

hired at the eleventh hour, and still less the returned prodigal;—the typical Christian is the elder brother when he is reconciled to the returned prodigal, and the labourer who, after bearing the burden of the day and the scorching heat, learns graciously to acquiesce in his Master's action in placing on an equality with him the labourer who entered at the eleventh hour.

JOSEPH JOHN MURPHY.

PROFESSOR HUXLEY AND THE SWINE OF
GADARA.

PROFESSOR HUXLEY's article on Agnosticism in the February number of the *Nineteenth Century* is one of uncommon interest. The bits of mental autobiography with which he favours us are both instructive and captivating. He champions moreover the position of a much-read novel, and assumes that belief in Christianity is entirely a question of the worth of a group of historical records that have hitherto been supposed to reflect its origins. He also restates some of the old difficulties arising out of the triple narrative of the Gadarene demoniac, and ventures to stake the credibility or otherwise of the gospel traditions upon the truth or falseness of the psychology that underlies the narrative. In conclusion, he tells us that "the choice then lies between discrediting those who compiled the gospel biographies and disbelieving the Master whom they thought to honour by preserving such traditions of the exercise of His authority over Satan's invisible world."

Without word-wasting preamble the professor throws down the gage before the theologians in the following clear and candid terms:

"I find in the second gospel a statement, to all appearance intended to have the same evidential value as any other contained in that history. It is the well-known story of the devils who were cast out of a man, and ordered or permitted to enter into a herd of swine, to the great loss or damage of the innocent Gerasene or Gadarene pig owners. There can be no doubt that the narrator intends to convey to his readers his own conviction that this casting out and entering in were effected by the agency of Jesus of Nazareth, that by speech and action Jesus enforced this conviction; nor does any inkling of the legal and moral difficulties of the case manifest itself.

"On the other hand, 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 purely natural as those which constitute small-pox: everything that I know of anthropology leads me to think that the belief in demons and demoniacal possession is the mere survival of a once universal superstition, and that its persistence at the present time is pretty much in the inverse ratio of the general instruction, intelligence, and sound judgment of the population among whom it prevails. 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. Again, the study of history, and especially that of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, leaves no shadow of doubt on my mind that the belief in the reality of possession and witchcraft, justly based, alike by Catholics and Protestants, upon this and innumerable other passages in the Old and New Testaments, gave rise, through the special influence of Christian ecclesiastics, to the most horrible persecutions and judicial murders of thousands upon thousands of innocent men, women, and children."

It is an assumption at once audacious and ambiguous that the phenomena ascribed to possession are "as purely natural as those which constitute small-pox." Possibly the professor may leave the door ajar for his escape from all the issues of the statement by making the word "natural" embrace both the known and unknown laws and the seen and unseen factors in human mind and life. This critical scientist would perhaps scarcely venture to say that these phenomena admit of a purely *physical* explanation, as any such assertion might leave out of account some of the facts of recent psychological research. Once allow that the energy of evil may gather itself up into unseen personal centres,

and the narratives of demoniacal possession perhaps make a less violent demand upon our credulity than some of the strange things that have been sifted again and again by members of the Psychic Research Society and set forth in their reports. Not a little has been done to explain the mental conditions under which possession is conceivable, and the narratives read less like myths than they might have done fifty years ago.

The mental condition that made the spiritual maladies described in the New Testament possible was probably analogous to that induced upon his subject by the mesmerist. The will and the higher mental and spiritual faculties were put to sleep and paralysed, and the realm of the emotions and sensibilities came under the control of an alien will. To all intents and purposes a mesmerised subject is "possessed" for the time, but by the personality of the human agent to whom he has submitted himself. The process may be repeated till the will of the subject is broken down, and his higher faculties weakened, and all the depths of a humiliating inanity are touched. Readers of *David Elginbrod* will remember the story of the German mesmerist, and of the influence he acquired over a young lady who figures in the story. The young lady had become a mental paralytic in his presence, and was conscious of his approach when he was a considerable distance from the house in which she was living. The incident is not a simple creation of the writer's fancy. There are verified instances in which the unscrupulous mesmerist has carried his power to a criminal extent. Here you have all the pathological conditions required for the New Testament incidents. Possibly the paralysing influence that prepared the mind for these dark and distressing dominations was the shadow of Paganism, for nearly all the cases of possession are cases that occur where Pagan superstition was rampant, rather than in the purer centres of Jewish thought and life.

Amongst heathen people I have met cases of derangement that have seemed to come very near to those of the New Testament type. The fatalistic tone of heathen thought may favour this condition of mental helplessness and automatism. Under the influence of the Christian faith, the will may be so strengthened and the mind so replenished with light and knowledge, that the prostration is scarcely possible that leaves the soul helpless in the presence of the mysterious forces of darkness that prey upon it. Admit that malign and disturbing influences from the unseen may act upon the human soul, and these abnormal phenomena will be sure to appear where the will is terrorised into helplessness, and the defences of man's higher faculties dismantled by degrading forms of idolatry.

