

THE DEMONIACS OF GERASA.

WHETHER we can, as an abstract question, believe in possession by evil spirits at all, or accept that doctrine of fallen angels upon which the belief rests, has already been considered in connection with earlier narratives.¹

It was then urged that every *a priori* argument against the existence of evil spirits goes as far to disprove that of evil men, and especially of wicked men in high places, wielding the powers of Attila or Napoleon—unless indeed one falls into the common error of supposing demons to be absolutely and infinitely evil, in the face of several direct assertions that some are more wicked than others. It was shown that our utter inability so much as to conceive of the origin of evil gives support to the doctrine that its origin was in natures unlike ours, and yet able to infect ours with the virus of their wickedness. It was pointed out that the plain teaching of the New Testament, affirming that we are in danger from personal tempters, falls in with and explains many phenomena of the inner life, conspicuous among these being the persistent manner in which evil, even when sad experience has shown it to be joyless and indeed painful, still urges itself upon fallen men, and subdues their will by sheer clamour and importunity within the mind. It was observed on the other hand that the word *possession* goes beyond what is written, for Scripture speaks of men who have a devil (*δαιμόνιον ἔχει*) but never the reverse; and it is quite possible that this expression overstates the case, although Christ, in a passage plainly figurative, represents the usurper as returning at will to his house whence he went out.

We note also that our Lord, when dealing with these cases, behaves with an austere severity quite unlike His

¹ EXPOSITOR, October, 1892, p. 272.

treatment of mere disease ; but, on the other hand, though here alone we find outcry, resistance, the evidence of an antagonistic volition and an immoral force, yet He never once admonishes a rescued demoniac as if he had been a special sinner with a consenting will, nor adds pardon to emancipation, nor warns him to beware lest a worse thing come upon him. All the phenomena are those, not only of a double consciousness, but of a real division of which the consciousness takes note. This is especially true of the case which we now approach, the case of the demoniacs of Gerasa.

But before examining this remarkable narrative, there is another preliminary question to be considered. What is to be understood by the evil spirit entering into a man, going out of him, and returning into him as into a house which he had forsaken? The answer is especially important when we read of the demons entering into swine, and much awkward merriment has been derived by unbelievers from the notion of evil spirits finding a residence in "pigs."

What then is it necessary to receive, if one would fain accept the words of Jesus frankly, and yet intelligently, neither refusing any statement which He actually makes, nor yet resting in that dull literalism from which transubstantiation and half the heresies of Christendom have sprung?

When the question is thus put, we are already half-way to the answer. For we are at once reminded that the same and stronger language is found in passages where no one dreams of a literal dwelling-place and mansion. Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. The Spirit dwells in us. God dwelleth in us and we in Him. Where the door is open, Christ comes in and actually sups. The Father and the Son come into men, and make their abode with them. Do we believe these assertions? We believe them implicitly ; but neither we nor any believe that they

are to be construed like the expressions in a lease. They speak of abiding influence, immediate, personal and intimate, not of localized physical presence in a body as in bricks and mortar. Now the same is true of fallen angels. The two influences are connected by identical language when we read that the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him (1 Sam. xvi. 14), and in the parable of the stronger man spoiling the strong man's house. Of Judas, who was not possessed but wicked, we read that after the sop Satan entered into him. Satan also filled the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira, but it was no physical occupation of the carnal organs which impelled them to lie against the Holy Ghost. Nor, when we read that Satan had his throne in Pergamum, do we think of a golden or ivory seat in any palace there.

And what reason is there to suppose that Scripture makes even demoniacs the house of demons any more carnally and literally than it makes spiritual men the temple of the Holy Ghost? The sway exercised is of a peculiar and dreadful kind, but it is mastery, direction ("indwelling" if one likes the phrase, which, however, is usually applied to a very different Spirit); and what is wild, fierce and impulsive in its character reveals to us the lawless nature of the fallen beings who exert it.

