

THE CASE OF JOHN BUNYAN. (III.)

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V.

The malady was now, after the passage of this acute stage, all the more certainly in possession of the man. The temporary remission was sure to prove deceitful. In Dr. Cowles's patient after once the morbid habits had become systematized, to a degree similar to the one now reached in Bunyan's case, there was apparently no way out of the gloomy labyrinth. Whatever devices were tried led, so long as the patient was under Dr. Cowles's observation, to renewed struggles with conscientious scruples and with ingeniously subtle inner temptations, and the sufferer, whatever her temporary stages of relief, was doomed to walk round and round the charmed circle of doubt, of temptation, of elaborate self-invented exorcising devices, of failure, of self-reproach, and of despair. It was to be Bunyan's good fortune to escape in the end from his tempter. How he was thus to escape, the next and most agonizing of his acute stages was to determine. The sufferer from such morbid systems is at best, as all the evidence shows, in a very serious position. That very strength of certain of his highest brain-functions which is one condition of the development of his weakness as to other functions, makes all the harder the task of teaching him wholly new mental habits. Yet without such wholly new habits he can never escape. Hence the evil prognosis which most observers now unite in attributing to this type of disorder, viz., to the chronic malady of insistent impulses with intercurrent acute stages. But there is one rather desperate chance which most writers on the subject

have, as I think, generally neglected. Suppose there appears, in the life of the chronically affected patient, a new insistent impulse, such that yielding to this particular impulse brings the patient into some wholly new relation to his environment. Suppose, thereupon, that a novel and profoundly different life, even if this be a very painful life, is forced upon him in consequence of his yielding. The result may be a condition of things in which, diseased though he still is, the old cares and temptations are entirely set aside by the fresh experiences given through the new environment. If the patient has now strength enough to bear the pangs and the fresh and strongly contrasted nervous distresses of this changed life, he may actually have time to reform his mental habits before the old 'tempter' is able, for his part, to organize his own inimical nervous tendencies upon the new battle-field. The substituted pangs themselves may then pass before the old are renewed. Then indeed, some day, the old enemy will come back, but the patient will have become, meanwhile, another man, and the whole system of his formerly insistent opponents will have been broken up. He will thus find himself thrown back, in some sense, to the earlier stages of his own case; he will once more have only elementary doubts and fears to oppose. But these his experience will have taught him to circumvent; and so, at any rate with a certain degree of defect, he may have become cured. The elements will survive, but will no longer systematize.

This possible good fortune, to be won, if at all, by passing through the fiercest fire of painful impulse, Dr. Cowles's patient tried in vain to find, when she experimented at pretending to poison herself, or, later, deliberately wounded herself with a pistol, not hoping to commit suicide, but only seeking to expiate her faults, and to get peace from her tempter, through novel pangs. Bunyan, without dreaming of such relief, actually won it through what seemed, at the time, the most hopeless of all the woes that had yet beset him.

"For after the Lord had, in this manner, thus graciously delivered me from this great and sore Temptation . . . the Tempter came upon me again, and that with a more grievous and dreadful Temptation than before. And that was, *To sell*

and part with this most blessed Christ, to exchange him for the things of this life, for anything."

The new temptation had its own typical mental context, different from that of the previous stage. This was now no single member of a 'flood of blasphemies.' It stood nearly alone, as equivalent for all the rest of the earlier temptations. Still, however, the impulse to *sell Christ* was merely an imperative motor speech-function. No other word seems ever to have substituted itself for the word *sell*; and the only further act involved in yielding to the temptation was a purely formal inner assent to the 'selling.' The proposed transaction involved, as a matter of course, no actually conceived exchange whatever. Nevertheless, in a most interesting fashion, the imperative impulse now appeared as a reflex, which tended, in consciousness, to enter into a sort of 'agglutinative' combination (to use one of Wundt's well-known adopted phrases), with any object of passing perceptive interest; so that the special form of the experience was that the tempter moved Bunyan to *sell Christ for this or for that*, whatever the insignificant thing might be that Bunyan was at the moment attending to, or handling, or dealing with in any active way. The painfulness, the associated fear, and the violence of the thought, were all of the most intense sort; and this reflex character made the temptation infect Bunyan's whole life most horribly; "for it did always, in almost whatever I thought, intermix itself therewith, in such sort that I could neither eat my food, stoop for a pin, chop a stick, or cast mine eye to look on this or that, but still the temptation would come, *Sell Christ for this, or sell Christ for that; sell him, sell him.*"

