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ARTICLE VIII.

THE MALADY OF SAUL, KING OF ISRAEL.

BY EDWARD M. MERRINS, M.D.

"YE daughters of Israel, weep over Saul. . . . How are the mighty fallen!" This text has furnished the theme for many noble and eloquent sermons; and not great preachers only, but great artists, poets, and musicians have also felt the singular fascination of the tragic career of the first king of Israel,—“the half-shrouded figure that stands erect and stately, but touched with such unutterable sadness, at the very threshold of Jewish kingly history; that still attracts, and touches, and interests, and still appeals across the ages to human sympathy, in spite of crime, and error, and madness, and defeat.” In the crucible of modern historical criticism, however, the facts of Saul’s life seem to be melting away into myths and unwarranted redactions, and it is a very shrouded, ghostly creature that is now left to us. We are told that neither the outer nor the inner life of the heroic king is intelligible. It is hinted that his malady may have been nothing more serious than “that heightening of the physical powers under the influence of rage against Yahweh’s enemies, which characterized the successful great warriors and athletes.” But as such wild moods are found in substantial creatures of flesh and blood, there is a series of questions which dissipate the malady entirely. “Was it a melancholy produced by a wild longing for battle? Was it but the morbid reflex of the prophetic inspiration of Saul’s heroic period? Does the story of the witch

of Endor suggest it was a frenzied anticipation of evil for Saul and his people? Is it historical at all?"¹ And so these our actors were all spirits, and are melted into air, into thin air, and the unsubstantial pageant fades, and leaves not a rack behind. Perhaps a reconsideration of the narrative, accepting the facts practically as they are stated in the sacred records, will enable us to identify the disease from which Saul suffered, and to that extent at least will help to preserve his history as that of a real though sorely tried human being. That he should be classed among "the shipwrecks of faith" may be unavoidable, yet the sympathy which can be touched with the feeling of human infirmity, physical as well as moral, may extenuate the misdemeanors for which the unfortunate king has been severely judged, and induce pity rather than condemnation, when his affliction is more clearly understood.

The relation of moral evil to physical infirmity is often very close, and in few diseases are the two more inextricably tangled than in epilepsy. As we believe this was the malady of Saul, a brief description of it must be given to furnish the matrix into which the various scattered allusions to Saul's disorder may be fitted.²

Epilepsy is a disease of the nervous system characterized by sudden attacks of unconsciousness, which may, or may not, be accompanied by convulsions. Abstaining from fine distinctions, it may be said there are the following ways in which the disease is manifested: (1) *le grand mal*, in which unconsciousness is profound and prolonged, and the convulsions are general and violent; (2) *le petit mal*, in which unconsciousness may be momentary, and convulsive movements very slight or absent; (3) *psychical epilepsy*, in which mental

¹ *Encyclopedia Biblica*, art. "Saul."

² See Allbutt, *System of Medicine*, vii. and viii.; Osler, *Practice of Medicine, and other medical works*.

and emotional disturbances may appear in the intervallary periods, entirely independent of the convulsions. There is still another form,—cortical or Jacksonian epilepsy,—in which the convulsions are confined to a single limb or set of muscles, and consciousness is retained; but, as it is due to an irritative lesion of the brain such as may be caused by injury or some abnormal growth, no further reference will be made to it.

Le grand mal.—In a typical attack of *grand mal*, the ushering-in symptom is generally a peculiar, momentary sensation, either physical or psychical, known as an “aura,” from the old idea that the arteries contained air, and that the rising of this air produced the sensation. The patient then utters a strange, unearthly cry, becomes unconscious, falls headlong to the ground, and the whole body is thrown into convulsions. The fall is often sudden and violent, as if the epileptic were hurled down by some invisible, external force, and may be such as to occasion serious injury, or involve him in mortal danger from burning, drowning, or other accident. During the convulsions the patient seems to choke, foam issues from the mouth, the teeth are fixed, the hands contracted, the eyes distorted. After a variable time the convulsions cease, the patient lies in a state of exhausted relaxation, often sleeping for some hours, and then awakes mentally clear, but feeling sore and bruised. A vivid and accurate description of such an attack is given in the New Testament by the distressed father of the boy brought to the Lord: “Master, I beseech thee to look upon my son; for he is mine only child: and behold, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out; and it convulseth him that he foameth, and it hardly departeth from him, bruising him sorely,” and “ofttimes he falleth into the fire, and oftentimes into the water.”¹

¹ Luke ix. 37-43; Matt. xvii. 15.

