

## CHAPTER XV.

### *FROM "DEMONIACAL POSSESSION" TO INSANITY.*

#### I. THEOLOGICAL IDEAS OF LUNACY AND ITS TREATMENT.

OF all the triumphs won by science for humanity, few have been farther-reaching in good effects than the modern treatment of the insane. But this is the result of a struggle long and severe between two great forces. On one side have stood the survivals of various superstitions, the metaphysics of various philosophies, the dogmatism of various theologies, the literal interpretation of various sacred books, and especially of our own—all compacted into a creed that insanity is mainly or largely demoniacal possession; on the other side has stood science, gradually accumulating proofs that insanity is always the result of physical disease.

I purpose in this chapter to sketch, as briefly as I may, the history of this warfare, or rather of this evolution of truth out of error.

Nothing is more simple and natural, in the early stages of civilization, than belief in occult, self-conscious powers of evil. Troubles and calamities come upon man; his ignorance of physical laws forbids him to attribute them to physical causes; he therefore attributes them sometimes to the wrath of a good being, but more frequently to the malice of an evil being.

Especially is this the case with diseases. The real causes of disease are so intricate that they are reached only after ages of scientific labour; hence they, above all, have been attributed to the influence of evil spirits.\*

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\* On the general attribution of disease to demoniacal influence, see Sprenger, *History of Medicine, passim* (note, for a later attitude, vol. ii, pp. 150-170, 178);

But, if ordinary diseases were likely to be attributed to diabolical agency, how much more diseases of the brain, and especially the more obscure of these! These, indeed, seemed to the vast majority of mankind possible only on the theory of Satanic intervention: any approach to a true theory of the connection between physical causes and mental results is one of the highest acquisitions of science.

Here and there, during the whole historic period, keen men had obtained an inkling of the truth; but to the vast multitude, down to the end of the seventeenth century, nothing was more clear than that insanity is, in many if not in most cases, demoniacal possession.

Yet at a very early date, in Greece and Rome, science had asserted itself, and a beginning had been made which seemed destined to bring a large fruitage of blessings.\* In the fifth century before the Christian era, Hippocrates of Cos asserted the great truth that all madness is simply disease of the brain, thereby beginning a development of truth and mercy which lasted nearly a thousand years. In the first century after Christ, Aretæus carried these ideas yet further, observed the phenomena of insanity with great acuteness, and reached yet more valuable results. Near the beginning of the following century, Soranus went still further in the

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Calmeil, *De la Folie*, Paris, 1845, vol. i, pp. 104, 105; Esquirol, *Des Maladies Mentales*, Paris, 1838, vol. i, p. 482; also Tylor, *Primitive Culture*. For a very plain and honest statement of this view in our own sacred books, see Oort, Hooykaas, and Kuenen, *The Bible for Young People*, English translation, chap. v, p. 167, and following; also Farrar's *Life of Christ*, chap. xvii. For this idea in Greece and elsewhere, see Maury, *La Magie*, etc., vol. iii, p. 276, giving, among other citations, one from book v of the *Odyssey*. On the influence of Platonism, see Esquirol and others, as above—the main passage cited is from the *Phædo*. For the devotion of the early fathers and doctors to this idea, see citations from Eusebius, Lactantius, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory Nazianzen, in Tissot, *L'Imagination*, p. 369; also Jacob (i. e., Paul Lacroix), *Croyances Populaires*, p. 183. For St. Augustine, see also his *De Civitate Dei*, lib. xxii, chap. viii, and his *Enarratio in Psal.*, cxxxv, 1. For the breaking away of the religious orders in Italy from the entire supremacy of this idea, see Bécavin, *L'École de Salerne*, Paris, 1888; also Daremberg, *Histoire de la Médecine*. Even so late as the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther maintained (*Table Talk*, Hazlitt's translation, London, 1872, pp. 250–256) that "Satan produces all the maladies which afflict mankind."