Some of the curious instances in which impressions have been transmitted from brain to brain without any of the ordinary processes of contact suggest the existence of occult laws of influence by which all the phenomena of possession might be brought about. Not a few marvellous illustrations of what has been called "telepathy" were brought together in the *Nineteenth Century* several years ago, and the names connected with the incidents put them beyond all possibility of question. The Rev. J. M. Wilson, headmaster of the Clifton College, Bristol, describes the strange impression that overpowered him when a student at Cambridge. One night a terrifying chill came over him. He seemed to have all the sensations of death. A fellow student endeavoured to cheer him. The strange feeling continued for some hours. The next day he heard that a twin brother in Leicestershire had died at the very time when he had these sensations of death. Mr. A. Severn, the artist, was staying at Brantwood, Coniston. He went for a sail on the lake before breakfast. A sudden change in the wind caused the tiller to swing round and strike him violently in the face. At the very hour his wife, who was

in bed, seemed to have received a blow, and actually put up a handkerchief to her lips. A workman in London felt an irresistible call to return home. On his arrival he found his wife had been run over by a cab, and had been crying out for him ever since. A Congregational minister of Woolwich had an impression of his brother's death in America at the time it was taking place, and also of his brother's wife's death; and crossed the Atlantic upon the strength of the second impression to take charge of the orphan children. In these cases, by some occult process of influence, one mind seemed to come for the time being under the dominion of a distant mind. The cases were those of momentary possession. If our conception of the freedom of spirits be correct, it will certainly be less credible that one human being should thus transfer his thoughts and sensibilities to another human being, and make them dominant for the time, than that a spirit should be able to rule over the sensibilities and nervous life and impulse of some poor wretch whose higher nature has become hypnotized.

The transfer of the man's madness, with the mysterious agents of it, to the swine, however strange, involves no impossibility, as Professor Huxley seems to admit. There is good reason for supposing that some dogs are thought-readers. An English sportsman in Norway says a Norsk dog obeyed all his orders, although it had not heard English spoken before, and the orders were not enforced by the least amount of pantomime. Domesticated animals will sometimes catch a man's moods of terror or depression. And it is more than suspected that groups of beasts have gone mad in the mass. The lower nature of the beast, without will or intelligence, unless of a very rudimentary order, would seem to make it a fit subject for the curious phenomena of possession. Professor Huxley, whilst claiming that the transfer of the demons to the swine con-

travenes probability, admits that he has "no *à priori* objection to offer." "There are physical things which can be transferred from men to pigs, and *vice versâ*, which do undoubtedly produce most diabolical and deadly effects on both. For anything I can absolutely prove to the contrary, there may be spiritual things capable of the same transmigration with like effect."

The insinuation that in this destruction of property there was a misdemeanour of evil example is too trivial from a serious and fair-minded man. Jesus regarded himself as a Jew, and if the Jewish law were binding on the eastern shore of the lake, the act of permission which issued in the destruction of the swine was perfectly justifiable. I have no doubt a Jew could have argued as forcibly against a hog-ranche as the professor himself would argue against a market for the sale of diseased meat. He ought surely to do Christ as much justice as he would a sanitary inspector who disregards the rights of property by laying hands on the horseflesh that is on its way to the shambles, or the revenue officer who seizes contraband tobacco or brandy. The passing of this mysterious power of derangement into the swine may have been necessary, as some one has pointed out, to the mental healing and assurance of the man. Looked at from that standpoint, all who are not Buddhists must surely refrain from any impeachment of an act that issued in the destruction of the swine. Man is paramount over both sheep and swine.

To affirm that the burning of witches in the Middle Ages was encouraged by these narratives of demoniacal possession is to wander very far afield indeed. Christ and His apostles treated all these cases as cases of suffering rather than transgression. The fact that they are represented as healed, and not hunted or baited or burned, ought to show both to the professor and to the Christian ecclesiastics who may have based their views of witchcraft

on such passages, that the things have nothing in common. The belief in witchcraft is independent of Bible teaching, and pagan rulers have often found that the peace of the State could only be maintained by its suppression. The fact of it is, that assassination rings, and secret murder societies, and poison leagues work, and have ever worked, under the cover of necromancy and divination. In savage countries the political parties divide themselves into government and opposition. The witches form the one and the witch-hunters the other, and the war between the inns and outs is war to the death. The professional sorcerer is quite distinct from the quasi-victim of demoniacal possession, as well as from the attendant in the temple who is visited by the spirit of the idol and made to utter trance oracles. Crime against life often hides itself under professional witchery and wizardry, and I dare say mediæval rulers punished the innocent in hunting out that crime as the innocent have been punished in all ages of the world and for every kind of supposed offence.

In some of these miracles it was necessary that Christ should dramatize the process to lay in the hearts of the healed and the saved the foundations of a sound faith in His own spiritual sovereignty. These cases of possession occur at the meeting places of Jewish and heathen religions. Faith in the supremacy of God over evil had been lost or compromised. If the ignorant sufferer was to be delivered from every form of Manicheism or degraded and terror-stricken Fetich-worship, he must be assured of his Healer's sovereignty over the evil powers that have harrassed him in the past. Some of the details of these incidents that affront the scientific reason were necessary to complete that assurance.

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