b) and returns to (a), being induced to do so by the distinct statement in the Book of Ecclesiasticus that it was Samuel who prophesied.

The view of Eustathius was very strongly taken by Luther, and by Calvin, whose homilies on this narrative contain much worth extracting if space permitted. Supported by such authority, it naturally became for a considerable time the prevalent opinion among the reformed, including the Church of England, as has been already mentioned.

(c) Theodoret, however, finds himself compelled to reject both the former solutions. Theory (a) is impious. Departed souls abide in a certain place, waiting for the resurrection of the body; and to imagine that sorcerers can have power over them is impious in the extreme. But those who in flying this impiety have devised theory (b), contradict the express statement of the Book of Chronicles already quoted. Theodoret concludes that God acted according to his rule (Ezek. xiv. 7), "Him that cometh to the false prophet I myself will answer him;" and as He put a true prophecy into the mouth of the false prophet Balaam, so

here too He gave to this seeker after a false prophet a true answer; for Theodoret contends, in opposition to Eustathius, that the answer given to Saul was entirely true. But he supposes that it was not Samuel who was raised up to give the answer, but that either an angel or a phantasm delivered the message; the sacred historian calling it Samuel because so it was thought to be; just as in the Book of Genesis the three who conversed with Abraham, though in reality angels, are called men, because to Abraham they seemed to be so.

(d) Though, as I have said, the view (b) is that which most prevailed for many years after the Reformation, it gradually died out; and at the present day most of those disinclined to give a rationalistic account of the story would adopt the solution that, in the same way as to the messengers sent to enquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron, God sent his prophet to deliver a true message, so on this occasion the woman who pretended to evoke the soul of Samuel was surprised by a success she had not anticipated; God having really sent up the prophet's soul to punish this necromancy by a prediction of coming evil. I do not think the arguments for this solution have been better stated or its difficulties better met than they have been by Farmer (*On Miracles*, p. 472). It seems to me strange that this solution should be so deficient in patristic support. I have not been able to find for it the patronage of any great ancient name, though Augustine's version of solution (a) and Theodoret's solution (c) seem to have prepared the way for it.

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