Attacks usually occur without any obvious exciting cause; but annoyance, fright, or any sudden mental emotion may induce them. In some cases they occur only in the night, so it is possible for a person to be epileptic for years without himself or any one else being aware of it.

Pre-paroxysmal stage.—It must not be supposed, however, that all seizures commence in this very sudden manner, like a bolt out of the blue. Those living with epileptics can often predict a seizure days beforehand, by observing some mental or physical change in them. They are nervous, restless, sleepless, and cannot properly perform their usual duties; or sullen, moody, lethargic; some show impairment of memory, others are troubled with hallucinations, or with delusions of persecution; many are irascible, quarrelsome, inclined to commit personal assaults on the slightest provocation; and there are those in whom the nervous excitability increases as the attack draws near, who give way to uncontrollable outbursts of furious violence, during which murderous assaults are committed, often on relatives and friends, but sometimes on persons against whom the epileptic has a grievance real or imaginary, so that the assault in such cases seems to be the result of premeditation. Actions performed in this condition may not afterwards be remembered.

Some patients are aware themselves an hour or two beforehand when an attack is impending by their depression, disquietude, or apprehension, or by such physical symptoms as a slight trembling, or a sensation as if the limbs were heavily weighted, and so have time to prepare for the seizure.¹

¹ For a curious illustration of this preparation, see the New York papers for May 16, 1904. Passengers on a trolley car "were surprised when the car reached Lexington Avenue, to see the motorman shut off the power, apply the brakes, step down into the street and begin to go through contortions." Later, "the motorman said he was subject to epileptic fits, and knew when they were coming on."

Auræ.—The immediate warnings, or auræ, are manifested in a variety of ways. Among them are the emotions of fear, terror, the fixed idea of some impending calamity, the sense that whatever is being done is morally wrong, a dreamy condition, giddiness very often, and peculiar sensations referred to some part of the body, or connected with the special senses of hearing, sight, smell, or taste. The auditory warning may be the sound of a bell, whistle, music, or distinct voices. The visual warning may be a flash of light, stars, objects of various kinds, persons, scenes. Occasionally the warnings of the special senses are associated, especially the auditory and the visual. A very important characteristic of sense deceptions, is the powerful and irresistible influence which they may exert over the entire thought and activity of the patient.

Le petit mal.—In *le petit mal*, the disease usually manifests itself by momentary unconsciousness and giddiness. “Suddenly, for example, at the dinner-table, the subject stops talking and eating, the eyes become fixed, and the face slightly pale. Anything which may have been in the hand is usually dropped. In a moment or two consciousness is regained, and the patient resumes conversation as if nothing had happened.” There is therefore nothing appalling to the onlookers, as in *grand mal*, but in many of these cases the effect upon the mental condition of the patient is far more disastrous than in the convulsive form.

Post-paroxysmal stage.—After the attack, some epileptics may remain in a most dangerous mental condition perhaps for days, especially after *petit mal*. Certain of them are troubled with hallucinations which are systematized into delusions; others are noisy, violent, perverse. There are those who pass into a state of automatism resembling somnambulism, unconsciously performing acts with so much apparent

intelligence that to others they appear to be volitional. These acts may be relatively harmless, as when a patient undresses himself wherever he happens to be, probably under the vague sense that something is wrong and he ought to go to bed; or they may be very serious indeed, as the committal of homicidal acts of violence. Thus one patient whose automatic condition following the seizure generally lasted for ten days, quarreled with his wife while in this state and shot her dead. As his murderous act appeared to the juridical mind to have been the result of sane premeditation, he was convicted of murder and sentenced to be hanged. Afterward, on account of some legal technicality, he was released. Six months later, while again in this abnormal state, he committed suicide. Anger, violence, retaliation for imaginary wrong, purposeless acts, assaults, murder, have all been recorded as occurring during this post-epileptic state. On emerging from it, all remembrance of acts performed during its continuance may have disappeared.

