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The Healing of the Man Possessed with the Legion.

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THAT Dr. Plummer, in his "Commentary on St. Luke," should give nine different justifications of our Lord's action in the healing of the man with the legion is sufficient proof of its difficulty of interpretation, and yet there are points in the narrative which seem hardly to have received full attention.

Our Lord's sympathy with the sufferer and His exhibition of authority are clear enough, but we would to concentrate attention on three points :

1. The method adopted with regard to the sufferer.
2. Its relation to the swine.
3. Its rightfulness as regards their owners.

The evidence of observers in different parts of the world as to demonic possession, combined with the witness of modern psychology as to multiple personality, incline us to accept the literal meaning of the Gospels as a reasonable statement of the man's actual condition ; and therefore the problem before the Master was to disentangle the man's true personality from the demons, who had possessed themselves of a lodging within it. Its difficulty is well illustrated by the use of the pronouns in one sentence of St. Mark—" *He* besought him much that He would not send *them* away out of the country." The demons had so invaded the personality of the man as to make him dread a complete separation from his evil co-partners. St. Mark also emphasizes this in the form in which the answer to the question, "What is *thy* name?" is given—" *My* name is Legion, for *we* are many." We have here, then, a case of diseased personality, which had to be cured in spite of itself, and it needed the most tender and reverent handling if the damage done was to be repaired.

1. The method adopted began with the question, "What is thy name?"—a question designed to recall the man to true self-consciousness once more. The second step was the granting of the request that the devils might be allowed to go into the swine, securing as it did an objective proof of the reality of deliverance. The refusal to allow the man to remain with his Deliverer was a third. The violated personality must make use of its deliverance, and stand complete and entire, without any morbid fear lest, apart from the immediate presence of Jesus, the danger might return. The last step in the process was designed to secure its permanence. The man was bidden to repeat the story, that his own confidence might grow thereby. In this repetition, the fact that he had the story of a visible and well-corroborated sign to give, saved him from any risk that he might be persuaded that he was himself a victim of self-deception. The direction that he was to proclaim the matter showed on Jesus' part a complete absence of any fear that the people of that time and place would find in the circumstances of the cure anything inconsistent with a display of Divine mercy and goodness; and such a direction would further help to keep the man in contact with human fellowship.

2. As regards the swine: I should be inclined to say that the best commentary is our Lord's own remarks when speaking of the love of God for sparrows: "Are ye not of much more value than they?" (Matt. vi. 26; Luke xii. 24); "Ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. x. 31; Luke xii. 7). This second being combined with the statements: "Not one sparrow shall fall on the ground without your Father," and "Not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God." Man is of much more value than many swine, and two thousand of them do not make an unreasonable price to pay for the rescue of one human being. The animal creation is given to man, and it serves man involuntarily by sacrifices which men can make consciously one for the other, or for God.

3. Lastly, there remains the question of the owners of the swine. It is important, I believe, to keep our minds alive to

our excessive individualism, which makes us forget primitive collectivism. The fact that the whole body of the inhabitants beseech Jesus to depart may well incline us to believe that this great herd of swine was the joint property of very many, and that the loss to any individual was small. Now, in exchange for that loss, the community had been rid of a very serious danger and nuisance, thus described by the different Evangelists :

“Two . . . exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass that way.”

“Oftentimes it had seized him, and he was kept under guard, and bound with chains and fetters; and, breaking the bonds asunder, he was driven of the devil into the deserts.”

“No man had strength to tame him. And always night and day, in the tombs, and in the mountains he was crying out, and cutting himself with stones.”

The removal of such a danger must have brought a wonderful sense of relief to every home; and if not a few of the men grumbled at the loss of their pigs, the women and children must have felt they had been delivered from a terrible ogre. Those who were engaged in what, by Jewish law, was an unlawful practice were compelled, without leave being asked, to make a contribution for the great relief of the whole neighbourhood, and the special deliverance of a man whom they had often tried to subdue and failed. Their willingness to suffer for the good of their own community was tested, and they failed. Had our Lord as Son of man the right to make the test? Godet's remark is that this is one of those cases where power to execute the sentence guarantees the right of the Judge. [*Cf.* “but that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins: then saith He to the sick of the palsy, Rise up and walk.”]

Every act of a ruler and leader of men, whereby public opinion is educated and brought to a higher level, demands a more or less unwilling compliance from some, in order that others besides themselves may benefit; but if the leader is to wait till all agree with him before he acts, nothing will be done.

I should therefore say that the action on Christ's part exhibits a willingness to assume responsibility for a community, and to act for them in a way in which at their best they would be willing to act; while His departure shows that, when they failed to respond, He did not force them to continue in a path of unselfishness when, after seeing its results, they deliberately refused.

To sum up :

1. As regards the man : The action of our Lord showed (1) reverent care for human personality, akin to His unwillingness ever to *compel* men to believe; (2) the most careful adoption of means to secure that the restoration which had been wrought might be maintained. [*Cf.* the command to give food to Jairus's daughter.]

2. As regards the swine : He asserted man's sovereign rights in creation, their death being justified by the service rendered.

3. As regards the owners : Our Lord made an heroic call on their nobility, testing their willingness to suffer loss that another might gain; and, at the same time, He conferred upon their community a large and real benefit. On their refusal to respond, He acted on the principle He Himself laid down—that the Christian messenger, where definitely rejected, is to retreat.

