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THE WITCH OF ENDOR.

BY MRS. SEBA SMITH.

THE unfortunate are always superstitious; just in proportion as the calamities of life impair the freedom of the human mind, do the elements of the dark and the mysterious gather about it. The past has been embittered by care and disappointment; and, in the words of Scripture, their "way is hedged up," there is no hopeful vista to relieve the gloom of the present, and they appeal to omens, predictions, and the rude superstitions current amongst the vulgar.

Too feeble to boldly enter the precincts of Truth, grasping with a strong faith the very horns of the altar; and thus to learn how the temporary yields to that which is eternal; how the partial is lost in the universal; they linger about the threshold, perplexing themselves with dim shadows and faint intimations. They pause in the vestibule, where Superstition sits portress, rather than enter to worship Truth herself.

It is the error of their destiny more than their own. The light that is in them has become darkness. The clearness and vigor of perception is lost under the pressure of circumstances, in which human wisdom would seem to be of no avail, and they yield at length as to an irresistible fate.

The history of Saul, the first king of Israel, is an affecting record of this kind. Raised to the dignity of royal power, by no ambition of his own, but by Divine appointment, in compliance with the will of a people weary of their Theocracy, we look upon him from the first as an instrument, a being impelled rather than impelling.

Painful, indeed, is the contrast of the proud and handsome youth commencing his royal career in the freshness and freedom of early manhood, when life presented but a long perspective of sunshine and verdure, to that of the stricken man, weighed down by calamities, bereft of hope, bereft of faith, yet manfully marching to that fatal field where death only had been promised him.

From the commencement of his career the "choice young man and goodly" seems to have had a leaning to the occult, a willingness to avail himself of mysterious power, rather than to arrive at results through ordinary and recognized channels. We find him commissioned by his father, going forth in quest of three stray asses, which he seeks, not by the hill-sides and pastures of Israel, but by consulting the seer, Samuel. The holy man hails him king, and gently rebukes him as to the object of his visit, by saying, "set not thy mind upon the asses which were lost three days ago, for they are found."

Ardent and impulsive, he now goeth up and down in the spirit of prophecy, with the strange men who expound its mysteries, and anon he sendeth the bloody tokens to the tribes of Israel, rousing them from the yoke of oppression.

Generous and heroic, he repels the foes of his people, and loads the chivalric David with princely favors. Yet beneath all this, like hidden waters, heard but unseen, lurked this dark and gloomy mysticism, that embittered even his proudest and brightest hours. An evil spirit troubled him, which only the melody of the sweet psalmist of Israel could beguile.

Moses had been familiar with all the forms of Egyptian worship, and all their many sources of knowledge: but, as the promulgator of a new and holier faith, he wished to draw his people from the subtleties of divination, and induce them to a direct and open reliance upon Him who alone "knoweth the end from the beginning." No insight to the future is needed by the strong in faith and the strong in action. Hence the divinely appointed legislator prohibited all intercourse with those who dealt in this forbidden lore—*forbidden*, as subversive of human hope and human happiness. For the mind loses its tone when once impressed with the belief that the "shadows of coming events" have fallen upon it.

The impetuous and vacillating Saul, impelled by an irresistible instinct to this species of knowledge, sought to protect himself from its influence by removing the sources of it from his kingdom. For this reason he put in force the severe enactments of Moses against dealers in what were termed "familiar spirits." Thus betraying the infirmity of his manhood, by removing temptation rather than bravely resisting it.

Vain and superstitious, oh "choice young man and goodly," thou wert no match for the rival found in the person of the chivalric David, the warrior poet, the king minstrel, the man of many crimes, yet redeeming all by the fervency of his penitence, and his unflinching faith in the Highest. Yet the noble and the heroic did never quite desert thee, even when thou didst implore the holy prophet to honor thee in the presence "of the elders of the people," and he turned and worshiped with thee. A kingly pageant when the sceptre was departing from thee.

Disheartened by intestine troubles, appalled by foreign invasion, the spirit of the unhappy king forsook him, and it is said "his heart greatly trembled." Samuel, the stern and uncompromising revealer of truth, was no more. Unsustained by a hearty reliance

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upon divine things, Saul was like a reed cast upon the waters, in this his hour of trial and perplexity.