\* It is significant of this scientific attitude that the Greek word for superstition means, literally, fear of gods or demons.

same path, giving new results of research, and strengthening scientific truth. Toward the end of the same century a new epoch was ushered in by Galen, under whom the same truth was developed yet further, and the path toward merciful treatment of the insane made yet more clear. In the third century Celsus Aurelianus received this deposit of precious truth, elaborated it, and brought forth the great idea which, had theology, citing biblical texts, not banished it, would have saved fifteen centuries of cruelty—an idea not fully recognised again till near the beginning of the present century—the idea that insanity is brain disease, and that the treatment of it must be gentle and kind. In the sixth century Alexander of Tralles presented still more fruitful researches, and taught the world how to deal with *melancholia*; and, finally, in the seventh century, this great line of scientific men, working mainly under pagan auspices, was closed by Paul of Ægina, who under the protection of Caliph Omar made still further observations, but, above all, laid stress on the cure of madness as a disease, and on the absolute necessity of mild treatment.

Such was this great succession in the apostolate of science: evidently no other has ever shown itself more directly under Divine grace, illumination, and guidance. It had given to the world what might have been one of its greatest blessings.\*

This evolution of divine truth was interrupted by theology. There set into the early Church a current of belief which was destined to bring all these noble acquisitions of science and religion to naught, and, during centuries, to inflict tortures, physical and mental, upon hundreds of thousands of innocent men and women—a belief which held its cruel sway for nearly eighteen centuries; and this belief was that madness was mainly or largely possession by the devil.

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\* For authorities regarding this development of scientific truth and mercy in antiquity, see especially Krafft-Ebing, *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie*, Stuttgart, 1888, p. 40 and the pages following; Trélat, *Recherches Historiques sur la Folie*, Paris, 1839; Semelaigne, *L'Aliénation mentale dans l'Antiquité*, Paris, 1869; Dagron, *Des Aliénés*, Paris, 1875; also Calmeil, *De la Folie*, Sprenger, and especially Isen-sée, *Geschichte der Medicin*, Berlin, 1840.

This idea of diabolic agency in mental disease had grown luxuriantly in all the Oriental sacred literatures. In the series of Assyrian mythological tablets in which we find those legends of the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, and other early conceptions from which the Hebrews so largely drew the accounts wrought into the book of Genesis, have been discovered the formulas for driving out the evil spirits which cause disease. In the Persian theology regarding the struggle of the great powers of good and evil this idea was developed to its highest point. From these and other ancient sources the Jews naturally received this addition to their earlier view: the Mocker of the Garden of Eden became Satan, with legions of evil angels at his command; and the theory of diabolic causes of mental disease took a firm place in our sacred books. Such cases in the Old Testament as the evil spirit in Saul, which we now see to have been simply melancholy—and, in the New Testament, the various accounts of the casting out of devils, through which is refracted the beautiful and simple story of that power by which Jesus of Nazareth soothed perturbed minds by his presence or quelled outbursts of madness by his words, give examples of this. In Greece, too, an idea akin to this found lodgment both in the popular belief and in the philosophy of Plato and Socrates; and though, as we have seen, the great leaders in medical science had taught with more or less distinctness that insanity is the result of physical disease, there was a strong popular tendency to attribute the more troublesome cases of it to hostile spiritual influence.\*

From all these sources, but especially from our sacred

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\* For the exorcism against disease found at Nineveh, see G. Smith, Delitzsch's German translation, p. 34. For a very interesting passage regarding the representation of a diabolic personage on a Babylonian bronze, and for a very frank statement regarding the transmission of ideas regarding Satanic power to our sacred books, see Sayce, *Herodotus*, appendix ii, p. 393. It is, indeed, extremely doubtful whether Plato himself or his contemporaries knew anything of *evil* demons, this conception probably coming into the Greek world, as into the Latin, with the Oriental influences that began to prevail about the time of the birth of Christ; but to the early Christians a demon was a demon, and Plato's, good or bad, were pagan, and therefore devils. The Greek word "epilepsy" is itself a survival of the old belief, fossilized in a word, since its literal meaning refers to the *seizure* of the patient by evil spirits.



books and the writings of Plato, this theory that mental disease is caused largely or mainly by Satanic influence passed on into the early Church. In the apostolic times no belief seems to have been more firmly settled. The early fathers and doctors in the following age universally accepted it, and the apologists generally spoke of the power of casting out devils as a leading proof of the divine origin of the Christian religion.