Intervallary period.—Between the attacks, some patients are in quite their normal condition, but sooner or later there generally take place a blunting of the higher mental qualities, and impairment of memory, especially for recent events.¹ In others there appears the condition known as “psychic” epilepsy. “The essential feature of psychical epilepsy is the disturbance of consciousness. Patients are confused, move and act in a mechanical or automatic manner, and often present evidences of illusions, hallucinations, and delusions. They wander aim-

¹ As total loss of memory may occur for a variable period in all cases of epilepsy, Saul's failure to recognize David when the latter was about to encounter Goliath, may perhaps be thus accounted for; but Abner's lapse of memory cannot be so easily explained, except, perhaps, on the ground that he assumed it was the whim of the irascible and capricious king not to recognize David, and, courtier-like, fell in with it.

lessly about, and do not appear to recognize any one, but will sometimes reply incoherently to questions. Occasionally they assume fixed or peculiar positions,¹ or gaze steadily at one point. In some instances they display a heightened excitement, and again a gloomy stupor.”² Numerous criminal acts have been committed while in this state.

Effect of epilepsy on mind and character.—Epilepsy may coexist with a healthy growth and development of the intellectual faculties, and a very high degree of intelligence and even genius may be associated with it. Julius Cæsar, Augustus, Napoleon, Peter the Great, Pascal, Petrarch, Mahomet, Molière, Handel, and many other great men were epileptics; indeed, Lombroso somewhat pessimistically defines genius itself as a symptom of hereditary degeneration of the epileptoid variety. It is not until the fits become frequent,—those of the *petit mal* being the worse,—that the mental faculties become seriously impaired. Nevertheless, even when no definite, observable mental weakness is present, certain peculiarities are common to the whole class of epileptics, and dominate their character, such as an explosive irritability of temper, and a state of

¹ Compare the remarkable lines of Browning, descriptive of the attitude in which David found Saul, when the latter was in one of his abnormal periods:—

“At the first I saw naught but the blackness : But soon I descried
A something more black than the blackness—the vast, the upright
Main prop which sustains the pavilion : and slow into sight
Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all.
Then a sunbeam, that burst through the tent-roof, showed Saul.
He stood erect as that tent prop, both arms stretched out wide
On the great cross-support in the center, that goes to each side ;
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught in his pangs
And waiting his change, the king-serpent all heavily hangs,
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance come
With the spring-time,—so agonized Saul, drear and stark, blind
and dumb.”

² Defendorf, *Clinical Psychiatry*, p. 340.

mind which makes them more than ordinarily susceptible to religious impressions. They are apt to be influenced greatly by the mystical and awe-inspiring, and may believe themselves to be inspired; they are scrupulous about the forms of religion, but there is not always a corresponding moral elevation. This aspect of religion need not occasion any disquieting reflections, for, as Professor James well says, "In the psychopathic temperament we have the emotionality which is the *sine qua non* of moral perception; we have the intensity and tendency to emphasis which are the essence of moral vigor, and we have the mysticism which carries one's interests beyond the surface of the sensible world."¹

We are now ready to see whether the study of Saul's life and the various allusions to his disorder, justify the conclusion that he was an epileptic. Of the preceding conditions and history which form the background, as it were, of every case of chronic disease,—the parental diseases and weaknesses, the hereditary tendencies, the childish ailments of the patient, his mental and physical peculiarities,—we are quite ignorant. All we know is that Kish, his father, was a man of substance or honor, and that Saul's early years were spent on his father's farm. Granted that he was an epileptic, a peaceful agricultural life, with little or no mental perturbation, would have been most favorable to his healthy development. But the times were dark and stormy; the people were kept in a state of perpetual turmoil by their disastrous wars. Every time the youthful Saul was compelled to go to a Philistian smithy to sharpen "his ploughshare, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock," his soul must have burned with indignation at the humiliation imposed upon him and his people, and the longing to be free from the restrictions of the helot must have

¹ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 25.

