DEMONIC POSSESSION
IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT

Its Relations
Historical, Medical, and Theological

BY
WM. MENZIES ALEXANDER
M.A., B.Sc., B.D., C.M., M.D.

EDINBURGH
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1902
Auf dem Grund des Glaubenmeeres
Liegt die Perle der Erkenntnis.
PREFACE

DEMONIC Possession in the New Testament is still an unsolved problem. That statement is at variance with a considerable body of opinion recently expressed on two Continents. Nevertheless, it is a correct representation of the present state of the case. Modern writers have attained a certain unanimity, only by approaching the subject from one point of view and confining attention to the more conspicuous phenomena. But any investigation which claims finality must explore the whole environment and scrutinise all residual facts. There is a comparative demonology to be studied; there are types of mental disease to be examined; there is a criterion of genuine possession to be discovered and applied. The inquiry thus broadens out and takes account of many points hitherto ignored or neglected. The whole subject thereby assumes a new complexion and has received restatement accordingly.

This work is an original research; not a com-
Preface

Few authorities have therefore been directly quoted; but any one familiar with the vast literature concerned will readily perceive that previous writings are constantly in sight. The tactics of the controversialist have likewise been avoided as essentially unprofitable. The opinions of others have been combated where necessary; but by an array of facts rather than a war of words. This treatise is at most only a fragment. A large amount of material has been held in retenis, and many important questions have been left untouched. The conclusions attained have been reached independently, and are of a novel character. They confirm, in the highest degree, the claim of Christ to be considered the Good Physician and the Revealer of the Father.

Wm. Menzies Alexander.

Glasgow, January 1902.
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DEMONIC POSSESSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

THE anthropologist here finds himself on ground which he deems common to the races of the lower culture. The expert physician here discovers, in the phenomena of possession, indubitable evidence of mental disease. The student of Scripture, after utilising the best exegetical data, finds himself confronted by a fact to which he finds it difficult to assign any definite significance. The perplexities of the subject are really enormous, and have scarcely been realised as yet. History and medicine and theology have their separate contributions to make towards the solution of this problem; but the awkwardness of the situation lies in the fact that they persist in making these contributions separately. The result is a conflict of opinion or a suspense of judgment.

The trend of modern opinion is most easily
indicated by citing the views of a few eminent and fair-minded writers. These are set forth without prejudice to the detailed investigation of this vexed question.

According to Meyer,¹ the demoniacs of the Gospels were popularly regarded as persons possessed of demons; a view of the matter shared by the first Evangelist. The bodies of the possessed (οἱ δαιμονιζόμενοι) were thus looked upon as the seat and organ of demonic working. They were really sick persons, suffering from peculiar diseases (mania, epilepsy, delirium, hypochondria, paralysis, temporary dumbness); these being apparently inexplicable from physical causes, and believed therefore to have their foundation, not in an abnormal organisation or in natural disturbances of the physical condition, but in the actual indwelling of demonic personalities. Many of these might be counted in a single sick person. The belief is conceivable from the decay of the old theocratic consciousness and of its moral strength, which referred all misfortunes to the sending of God. This belief, however, rendered healing possible only through the acceptance of the existing view, leaving the latter untouched; but making the healing all the more certain for the Messiah, Who has power over the kingdom of devils, and Who now stood victoriously opposed to all diabolic power.

If it be assumed that Jesus Himself shared the opinion of His age and nation regarding the reality of

possession by demons, then we must either set up the old doctrine on the authority of Jesus, or attribute to Him an error, not simply physiological, but essentially religious, and irreconcilable with the pure height of His divine knowledge.

Against the old view, apart from all physiological and medical objections, the following are urged as decisive:—

1. The non-occurrence of demoniacs in the Old Testament.
2. The undisputed healing of the same by many exorcists.
3. The non-occurrence of reliable instances in modern times.
4. The complete silence of the fourth Evangelist on the subject.
5. The absence from Paul's Epistles of definite references to expulsions.
6. The conduct of the demoniacs, who were not at all filled with godless dispositions and anti-christian wickedness, which was necessarily to be expected as the result of the real indwelling of devils.

The opinion of Dean Farrar¹ is as follows: "So many good, able, and perfectly orthodox writers have, with the same data before them, arrived at different conclusions on this question, that any certainty respecting it appears to be impossible. My own view under these circumstances is of no particular import-

¹ *Life of Christ*, chap. xxiii.
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