The struggle this time very soon led Bunyan to that grave stage where the sufferer from insistent impulses resorts to apparently senseless motor acts that possess for him an exorcising significance. "By the very force of my mind, in laboring to gainsay and resist this wickedness, my very body also would be put into action or motion by way of pushing or thrusting with my hands or elbows, still answering as fast as the destroyer said, *Sell him; I will not, I will not . . . no, not for thousands, thousands, thousands of worlds.*" This kind of elaboration rapidly grew to its own hopelessly extravagant extremes. But

in vain. A few added doubts, of the old inhibitory type, meanwhile appeared in the background, but the tempter had now, so to speak, learned his game, and had no need to waste his forces upon general devices of inhibition. This one suggestion was enough. The loathsome triviality of the motor impulse itself, in its pettiness, and the vast dignity of the eternal issues imperilled, as Bunyan felt, by its presence, combined to give the situation all the dreadful and inhibitory features that had earlier been spread over so wide a mental range of evil interests.

"But to be brief, one morning, as I did lie in my bed, I was, as at other times, most fiercely assaulted with this temptation, . . . the wicked suggestion still running in my mind, *Sell him, sell him, sell him, sell him*, as fast as a man could speak. Against which also, in my mind, as at other times, I answered, *No, no, not for thousands, thousands, thousands*, at least twenty times together. But at last, after much striving, even until I was almost out of breath, I felt this thought pass through my heart, *Let him go, if he will!* and I thought also that I felt my heart freely consent thereto. Oh the diligence of Satan! Oh the desperateness of man's heart!"

"Now was the battle won, and down fell I, as a Bird that is shot from the top of a tree, with great guilt, and fearful despair. Thus getting out of my Bed, I went moping into the field; but God knows, with as heavy a heart as mortal man, I think, could bear; where, for the space of two hours, I was like a man bereft of life, and as now past all recovery, and bound over to eternal punishment."

VI.

The nervous crisis thus passed served to introduce a condition of extremely lengthy, quasi-melancholic, but to Bunyan's consciousness wholly secondary, depression. The hopeless sin was committed. Like Esau he had sold his birthright. There was now 'no place for repentance.' This, the third stage of the culmination of the malady, was marked by an almost entire quiescence of the insistently sinful impulses; for what had the victorious tempter now left to do?

There were no more minor hesitations, no loathsome motor irritations. One overwhelming idea and grief inhibited all these inhibitory symptoms. The insistent associative processes with the scripture passages became, however, for a good while, all the more marked, automatic, and commanding. Thus the whole mental situation was profoundly altered. The secondary melancholic depression expressed itself occasionally in precordial anxiety. "I have felt also such a clogging and heat at my stomach, by reason of this my terror, that I was, especially at some times, as if my breast bone would have split asunder." But Bunyan even now never long lost his dialectic skill; and hopeless as seemed his case, he from the first set about trying to think of a way of escape from destruction, being throughout 'loath to perish,'—a fact which, viewed in its results, indicates the relative intactness of his highest mental functions amidst all his gloom.