been intense. Many fierce questions arose in his heart which remained unsolved until Samuel answered them. When first Saul appears on the scene, he is a handsome youth of extraordinary stature: "from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people." In this excess of bodily development may there not lie the physical basis of his later abnormal mental condition? Some of the cases of gigantism, if not all, are pathological, being closely related to a disease called acromegaly, in which the morbid growth of the bones is accompanied by symptoms of mental disorder.¹

The nation, weary of the rule of the incapable and morally worthless sons of Samuel, had requested the aged prophet to find for them a king. On a certain day it was divinely revealed to him that on the morrow a visitor would call upon him who was to be anointed for the office. Saul duly appeared, and immediately won Samuel's heart by his handsome appearance and engaging qualities, and by his unaffected modesty when it was made known to him that he was chosen to be king of Israel. He spent the day and night at Samuel's house, and during that time high converse passes between the two, the prophet answering all the questions in the youth's heart. Saul's religious fervor and zeal, and his openness to instruction, made a deeply favorable impression on Samuel, and it was not an official kiss, but one of personal affection, that he gave him as a farewell salute. Whether at that time there had been previous attacks of the malady we cannot tell, but Saul was presumably at that age of early adolescence when they very commonly begin. It must have been in a strange state of emotional excitement when he left the prophet's house early the following morning, and was told that, among other

¹Lannoy and Roy, *Rev. Neurolog.*, January 31, 1903; *Lancet*, March 14, 1903; art. "Giants and Dwarfs," *Lancet*, August 6, 1904, pp. 406-407.

wonderful events to happen before the day was over, he would find himself prophesying among a band of prophets, and his whole nature would be changed. The prophets of those times were not of the highest order. It may even be they were men after the fashion of Mahometan fakirs, or dancing and howling dervishes, who express their religious exaltation in most eccentric ways.¹ Many of them, no doubt, were epileptics. An eye-witness, in describing the Doseh or Trampling of the Egyptian dervishes, says of the devotees that "some writhe in agony, some swoon, some are in fits, while still with foaming lips they strive to murmur the praise of Allah."² At the present day the Siberian Shamans, who profess to have intercourse with spirits and operate in a state of convulsive exaltation, choose their pupils by preference from among epileptic children.³ "But that good Spirit who seeks men more than they seek him, in condescending to use poor human language for the purposes of religion, must also have stooped to the picture language, to the rude instruments, symbols, and sacraments of an early or undeveloped faith."⁴ So it was with Saul. "The Spirit of God came mightily upon him, and he prophesied among them." In such company and in a state of religious ecstasy, the overpowering excitement may easily have culminated in an attack of epilepsy. Certainly on a later occasion when we find him again among the prophets, and he undresses himself,—a frequent occurrence during the epileptic state,—"and fell down naked all that day and all that night," disordered in mind and under the vehement agitation of a spirit, as Josephus records, the details point strongly to an

¹ Cornill, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 13.

² Gordon Cumming, art. "Egyptian Dervishes," *Gent. Mag.*, N. S., **xxix.** 545.

³ Lombroso, *The Man of Genius*, p. 40.

⁴ G. A. Smith, *The Twelve Prophets*, i. 16.

epileptic condition.¹ May not also the strange hiding of himself when the lots were being drawn as to who should be king, be accounted for in the same way, the excitement, as the lots drew nearer and nearer, bringing on the attack? Further, would not this explain why the sons of Belial despised him, and brought him no present, and contemptuously asked, "How shall this man save us?" in spite of his physical stature and strength being such as to immediately commend him to those who desired a warlike king? To their disparaging remarks Saul made no reply: "he was as though he were deaf." This may mean that he was only dissembling his resentment, a supposition which his subsequent conduct does not warrant; or, on the other hand, it may mean that he was in the dazed condition of the post-epileptic state.

The sacred historian states it was an evil spirit that troubled² Saul. That epilepsy was due to supernatural agency we know to have been the universal belief in former times. As far back as the Stone Age, holes were bored in the skulls of epileptics to afford a means of escape to the spirits supposed to be imprisoned within them. In fact, the name *epilepsia*, "a falling upon" as by a spiritual agent, was given to the disease by the Greeks, in the belief that its startling manifestations must be the work of some unseen agent of demoniacal ferocity and strength. Similar views were held by the Romans, who called it the "comitial sickness," because the polling for the *comitia centuriata* was null and void if any voter was seized with epilepsy while the votes were being taken. The Arabs also looked upon the subjects of epilepsy as being under supernatural influence; Mahomet's fits, for example, being regarded by his followers, and probably also by himself, as evidence

¹ 1 Sam. xix. 24; cf. also, xviii. 10.