"When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams nor by prophets." Unhappy man, thy prayers were those of doubt, not of faith, and how could they enter that which is within the veil!

In the utterness of his despair, he consults the Woman of Endor. She might not control events, but she could reveal them. Perilous and appalling as his destiny threatened, he would yet know the worst.

There was majesty in thee, oh Saul! even in thy disguise and agony as thou didst confront thy stern counsellor brought from the land of shadows—"the old man covered with a mantle." When Samuel demands, "why hast thou disquieted me?" we share in the desolateness and sorrow which thy answer implies.

"God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams, therefore have I called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do."

The Woman of Endor! That is a strange perversion of taste that would represent her hideous in aspect. To me she seemeth all that is genial and lovely in womanhood.

So great had been the mental suffering of Saul, that he had fasted all that day and night, and at the terrible doom announced by the seer his strength utterly forsook him, and he fell all along upon the earth.

Now cometh the gentle ministry of the Woman of Endor. "Behold thou hast prevailed with me to hearken to thy voice, even at the peril of my life; now, also, I pray thee, hearken to the voice of thy handmaid, and let me set a morsel of bread before thee, and eat, that thou mayest have strength."

Can aught be more beautiful, more touching or womanly in its appeal? Aught more foreign from a cruel and treacherous nature, aloof from human sympathies, and dealing with forbidden or unholy knowledge?

To the Jew, trained to seek counsel only from Jehovah, the Woman of Endor was a dealer with spirits of evil. With us, who imbibe truth through a thousand channels made turbid by prejudice and error, she is a distorted being allied to the hags of a wild and fatal delusion. We confound her with the witches of Macbeth, the victims of Salem, and the Moll Pitchers of modern days.

Such is not the Woman of Endor—we have adopted the superstition of monk and priest through the long era of darkness and bigotry, and every age hath lent a shadow to the picture.

"Hearken to the voice of thine handmaid, and let me set a morsel of bread before thee." Beautiful picture of primitive and genial hospitality! The Woman of Endor riseth before me in the very attitude of her kind, correct entreaty. The braids of her dark hair mingle with the folds of her turban; her oriental robes spread from beneath the rich girdle, and the bust swells with her impassioned appeal. I

behold the proud contour of features, the deep, spiritual eye, the chiseled nostril, and the lip shading the ruby. The cold, haughty grace, becoming the daughter of the Magi, hath now yielded to the tenderness of her woman's heart.

Woman of Endor! thou hast gathered the sacred lotus for the worship of Isis; thou hast smothered the dark-winged Ibis in the temple of the gods; thou art familiar with the mysteries of the pyramids; thou hast quaffed the waters of the Nile, even where they well up in the cavernous vaults of the ancient Cheops; thou hast watched the stars, and learned their names and courses; art familiar with the sweet influences of the Pleiads, and the bands of Orion. Thy teacher was a reverent worshiper of nature, and thou a meek and earnest pupil. Thou heldst a more intimate communion with nature than we of a later and more worldly age. Thou workedest with her in her laboratory, creating the gem and the pearl, and all things whatsoever into which the breath of life entereth not.

There was nothing of falsehood, nothing of diabolic power in this. Men were nearer the primitive man, nearer the freshness of creation, and they who patiently and religiously dwelt in the temple of nature learned her secrets, and acquired power hidden from the vulgar, even as do the learned now, in their dim libraries, and amid their musty tomes.

Thus was it with the Woman of Endor. She was learned in all the wisdom of the East. She had studied the religion of Egypt, had listened to the sages of Brahma, and studied philosophy in the schools to which the accomplished Greeks afterwards resorted to learn truth and lofty aspiration; yet even here did the daughter of the Magi feel the goal of truth unattained.

She had heard of a new faith—that of Israel—a singular people, who at one time had sojourned in Egypt, and yet who went forth, leaving their gods and their vast worship behind, to adopt a new and strange belief. Hither had she come with a meek spirit of inquiry, to learn something more of those great truths for which the human soul yearneth forever.