Except for the automatic processes with the scripture passages, Bunyan's condition of secondary melancholic depression had, therefore, despite its depth and its fantastic background, many of the more benign characters of normal grief. It had, at the worst, its occasional remissions. It left his reasoning powers formally unaffected. And it had the painful but really invaluable character that, just because his fate seemed decided, he had a long and almost total rest from the irritating motor processes, whose dependence upon his past habits of conscientious anxiety is thus all the more confirmed. For this restless anxiety, the pretty steady assurance of damnation was now substituted. This, as the event proved, Bunyan's heroic disposition was strong enough to endure, despite the 'splitting' sensations in the breast, despite the long days of grief and of lonely lamentation; despite his inability to get any comfort or help from his few advisers. The case was still grave enough, but this light melancholia proved to be a decidedly kinder disorder than the foregoing one, and it led the way over to recovery.

In the long tale which follows, in Bunyan's *Autobiography*, and which is largely devoted to the description of the inner conflicts amongst the scripture passages (of whose automatic evolutions poor Bunyan's consciousness was now long the

merely passive theatre), there are but few things further to be noted for our purpose. But these are extremely instructive.

The gradual emergence from despair is obviously due, on the whole, to the *vis medicatrix naturæ*. Bunyan's general physical health gradually improved. His conscientious habits of life, freed now from the tempter's teasing interferences, had a chance to become healthily fixed and unconscious. He grieved too deeply to long for distractions, and never thought of returning to his youthful sins as a relief from despair. The doubts and other motor inconveniences were of course still in the background of his mental life, but it is interesting to note how, whenever they appear, they are now simply overshadowed and devitalized by the fixed presence of the ruling melancholic ideas. The tempter is thus at length known as a relatively foreign and mocking other self, whose power over Bunyan's will grows less even while his triumph is supposed to be final. He 'becomes humorous,' as Froude observes. Bunyan, so the tempter suggests in his old metaphysical way and with the old doubting subtlety—Bunyan had better not pray any more, since God must be weary of the whole business; or if he must pray, let it be to some other person of the Trinity instead of to the directly insulted Mediator. Could not a new plan of salvation be devised by special arrangement, the Father this time kindly acting as mediator with the otherwise implacable Son, to meet Bunyan's exceptional case? But such suggestions, which in an earlier stage would have been 'fearful blasphemies,' now have to stand in contrast to the fixed and central grief which constitutes Bunyan's own personal consciousness. Bunyan knows by the very contrast that these suggested words of the tempter are *not* his own. This is the mere fooling of the exultant devil. It is meaningless. For Bunyan is consciously on the side of the grief itself, and the humorous tempter is the sole owner of the blasphemies, which therefore serve all the more to 'confirm' the sufferer in his painful faith. A better device than this for the 'segmentation' of insistent questionings could not have been imagined by any physician learned in the cure of souls. The victorious tempter had unwittingly dug his own grave. He could never again get possession of this man's central

self, nor use this brain as a foundation for systematized evil habits.

Another instructive aspect of the slow process of recovery lies in the fact that Bunyan was, towards the end, able, at some moments and despite his always busy dialectic processes, to win that attitude of complete resignation, of abandonment of all feverish conscious strugglings and pleadings with fate,—that attitude which, as experience shows, is so often the beginning of a final recovery from all forms of deeper mental distress. Such an attitude is consistent, as it was in Bunyan, with a good deal of cool consideration, and with much activity of thought, but it was still effectively assumed. There is, for such sufferers as Bunyan, and for many others, a mood of gentler despair that is often essentially healing, because, as compared to their old feverishness, it is peaceful. It is the sort of despair that Edgar Poe has put on record in the admirably psychological lines ‘For Annie.’ It is the mood that says, to the tempestuous striving self of former days, ‘*Ich hab’ meine Sache auf Nichts gesetzt.*’ One is lost; only eternal mercy can save; one finally is content to leave all to fate or to God, and to ‘lie quietly,’ like the conscious corpse of Poe’s poem, glad a little that the ‘fever called living is ended at length.’ Bunyan is remote enough in type from Poe’s lover; and he was never content long to lie quiet. But still, at moments, this essentially curative element also is present in this stage of his experience. The automatic play of the remembered scripture passages became with him more and more complex, imposing, unpredictable,—an inner fate that he often helplessly watched as one watches the breaking of great waves on the beach. Plainly God must be directing the process. Bunyan could only pray that God’s will might be done, and hope that so many kind glimpses of light would not have been shown to an utter outcast. ‘God and Christ,’ he says, ‘were continually before my face,’ and, painful as the experience was, since he was facing his judge, this kept down, as he himself recognizes, all the old temptations to ‘atheism.’ At last “I saw . . . that it was not my good frame of heart that made my Righteousness better, nor my bad frame that made my Righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, *the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.*” And ‘now,’ he says,