Now what has science, represented by so powerful an exponent as Mr. Huxley, to object against all this? His attack, delivered with great vigour and parade of mastery, addressed itself to the special case before us, the case of the Gadarenes, and the swine. Now that the dust has settled down, and his weapon is no longer flashing, we may safely ask what has come of it all. The present writer can find only what a few sentences suffice to express. And, strange to say, one of these is a distinct admission that the whole narrative contains nothing which science really contradicts at all. "I declare, as plainly as I can, that

I am unable to show cause why these transferable devils should not exist; nor can I deny that not merely the whole Roman Church, but many Wacean" (=so-called) "infidels" of no mean repute, do honestly and firmly believe that the activity of such-like dæmonic beings is in full fling in this year of grace 1889. Nevertheless, as good Bishop Butler says, 'probability is the guide of life,' and it seems to me that this is just one of the cases in which the canon of credibility and testimony, which I have ventured to lay down, is in full force."¹

Quite so, but credibility and testimony come into play, just where scientific demonstration calls a halt. No one will say that the laws of crystals, or the mutual relation of the angles in a triangle, or the structure of a crayfish are questions of credibility and testimony; nor indeed is the profoundest demonstration of astronomy such, except so far as I am not a scientific expert, so far as my knowledge is at secondhand.

Now this does not break the force of any arguments which Professor Huxley has to adduce, nor is it quoted with any such intention. But it does something else. It quite dispels the glamour which is felt by many minds, concerning the pronouncement of so great a man of science. The talkers who do not think, the readers of magazines and not of books, the not incurious young men and women who are not well informed, but pickers up of wisdom's crumbs, all these are profoundly impressed by finding that a great man of science has declared against the story of the demoniac. But the declaration does not come from Professor Huxley as admirable man of science; as such he disowns any part in it; it comes from the amateur in biblical criticism, from the author of an assertion in that line so amazing that I have never been quite certain whether Professor

¹ *Nineteenth Century*, February, 1889, p. 177.

Huxley meant to say the wonderful thing which his words convey to me. Here is the yard-stick wherewith to measure his attainment in this direction. "Let any reasonable man ask himself this question. If after an approximate settlement of the canon of the New Testament, and even later than the fourth and fifth centuries, literary fabricators had the skill and the audacity to make such additions and interpolations as these, what may they have done when no one had thought of a canon?"¹ Now what are these additions and interpolations, of which he thinks it safe to assume as a thing conceded, without adducing further evidence than he finds in the revised margin, that they are "even later than the fourth and fifth centuries?" They are the closing verses of St. Mark, and the story of the woman taken in adultery.

We now breathe freely. We can exercise our judgment without being overweighted by undue awe, for it is evident that the high and deserved position of the assailant has been attained not only in other fields, but also by other processes.

And in this matter of credibility and testimony, we have first of all to ask what sort of examination has he given to the facts? Was his rejection of the scriptural theory of "possession" the result of a careful and accurate diagnosis, or the reverse? Another citation enables us to answer this question pretty confidently. "If physical diseases are caused by demons, Gregory of Tours and his contemporaries rightly considered that relics and exorcists are more useful than doctors" (p. 174). Two things are here to be observed. The alleged consequence would only follow if we grant the further assumption that demons are the usual cause of most diseases, since the healers of a few exceptional maladies cannot be held to be "more useful" than the healers of many. Now the New Testa-

¹ *Nineteenth Century*, February, 1889, p. 176.

ment draws a clear and sharp contrast between possession and nine-tenths of the diseases treated by our Lord, so that on any showing he who deals with the latter retains his superiority in usefulness. The ethical significance of the events is quite another thing. But this is a small matter compared with the monstrous assertion that exorcism and the use of relics follow from the scriptural doctrine of demons. The scriptural doctrine is fatal to them both. It is impossible to believe in exorcism, in the inherent efficacy of mystic words and invocations, in the face of the story of the sons of Scæva. It is impossible to believe in either exorcism or relics in the face of the explicit word of Jesus: "This kind goeth forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting." And yet this is no mere *obiter dictum*, dropped lightly, and without bearing upon the main argument. That argument relies entirely upon its identification of the phenomena in the New Testament with the disgraceful superstitions of the middle ages, and of the New England puritans, who were beset by savage men and strange and cruel circumstances, in a wilderness, with overstrained nerves, and full of morbid imaginations. Mr. Huxley carries the identification so far as to declare that "if the story is true, the mediæval theory of the invisible world may be, and probably is, quite correct; and the witchfinders, from Sprenger to Hopkins and Mather, are much-maligned men" (p. 173). The latter clause, one observes with interest, is not even qualified by the word "probably." And then of course it is easy to conclude that the same common sense which dismisses the later stories should reject the earlier, since the one follows upon the other. The only objection to the argument is that it begs the question. The difference between the stories is radical and profound. A witch in the middle ages was the willing accomplice of the evil one, to whom her soul was sold. She could be detected by the spot on her body

which a needle would not pierce, and this should be indecently and cruelly searched out. The devils of the middle ages were creatures whose horns and hoofs betrayed their pagan origin, and they would play dice, or draw plans of a cathedral, or win a sweetheart for you, if only you would sign a document which straightway became irrevocable.