Hence was it that her wisdom and her beauty became a shield to her when the mandates of Saul banished all familiar with mysterious knowledge from the country. She was no trifle with the fears and the credulities of men. She was an earnest disciple of Truth, and guilelessly using wisdom which patient genius had unfolded to her mind.

All night had she watched the stars, and firmly did she believe that human events were shadowed forth in their hushed movements.

She compounded rare fluids, and produced creations wondrous in their beauty.

There were angles described in the vast mechanism of nature, in the passage of the heavenly bodies, in the congealing of fluids, and the formation of gems, which were of stupendous power when used in conjunction with certain words of mystic meaning, derived from the vocabulary of spirits; spirits who once familiarly visited our earth, and left these

symbols of their power behind them. These the learned, who did so in the spirit of truth and goodness, were able to use, and great and marvelous were the results.

Such was the knowledge, and such the faith of the Woman of Endor, the wise and the beautiful daughter of the Magi. She was yet young and lovely; not the girl nor the child, but the full, intellectual, and glorious woman.

She had used a spell of great power in behalf of Saul, who was in disguise, and unknown to her; and thus had compelled the visible presence of one of the most devout servants of the Most High God. Even she was appalled, not at the sight of the "old man covered with a mantle," but that she saw "gods descending to the earth."

The fate of Saul would have been the same had not the prophet from the dead pronounced that fear-

ful doom, "To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be as I am," but he might till the last have realized that vague comfort to be found in the uncertainty of destiny, and in the faint incitements of hope. Fancy might have painted plains beyond the mountains of Gilboa, where the dread issues of battle were to be tried, and he would have been spared that period of agony, when the strong man was bowed to the earth at the certainty of doom.

Saul and the Woman of Endor, ages on ages since, fulfilled their earthly mission, leaving behind this simple record of the power and fidelity of human emotions in all times and places; we cannot regret even the trials of Saul, in the view of enlarged humanity, for had he been other than he was, the world had been unblessed with this episode of woman's grace and woman's tenderness, in the person of the Woman of Endor.

THE FLOWERET.

BY REV. C. W. EVEREST.

I marked when the morning sun shone bright
Where a floweret in beauty grew:
Its petals oped to the rosy light,
As it laughed in the sparkling dew.

And a grateful fragrance the blossom flung
To the sportive winds at play;
While o'er it a raptured wild-bird hung,
And caroled its love-taught lay.

I came again, when an hour had flown,
And sought for my floweret fair,
All vain, alas! for the blossom was gone,
And sad was the silent air!

I mourned when I thought on its radiant hue,
And remembered its look of pride;
I bowed me in grief where its beauty grew,
And wept where my floweret died!

Then I turned my gaze to the azure sky,
And thought on the God above,
Who heareth the hungry ravens cry,
And whose holiest name is Love.

Then I dried my tears as my fancy roved
To the realm by angels trod;
For I knew that my blossom, from earth removed,
Bloomed bright in the gardens of God.

O ye who have watched o'er its fragrant birth,
As it oped to the balmy day—
Weep not that no longer it smileth on earth,
To gladden your weary way!

No more shall ye fear for the morning's blight,
Nor dread the cold chills of even;
For afar, in a world of celestial light,
Your floweret is blooming in heaven!

THE WALTZ OF LIFE.

In dreams, I walked through narrow vaults
Where Death reigned over all,
Deep under ground, where Midnight bound
All in his gloomy pall;
And, as I moved, with cautious tread,
Within their walls so cold,
The rattling skulls of hundreds dead
Beneath my footsteps rolled;
And human bones did crack and break
As slowly on I stepped,
And reptiles left the skeletons
Where they in gloom had slept.
Some crawled upon the damp, cold wall,
Some made the skulls their den,

But when I'd passed I heard them crawl
Back to their feasts again.
I stood within a banquet hall,
Amid a flood of light,
Where music of the festival
Flowed on the air of Night.
There maidens whirled in dizzy dance,
Like fairies on the lea,
And beauty shed her radiance,
Like sunbeams o'er the sea.
And these, I thought—these, one and all,
Now reveling in the waltz,
Are hurrying through the banquet hall
Down to those gloomy vaults!