in narrating this last experience, 'did my chains fall off my Legs indeed.' Such is the healing virtue of true resignation.

The episodes of this whole long final stage were of course numerous and of Protean character. There was throughout, despite the prevalence of the general despair, considerable instability of mood. Intervals of peace, resulting from this or that 'sweet glance' of a 'Promise,' alternated with the wildest fits of gloom. Two or three times the borderland pseudo-hallucinations of speech returned. Once, in particular, at a moment of this sort, the accompanying experience of calm "made a strange seizure upon my spirit; it brought light with it, and commanded a silence in my heart of all those tumultuous thoughts that before did use, like masterless hell-hounds, to roar and bellow and make a hideous noise within me." And this sudden transformation of mood, produced by a comforting voice that was 'as if heard,' was so great that, many years later, though writing in a very cautious and self-critical spirit, Bunyan could not refrain, in a later edition of the *Grace Abounding*, from inserting this incident, and adding his private opinion that this might indeed have been 'an Angel' that 'had come upon me.' Yet no element of actual delusion was, at the time, involved in the experience. As for the scripture passages, their automatic effects were such that Bunyan ere long found himself awaiting with interest what would happen when two, already known and often studied 'words' should, by chance, 'meet in my heart'—an event which might prove to him of the most critical importance, although, beforehand, he could do positively nothing to hasten or to effect this event by any voluntary consideration of the passages. Only when the suggested passages were numerous, and the 'meeting' had already often occurred, could he devote himself, with his accustomed dialectic skill, to considering with care the outcome and its meaning—a thing which, just before his recovery, he learned to do, in some cases, very coolly and with great deliberation.

The passing of this stage of despair was attended, at the end, with many of the usual exaltations and confusions of convalescence. "I had two or three times, at about my deliverance from this temptation, such strange apprehensions of the grace of God, that I could hardly bear up under it; it was so

out of measure amazing, when I thought it could reach me, that I do think, if that sense of it had abode long upon me, it would have made me incapable of business."

VII.

The cure had come to pass, but it was, and remained, a cure with a pretty well-defined defect. The tempter could never again obtain control. The diseased habits were reduced to their elements, and were unable to systematize themselves afresh. The elements, however, proved, as one would expect in such a case, too deeply founded in this wonderful constitution ever to be eliminated. At the end of the *Grace Abounding* Bunyan, with the simplest humility, records the temptations to which his soul is now permanently subjected. His moods of spiritual interest and emotion are to a very considerable extent unstable, do what he may. There are times when he is 'filled with darkness,' however much, at other times, he may have been exalted. His heart becomes, at the dark times, 'dead and dry,' and he can then find no 'comfort.' He is also still occasionally tempted 'to doubt the being of God and the Truth of his Gospel'; and this is always the 'worst' of moods. Furthermore, in his preaching, the tempter often besets him 'with thoughts of blasphemy,' which he is 'strongly tempted to speak' 'before the congregation'; or again, a strange confusion of head comes upon him as he preaches, and 'straitens' him, so that he feels "as if I had not known or remembered what I have been about, or as if my head had been in a bag all the time of the Exercise." More subtle assaults of the tempter also come while he preaches,—condemnations of this or that which he knows it to be his duty to utter, or on the other hand movings 'to pride and liftings up of heart.' For a while after his malady, when he had joined the church, he was tempted to blaspheme during the sacraments. In any of his illnesses, peculiarly black and cowardly thoughts always come. At the beginning of his imprisonment he long felt himself to be a hopeless coward, unable because unworthy to suffer for the faith, and the tempter mocked this weakness with all the old subtlety.