This belief took firm hold upon the strongest men. The case of St. Gregory the Great is typical. He was a pope of exceedingly broad mind for his time, and no one will think him unjustly reckoned one of the four Doctors of the Western Church. Yet he solemnly relates that a nun, having eaten some lettuce without making the sign of the cross, swallowed a devil, and that, when commanded by a holy man to come forth, the devil replied: "How am I to blame? I was sitting on the lettuce, and this woman, not having made the sign of the cross, ate me along with it." \*

As a result of this idea, the Christian Church at an early period in its existence virtually gave up the noble conquests of Greek and Roman science in this field, and originated, for persons supposed to be possessed, a regular discipline, developed out of dogmatic theology. But during the centuries before theology and ecclesiasticism had become fully dominant this discipline was, as a rule, gentle and useful.

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\* For a striking statement of the Jewish belief in diabolical interference, see Josephus, *De Bello Judaico*, vii, 6, iii; also his *Antiquities*, vol. viii, Whiston's translation. On the "devil cast out," in Mark ix, 17-29, as undoubtedly a case of epilepsy, see Cherullier, *Essai sur l'Épilepsie*; also Maury, art. *Démoniaque* in the *Encyclopédie Moderne*. In one text, at least, the popular belief is perfectly shown as confounding madness and possession: "He hath a devil, and is mad," John x, 20. Among the multitude of texts, those most relied upon were Matthew viii, 28, and Luke x, 17; and for the use of fetiches in driving out evil spirits, the account of the cures wrought by touching the garments of St. Paul in Acts xix, 12. On the general subject, see authorities already given, and as a typical passage Tertullian, *Ad. Scap.*, ii. For the very gross view taken by St. Basil, see Cudworth, *Intellectual System*, vol. ii, p. 648; also Archdeacon Farrar's *Life of Christ*. For the case related by St. Gregory the Great with comical details, see the *Exempla* of Archbishop Jacques de Vitry, edited by Prof. T. F. Crane, of Cornell University, p. 59, art. cxxx. For a curious presentation of Greek views, see Lélut, *Le Démon de Socrate*, Paris, 1856; and for the transmission of these to Christianity, see the same, p. 201 and following.

The afflicted, when not too violent, were generally admitted to the exercises of public worship, and a kindly system of cure was attempted, in which prominence was given to holy water, sanctified ointments, the breath or spittle of the priest, the touching of relics, visits to holy places, and submission to mild forms of exorcism. There can be no doubt that many of these things, when judiciously used in that spirit of love and gentleness and devotion inherited by the earlier disciples from "the Master," produced good effects in soothing disturbed minds and in aiding their cure.

Among the thousands of fetiches of various sorts then resorted to may be named, as typical, the Holy Handkerchief of Besançon. During many centuries multitudes came from far and near to touch it; for, it was argued, if touching the garments of St. Paul at Ephesus had cured the diseased, how much more might be expected of a handkerchief of the Lord himself!

With ideas of this sort was mingled a vague belief in medical treatment, and out of this mixture were evolved such prescriptions as the following:

"If an elf or a goblin come, smear his forehead with this salve, put it on his eyes, cense him with incense, and sign him frequently with the sign of the cross."

"For a fiend-sick man: When a devil possesses a man, or controls him from within with disease, a spew-drink of lupin, bishopswort, henbane, garlic. Pound these together, add ale and holy water."

And again: "A drink for a fiend-sick man, to be drunk out of a church bell: Githrife, cynoglossum, yarrow, lupin, flower-de-luce, fennel, lichen, lovage. Work up to a drink with clear ale, sing seven masses over it, add garlic and holy water, and let the possessed sing the *Beati Immaculati*; then let him drink the dose out of a church bell, and let the priest sing over him the *Domine Sancte Pater Omnipotens*."\*

Had this been the worst treatment of lunatics developed in the theological atmosphere of the Middle Ages, the world would have been spared some of the most terrible chapters

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\* See Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wort-cunning, and Star-Craft of Early England*, in the Rolls Series, vol. ii, p. 177; also pp. 355, 356. For the great value of priestly saliva, see W. W. Story's essays.

in its history; but, unfortunately, the idea of the Satanic possession of lunatics led to attempts to punish the indwelling demon. As this theological theory and practice became more fully developed, and ecclesiasticism more powerful to enforce it, all mildness began to disappear; the admonitions to gentle treatment by the great pagan and Moslem physicians were forgotten, and the treatment of lunatics tended more and more toward severity: more and more generally it was felt that cruelty to madmen was punishment of the devil residing within or acting upon them.