The demons of the New Testament were invisible. No wizard or witch is ever said to cross the steps of Jesus. No soul of men is ever described as forfeited by a deed of gift. Christ and His followers do not cruelly destroy the demoniac because they fear him; on the contrary they claim and exercise a moral mastery over his tyrant, and have no feeling except pity for himself. It follows therefore that Scripture is no more responsible for the witchfinder than (as we have seen) for the exorcist or the relic-monger; and has on the contrary laid down principles which, if observed, would have made them all alike impossible. It is surely unscientific to declare that "the most horrible persecutions and judicial murders of hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children" were "justly based" on narratives which distinctly assert that even if every one of them was really possessed, the Church could recover them, and was bound to do so, narratives which say not a word about witches, and which exhibit the demons in a character wholly unlike the mediæval conception. If we are asked how the mediæval Church neglected these palpable distinctions, we have now a ready answer, How did Professor Huxley neglect them? And this entirely draws the sting of yet another pronouncement. "Everything that I know of physiological and pathological science leads me to entertain a very strong conviction that the phenomena ascribed to possession are as natural as those which constitute small-pox" (p. 172).

This no longer alarms us, when we see him ascribing

to possession phenomena which he has picked up in other centuries and distant lands, phenomena which we might with equal confidence expect to show themselves in ignorant and fanatical ages, whatever be our view of the gospel narratives, because hysteria and madness reproduce in burlesque alike true things and false, and there will be found in the same asylum aspirants to the rank of the deity, and of the man in the moon, of Napoleon the Great, and Aladdin and Queen Victoria.

There is one other consideration, of a kind entirely different. Professor Huxley thinks Jesus behaved improperly if it is true that He destroyed the swine. "Everything that I know of law and justice convinces me that the wanton destruction of other people's property is a misdemeanour of evil example."¹ In this little sentence only three questions are begged: that it was Jesus who destroyed anything; that what He did was wanton; and that the swine were the property of the Gadarenes in a sense which barred the claim of One, whose are the cattle on a thousand hills, and whom on any theory which upholds the miracle, Jesus represented. All this is afterwards repeated in a cruder form: "Suppose a modern English sabbatarian fanatic . . . sees a fellow Puritan yielding to the temptation of getting in his harvest on a fine Sabbath morning, is the former justified in setting fire to the latter's corn?"² As if (on the only supposition with which Professor Huxley has to deal), there was no more in the position of Jesus than that of a fellow citizen. It is asserted that "the kingdom of God has come unto you," and that "I by the finger of God cast out devils." In this power He has just wielded the elemental forces of nature, calming the tempest on the lake. And yet He, armed by God with forces meant to attest His divinity, may only treat men as it is lawful for

¹ *Nineteenth Century*, Feb., 1889, p. 172.

² *Ibid.*, Dec., 1890, p. 978.

one Puritan to treat another. But Professor Huxley will not deny that (on the theory with which he is grappling) God does, by storm and plague, destroy not only property but life. Nay, His human agents, not the fellow Puritan but the judge, and the national forces, habitually do the same. And it is a bold thing to refuse a revelation of God in humanity, merely because it professes to act as God acts, and not as a common man. One is not disposed to insist over-much on the distinction between destroying the swine and allowing the demons who destroyed them to enter in, yet it is not one which an antagonist can afford entirely to ignore. For many reasons unknown to us, perhaps to assure the demoniacs of the reality and completeness of the removal of their tormentors, perhaps to deepen the public impression of the great deed, perhaps to rebuke a violation of the law (for even Mr. Huxley cannot flatter himself that he has quite proved that the owners of the swine were certainly Gentiles), Jesus may have permitted the demons to enter the swine, at the cost of the destruction of the animals. That is not the same as the throwing of fire into a cornfield, simply in order to destroy it. And certainly it is a bold thing to describe the act as "wanton," merely because one does not himself approve of it.

One use of it is palpable, and bears all the appearance of having been designed when it was wrought. Jesus came not to judge the world but to bring a new life into it. And therefore He never wrought even one such act of penal judgment as was familiar to every student of the Old Testament. Such deeds of vengeance are common in the Apocryphal Gospels, in which we find many specimens of what would have happened if Jesus had obeyed an impulse to "wanton destruction." They were entirely alien to the plan of His first coming, and the divine purpose which it revealed.