² The verb translated "troubled," means to "fall suddenly upon, or startle."

of his inspiration.¹ This evil spirit is said to have "terrified" Saul. We have already seen that among the psychical auræ is the sensation of fear, of terror, or a fixed idea that some frightful calamity is impending. Another little detail is furnished by Josephus, who says: "Some strange and demoniacal disorders came upon him, and brought upon him such suffocations as were ready to choke him."² Hippocrates, also, in his description of an epileptic seizure, says, "The patient seems to choke," the breathing often being interfered with during the whole attack. Moreover, David's music is said to have made Saul breathe more freely.³ Other symptoms pointing to epilepsy are the instability of mood and conduct, and the wild, uncontrollable outbursts of furious violence.

Saul furnishes many illustrations of the strange instability of character which is one of the most striking mental features of the epileptic. At times he is brilliant, daring, confident of success, as in his early conflict with Nahash, and on many occasions when "he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines, and whithersoever he turned himself he was victorious." At other times, as when the hulking brute Goliath defied him and his army, he is apathetic, despondent, afraid. When the people wished to put to death the sons of Belial who despised him, he is magnanimous, and declares, "There shall not a man be put to death this day"; yet he can mercilessly slaughter helpless priests, with their wives and children, for showing hospitality to a man he thinks is his foe. He persistently pursues David with murderous intent, and then, overcome by David's generous forbearance to raise his hand against the Lord's

¹ Muir's *Life of Mahomet*, p. 7.

² *Antiq. of the Jews*, vi. 8. ³ 1 Sam. xvi. 23.

anointed, he cries out: "Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rendered unto me good, whereas I have rendered unto thee evil." In such moods Saul is lovely and pleasant, "for these patients will sometimes be found marvelously sweet in disposition, benevolent, affectionate, and considerate"; yet quickly his mood changes, and he pursues David with the same bitter hatred as before. He is so morbidly pious as to be willing to kill his son in order scrupulously to fulfill a rash religious vow; but over and over again, when plain commands are laid upon him, he displeases Samuel by his thoughtlessness and disobedience, so that he has to be told that obedience is better than sacrifice. In his desire for the purity of religion he puts out of the land all those with familiar spirits, wizards, and other traffickers with the powers of darkness, yet in a crisis of his life he seeks the services of the witch of Endor. It is hardly necessary to give further illustrations of this changeableness.

Of the sudden outbursts of fury and acts of homicidal violence characteristic of the epileptic, which may occur immediately before or after a fit, there are several examples. More than once while David is trying to soothe him with music, Saul hurls his spear at him. His anger is kindled because David is absent from a feast, and during the course of his inquiries he gives his son Jonathan the deadliest insult one Oriental can give to another by reviling his mother, accuses him of being in collusion with David, and then casts his ever-ready spear at him to smite him.¹ Similarly, the epileptic Na-

¹ According to a venerable supersition, epileptics were always worse at the new moon. Says an old English writer: "And this is proved in meene that be lunatike or madde, and also in menne that be epulentike [epileptic], or having the falling sickness, that be moeste greeved in the beginning of the new moone." By a coincidence,

oleon, at a time when Prince Metternich was most necessary to him, insultingly asks him, how much money he receives from England for defending her interests; on another occasion he throws Prince Louis violently out of the room; on yet another, he kicks Senator Volney in the stomach. Saul can also be more deliberate in his cruelty. He tries to kill David by sending him on a military expedition against the Philistines. When that scheme fails, he tries to murder him at night, and David is only saved by the ready wit of his wife. Saul's massacre of the priests and of the Gibeonites shows the same merciless, fanatical spirit as the inhuman execution of the eight hundred captives of the defeated clan Bani Koreitza by Mahomet,—another epileptic.¹