A few strong churchmen and laymen made efforts to resist this tendency. As far back as the fourth century, Nemesius, Bishop of Emesa, accepted the truth as developed by pagan physicians, and aided them in strengthening it. In the seventh century, a Lombard code embodied a similar effort. In the eighth century, one of Charlemagne's capitularies seems to have had a like purpose. In the ninth century, that great churchman and statesman, Agobard, Archbishop of Lyons, superior to his time in this as in so many other things, tried to make right reason prevail in this field; and, near the beginning of the tenth century, Regino, Abbot of Prüm, in the diocese of Treves, insisted on treating possession as disease. But all in vain; the current streaming most directly from sundry texts in the Christian sacred books, and swollen by theology, had become overwhelming.\*

The first great tributary poured into this stream, as we approach the bloom of the Middle Ages, appears to have come from the brain of Michael Psellus. Mingling scriptural texts, Platonic philosophy, and theological statements

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\* For a very thorough and interesting statement on the general subject, see Kirchhoff, *Beziehungen des Dämonen- und Hexenwesens zur deutschen Irrenpflege*, in the *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Psychiatrie*, Berlin, 1888, Bd. xliv, Heft 25. For Roman Catholic authority, see Addis and Arnold, *Catholic Dictionary*, article *Energumens*. For a brief and eloquent summary, see Krafft-Ebing, *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie*, as above; and for a clear view of the transition from pagan mildness in the care of the insane to severity and cruelty under the Christian Church, see Maudsley, *The Pathology of Mind*, London, 1879, p. 523. See also Buchmann, *Die unfreie und die freie Kirche*, Breslau, 1873, p. 251. For other citations, see Kirchhoff, as above, pp. 334-336. For Bishop Nemesius, see *Trélat*, p. 48. For an account of Agobard's general position in regard to this and allied superstitions, see Reginald Lane Poole's *Illustrations of the History of Medieval Thought*, London, 1884.



by great doctors of the Church, with wild utterances obtained from lunatics, he gave forth, about the beginning of the twelfth century, a treatise on *The Work of Demons*. Sacred science was vastly enriched thereby in various ways; but two of his conclusions, the results of his most profound thought, enforced by theologians and popularized by preachers, soon took special hold upon the thinking portion of the people at large. The first of these, which he easily based upon Scripture and St. Basil, was that, since all demons suffer by material fire and brimstone, they must have material bodies; the second was that, since all demons are by nature cold, they gladly seek a genial warmth by entering the bodies of men and beasts.\*

Fed by this stream of thought, and developed in the warm atmosphere of mediæval devotion, the idea of demoniacal possession as the main source of lunacy grew and blossomed and bore fruit in noxious luxuriance.

There had, indeed, come into the Middle Ages an inheritance of scientific thought. The ideas of Hippocrates, Celsus Aurelianus, Galen, and their followers, were from time to time revived; the Arabian physicians, the School of Salerno, such writers as Salicetus and Guy de Chauliac, and even some of the religious orders, did something to keep scientific doctrines alive; but the tide of theological thought was too strong; it became dangerous even to seem to name possible limits to diabolical power. To deny Satan was atheism; and perhaps nothing did so much to fasten the epithet "atheist" upon the medical profession as the suspicion that it did not fully acknowledge diabolical interference in mental disease. Following in the lines of the earlier fathers, St. Anselm, Abélard, St. Thomas Aquinas, Vincent of Beauvais, all the great doctors in the mediæval Church, some of them in spite of occasional misgivings, upheld the idea that insanity is largely or mainly demoniacal possession, basing their belief steadily on the sacred Scriptures; and this belief was followed up in every quarter by more and more constant citation of the text "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." No

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\* See Baas and Werner, cited by Kirchhoff, as above; also Lecky, *Rationalism in Europe*, vol. i, p. 68, and note, New York, 1884. As to Basil's belief in the corporeality of devils, see his *Commentary on Isaiah*, cap. i.