And yet the absence of all severity, the revelation of God

without any judgment, the total ignoring of a stern side in the divine character, would have been equally unlike His teaching and the reality of things. Here, and in the symbolic fate of the barren but pretentious fig-tree, there is seen, yet without human suffering, that God can act otherwise than softly. To enforce this lesson, every theist holds that agony and death are constantly inflicted. Why not also the loss of two thousand swine?

Moreover, when the miracle, true or mythic, is compared to a mischievous flinging of fire into a cornfield, we might have looked for some recognition of the fact that it brought large compensation with its loss, the pacifying of two human tigers, and the opening up of a way which no man had dared to traverse.

It is now time to examine the narrative itself. Fresh from His victory over the tempest, the Lord is confronted by a sterner fury, the rage of hostile spirits. Two men meet Him, as St. Matthew is aware, although the subsequent evangelical energy of one has made him better known, and in the other Gospels he only is the hero of the tale. Both are exceeding fierce, the terror of the countryside, scorning restraint and decency, and haunting the cave-tombs whose melancholy associations harmonized alike with their own ruin, and that of the spirits which impelled them. At the sight of Jesus, their duplex personality produced conflicting cries and actions, so that they ran to meet Him and yet bade Him let them alone. Madmen, even if attracted, would not have known Him who He was; but this was certain to the followers of that dark spirit, who after His Baptism had assailed the Holy One of God in vain. Jesus sets Himself at once to awaken and to calm the real humanity within the sufferer by asking What is thy name? but the demons break in with a boastful self-assertion, claiming to be many, and taking the name of such a mail-clad host as they had often seen trampling

down the reluctant land. Then, when they feel themselves overpowered, they beseech not to be utterly driven into "the abyss," but allowed to linger in that borderland between Israel and paganism, even if their dominion must be limited to the brutes. But these, when permission is given and acted upon, utterly lose all self-control, and fling themselves into the waters of the lake. It is impossible to explain the nature either of such brute "possession" or of its effects. But those who know the effect produced upon animals by many sights and sounds, by blood, sometimes by the chime of bells, and by hypnotism, will not deny that they possess a nervous excitability at once mysterious and far-reaching, the bounds of which cannot be so drawn as certainly to exclude strange impulses from sources unknown to man. The keepers told the story in the city, and the multitude came out to see the demoniacs recovered, whereupon a serious difficulty is made out of the question, Where had the two men got raiment, since clothed they were? As if a boat's crew could not have provided them with as much as decency required.

If any further vindication of the penal loss of property were needed, it is supplied by the inhabitants themselves, in their covetous and pitiless repulsion of Him on whom they lay the blame. They dared not expel Him, but they prayed the Saviour of their brothers to depart out of their coast; and Jesus "gave them their desire," though it implied, as of old, "leanness 'for' their souls." It was not His manner to force grace upon the reluctant, and we to-day may reject His counsel, against ourselves.

It was most natural that one whom He had rescued from fathomless degradation should earnestly desire to follow Him, even if he had no superstitious fear of the demons returning when Jesus was at a distance. But it was right that he should learn a bolder faith; and his testimony, comparatively useless elsewhere, was the last

benefit which Jesus could secure for the ungrateful inhabitants, to whom it was of paramount importance.

Thus the whole narrative is coherent and edifying, utterly unlike the miserable witchtales with which its enemies would confound it.

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WEIZSÄCKER ON THE RESURRECTION.

WEIZSÄCKER'S important book on *Apostolic Times*¹—a new edition of which has recently come out, embodying the writer's latest conclusions—opens with an explanation of the New Testament account of the resurrection of our Lord that invites our inquiry, not only because it represents the opinion of a very acute critic, but for the weighty reason that the view it sets forth seems to be gaining favour as a refuge from a perplexing problem, even among persons who are far from accepting the standpoint of the author and his school. The secret of this view may be divined from the statement that we can *easily* ascertain the nature of the appearances of Christ to the predecessors of St. Paul referred to in 1 Corinthians xv. by considering what the Apostle tells us of his own experience. In his list of the appearances of the risen Lord he includes that with which he himself was favoured, saying, "And last of all, as to one born out of due time, He appeared to me also" (1 Cor. xv. 8). St. Paul makes no distinction between this last manifestation to himself and the five earlier ones. He does not scruple to use the same word (*ὄφθη*) for all six cases. Therefore, Weizsäcker argues, if we can discover St. Paul's experience, we shall know what he understood to be the experiences of St. Peter, St. James, the twelve, "all

¹ *Das Apostolische Zeitalter der Christlichen Kirche.* Von Carl Weizsäcker. Zweite neu bearbeitete Auflage.