The treatment of Saul's malady by music is quite consistent with its being epilepsy, as music from the earliest times has been employed as a healing agent, and more especially has it ever been held that it has power to soothe the savage breast. Pythagoras and Xenocrates recommended it in the treatment of mental disorders, and many centuries later, Ferinelli, the eminent singer, is said to have cured Philip of Spain of homicidal mania by singing ballads to him daily. In various ancient Egyptian papyri, incantations are prescribed for similar conditions. It was believed that words and sounds emitted at the favorable moment with the "correct voice," had power over the gods to make them do the will of the performers.² As epilepsy was held to be an obsession, music would this outbreak of Saul occurred at this precise period (1 Sam. xx. 24). One is inclined to reckon as good fish everything that comes into the net, but without indorsing this superstition, it may be said that in an age when persons so afflicted believed in the baleful influences of the moon, it is quite possible that such belief and the consequent anticipations, would have a tendency to make the recrudescence of their mental disorder coincident with the appearance of the "new moon."

¹ Muir, *Life of Mahomet*, p. 330. ² Maspero, *Dawn of Civilization*.

naturally be used to restore the patient to his normal condition. It was not simply when Saul was overcome by mental depression between attacks, that David played and sang before him; he played during the actual seizure to exorcise the evil spirit. "And it came to pass when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took the harp and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him." The word translated "refreshed," means more exactly, "to breathe freely," which, as we have already observed, is in favor of the malady being epilepsy. When the violent convulsions ceased, the evil spirit was supposed to have taken its departure; but the playing may have continued during the dreamy post-epileptic state to keep him soothed. When Othello is overcome by the conviction of Desdemona's unfaithfulness, and falls prostrate, Iago tells Cassio that Othello has fallen into an epilepsy. Cassio suggests rubbing the temples by way of immediate treatment. Iago replies:—

"No, forbear;
The lethargy must have its quiet course;
If not, he foams at mouth, and by and by
Breaks out to savage madness."¹

David's musical performances were not always successful in preventing these subsequent outbreaks of savage madness. Several times with the lyre still in his hand did David have to run for his life from the murderous spear of Saul.

It has usually been assumed that Saul's malady was hypochondriasis or melancholia.² But in melancholia the social feeling almost invariably tends to disappear. The patient has no pleasure in society, and avoids it; he is solitary and egotistical. Saul was sociable; it is no hyperbole to say that he was lovely and pleasant. Again, in melancholia, the feelings which have anger as their fundamental emotion are absent; all combative-

¹ Othello, iv. i. 51.

² Bennett, *Diseases of the Bible*, p. 83.

ness is lost; the patient is meek, humble, and submissive. These are hardly the characteristics of Saul's malady as depicted in the Bible. In chronic dementia, saliva may dribble from the mouth, and perhaps it was close observation of a person so afflicted that enabled David to successfully simulate madness at the court of Achish, the king of Gath; but this is a symptom common to the later stages of various mental diseases when the patients have become complete wrecks, and David may often have come across such cases. There is nothing to indicate that Saul had reached this terminal condition.

It has also been held that his case is a typical one of recurrent paroxysmal mania;¹ but, as an attack of mania rarely passes off under three or four months, this diagnosis is not congruous with the narrative. The same objection would apply to the diagnosis of *folie circulaire*, which consists of periods of exaltation, depression, and sanity, following each other in regular succession.

We pass now to the closing scenes of Saul's life, and the gloom is unrelieved by a touch of hope or brightness. The Philistines had again declared war, and Saul feared the issue. Samuel, his early friend and faithful counsellor, was dead, and there was no one else to whom he could turn for help; the priestly caste was alienated from him, and their intercessions on his behalf were inefficacious; he prayed himself, but the heavens were as brass, no response came, and this deepened his consciousness of estrangement from the Most High. What with the recurring seizures of his incurable malady, and intense spiritual depression, he felt he was a beaten man before the battle began: "When Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly." His

¹ Hastings, Bible Dictionary, art. "Saul."