But now—here is the important thing—all these perma-

ment enemies are still, and remain for the rest of Bunyan's life, in no wise uncontrollable. His deeper consciousness is beset, but never overwhelmed, by them. His attitude towards them becomes objective, resigned. They teach him to 'watch and be sober.' They are useful to him, since 'they keep me from trusting my heart.' Of one of his later hours of darkness he says: "I would not have been without this Trial for much. I am comforted every time I think of it, and I hope I shall bless God forever for the teaching I have had by it. Many more of the dealings of God towards me I might relate, but these, *out of the spoils won in Battle have I dedicated to maintain the house of God.*" The words are typical of all the later inner experience of Bunyan; and it is to this spirit in the man that we owe his immortal works.

Of his mental regimen after his recovery a word may yet be said. A wise instinct guided the much-trying wanderer in the darker world to forsake henceforth his solitude, to join himself 'unto the people of God,' to try to be objectively serviceable, and to keep in touch with the needs of his brethren. His gift of speech hereupon soon discovered itself. He was ere long set to preach. His power won multitudes of listeners during all his years passed out of prison. In prison he wrote busily, and preached to his fellow-prisoners at every opportunity. The motor speech-functions, whose inhibition had led to such disastrously rebellious insistent habits, were never again suffered to remain without absorbing and productive exercise. The decidedly healthy self-contempt engendered by the experience of his own weakness only served to make him more objective in his whole attitude towards life. Henceforth he knows every man to be of himself naught. He has therefore, as Froude points out, no favorites, and portrays, in his literary work, Talkative, and Ignorance, and Mr. Badman, with as much cool devotion to the task and with as much artistic faithfulness, as Christian. He spares no one, himself least of all. Yet he sympathizes with every manner of human weakness, for his own inner life has furnished him with a brief abstract and epitome of all human frailty. His mastery is the mastery of the genius who has really entered the Valley of the Shadow and has passed through. Hence the seeming of the man in the eyes of those who knew him in later life, and who

could not easily have suspected, in this modest yet commanding presence, the piteous weaknesses of his younger years, had he himself not so instructively told the wonderful story.

Our result can be briefly stated. This is unquestionably a fairly typical case of a now often described mental disorder. The peculiarities of this special case lie largely in the powers of the genius who here suffered from the malady. A man of sensitive and probably somewhat burdened nervous constitution, whose family history, however, so far as it is known to us, gives no positive evidence of serious hereditary weakness, is beset in childhood with frequent nocturnal and even diurnal terrors of a well-known sort. In youth, after an early marriage, under the strain of a life of poverty and of many religious anxieties, he develops elementary insistent dreads of a conscientious sort, and later a collection of habits of questioning and of doubt which ere long reach and obviously pass the limits of the normal. His general physical condition meanwhile failing, in a fashion that, in the light of our very imperfect information concerning this aspect of the case, still appears to be of some vaguely neurasthenic type, there now appears a highly systematized mass of insistent motor speech-functions of the most painful sort, accompanied with still more of the same fears, doubts, and questions. After enduring for a pretty extended period, after one remission, and also after a decided change in the contents of the insistent elements, the malady then more rapidly approaches a dramatic crisis, which leaves the sufferer for a long period in a condition of secondary melancholic depression, of a somewhat benign type,—a depression from which, owing to a deep change of his mental habits, and to an improvement of his physical condition, he finally emerges cured, although with defect, of his greatest enemy—the systematized insistent impulses. This entire morbid experience has lasted some four years. Henceforth, under a skilful self-imposed mental regimen, this man, although always a prey to elementary insistent temptations and to fits of deep depression of mood, has no return of his more systematized disorders, and endures heavy burdens of work and of fortune with excellent success.

Such is the psychological aspect of a story whose human and spiritual interest is and remains of the very highest.