hopefulness and courage were clean forspent. In desperation he sought intercourse with Samuel through necromancy. Changing his kingly raiment for ordinary costume, and with a headband or mask over the upper part of his face to prevent recognition,¹ he went at night with two companions to the witch of Endor, one of that class he had formerly tried to exterminate. Whether she actually had the power of holding intercourse with the dead, who can say? There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy, and if modern psychologists who hold no brief for the truth of the biblical narratives are inclined to think that incursions into the subliminal consciousness of man may be made by supernatural powers, it is not for us to contend otherwise. However that may be, the interview must have been a striking one. The woman in mortal fear of being entrapped by her unexpected visitants and denounced by them to the authorities for pursuing an unlawful calling, refusing to proceed until assured of safety by solemn oath; the king in a state of nervous tension, full of gloomy anticipations of coming disaster, his fears and nervousness made more profound by weariness and want of food (for he had eaten nothing all day), and by the solitude of the place, the darkness of the night, and the feeling that he was engaged in an unholy enterprise,—all the circumstances being such as to put him exactly in that condition when a return of his malady might be expected. The woman commences her incantations, and in reply to her question, "Whom shall I bring up unto thee?" the king names Samuel. He was the one who in God's hand had placed him on the throne, and had held the kingdom together during a dark and stormy period. Could he not do something, or suggest some course of action now? In his excitement, as the in-

¹ Cf. 1 Kings xx. 38.

cantations proceed, the king removes his headband, so uncovering his face, and the woman recognizes him. "And when the woman saw Saul, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me, for thou art Saul?" Again the king assured her that she had nothing to fear, and the woman continued with her incantations. Trembling with excitement, the king asked, "What seest thou?" The woman said she saw a god coming out of the earth, and further described him as an old man covered with a robe. If the above reading of verse twelve be correct,¹ it does not necessarily follow from the text that she actually saw Samuel. Josephus says that Saul "bade her bring up to him the *soul* of Samuel." In any event her task was very easy. Her vague description satisfied the vehement anticipations of the king, and convinced him the old prophet was invisibly present. If he had seen Samuel himself, his questions to the woman would have been needless. "And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and did obeisance." The nervous strain now induced the preliminary symptoms of an epileptic attack.

The warnings which precede an attack of epilepsy often take the form of certain ideas which are generally of the nature of complex sense-perceptions related to vision. Not only may a sense of fear, for example, be accompanied by the vision of some cause for it, but the more elaborate visual sensations are such as to involve a psychical process weaving the whole into the semblance of coherence. A remarkable instance is that

¹ Ancient scribes were liable to confound the two names, Saul and Samuel, for evidence of which it is enough to refer to 1 Sam. xi. 7, where the rival readings, "after Saul," "after Samuel," stand side by side; and 1 Sam. xxviii. 12, where the cry of the witch of Endor is said to have been called forth by the sight of "Samuel," a palpable error (as Perles has pointed out) for "Saul" (Encycl. Biblica, art. "Saul").

of a woman who saw London in ruins, the Thames emptied to receive them, and herself the lonely survivor.¹ This combination of visual sensation with definite thoughts concerning it, may be discerned in many other forms. Now the one thought, the paramount desire, in Saul's mind at that time was to see or to hold converse with Samuel. Such an intense longing would be extremely likely to furnish the background, as it were, for the psychical auræ. Sir Walter Scott relates² that, shortly after the death of Lord Byron, he was one day reading with great interest an account of his habits and opinions. Having finished the subject, he was passing from his sitting-room into the entrance-hall, when suddenly he saw, right before him and in a standing posture, the exact representation of his departed friend, whose recollection had been so strongly brought to his imagination. He stopped for a moment, so as to notice the wonderful accuracy with which fancy had impressed upon the bodily eye the peculiarities of dress and posture of the illustrious poet, and the vision vanished. Sir Walter was sensible of the delusion, and dispelled it. But epileptics are not able to distinguish between the real and visionary; with them the delusion is very real, and often persists into the post-paroxysmal stages of the attack. Thus "M. W. has visions of a heavenly visitant appearing to her, after which she has a fit. When recovering she continues to see the same figure in the sky, and imagines she is an angel called to heaven; she answers the voice and makes repeated attempts at flight." It is thus seen that the last impression in consciousness before a fit may be revived after the paroxysm is over and held in the consciousness again. This has been called the epileptic echo, and it may take the form of a directing voice,

¹ Allbutt, *System of Medicine*, vii. 775.

² *Demonology and Witchcraft*, p. 45.

an imperative idea, or a fixed delusion. With Saul it was the definite impression that he had conversed with Samuel, who had foretold that on the morrow he and his people were doomed to defeat, and death awaited him and his sons.

After the auræ, "Saul fell straightway his full length upon the earth." The attack came upon him, expended its force, and left him exhausted: "there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no bread all the day nor all the night." In spite of her unholy calling, the witch seems to have been a kind-hearted woman, and deserving of the praise given her by Josephus with a generous hand. Seeing the king was "sore troubled," she persuaded him to take some refreshment. Strengthened in body and quieter in mind, but with an unshakable presentiment of coming disaster that tended to bring about its own fulfillment, the king and his companions then returned to the Israelite camp.

On the morrow, "the Philistines fought against Israel, and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa." Saul and his sons were very hard pressed. "And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers overtook him, and he was greatly distressed by the archers." It is confessedly a difficult task to make a coherent narrative of what follows, but in the light of this understanding of Saul's complaint the writer thinks it can be done. Plutarch states it was reported of Julius Cæsar,—who our readers will remember was also an epileptic,—that in one of his campaigns, as he was drawing up his army and giving his orders, he had an attack of his old distemper; and that upon its approach, before it had overpowered and deprived him of his senses, as he felt the first agitations, he directed his people to carry him to a neighboring tower, where he lay in quiet till the fit was over. Is it not easily conceivable that

Saul, weary, wounded, and despondent, was overcome during the battle in like manner? He too felt the approaches of his ailment; but for him there was no quiet refuge where he could stay until the evil was overpast; and he knew when the Philistines found him in that helpless condition, that whatever malice could suggest would be done to him. He therefore wanted to die at once, it was foreordained he should, so he appealed to his armor-bearer to thrust him through. The armor-bearer would not, "for he was sore afraid." May be, from his intimacy with Saul, he also discerned the epileptic state was approaching, and perhaps feared the consequences that would happen to him if he killed a man in whom an evil spirit was already beginning to exert its malign influence. Leaning for support upon his sword from sheer weakness, Saul then turned to an Amalekite who was standing near, and made a similar appeal to him. But his physical weakness now overcame him, and he fell heavily to the ground, wounding himself with his sword in doing so, for his senses were confused. Still he struggled to make himself understood: "Stand, I pray thee, over me," he said to the Amalekite, "and slay me; for anguish [giddiness, cramps, convulsions] ¹ hath taken hold of me; because my life is yet whole in me." And so he passed into a merciful state of unconsciousness. His life *was* yet whole in him; it was not a mortal wound by his own hand that stretched his kingly form in the dust, but this terrible ailment, which had been the torment of his life and the ruin of a noble career.

¹ The Hebrew word אַנְגוּשׁ translated "anguish" occurs nowhere else, and is of doubtful meaning. The Rabbins interpret it, some "cramp," others "giddiness." The former is the most probable (Speaker's Comm.). Why not "convulsion" instead of "cramp"? The other translation, "giddiness," fits in well, however, with the theory of epilepsy, as this is the most common symptom of all, immediately preceding the convulsions.

The Amalekite, who did not have the scruples and fears of the armor-bearer, and "was sure that [Saul] could not live after that he was fallen,"¹ brought the troubled life to its earthly close.

No wonder Saul has been reckoned among the shipwrecks of faith. Certainly the ending of his life could hardly have been more disastrous,—his army defeated, his sons slain, the succession to the throne passing to another line, the personal sense of estrangement from God and man, and then his violent death with no glimmering of hope beyond, nothing but the darkness of Sheol. And yet, when we consider how greatly he suffered in body and mind, and that much of his spiritual infirmity was almost certainly due to his nervous disease, may not the glorious prophecy put in the mouth of David by the modern poet after all be true?

" O Saul, it shall be

A Face like my face that receives thee ; a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by forever ; a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee !
See the Christ stand ! "

¹ 2 Sam. i. 10.