VII. THE HEALING OF THE WOMAN BOWED TOGETHER

The account of the healing of the woman who could not lift herself up for eighteen years is given only in Luke 13:10-17. The Evangelist gives only sketchy information on time and place: the healing took place on a Sabbath in a synagogue. In the synagogue there was a woman 2 "which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together," so that she could "in no wise" lift herself up. The reading that she could "not entirely" or "not altogether" lift herself up is, as Brouwer, Keulers, and others say, preferable to the translation that she could "in no wise" lift herself up. 3

The sick woman was tormented by a "spirit of infirmity," i.e. by a spirit which caused the weakness. Her illness was therefore ascribed to a supernatural evil force, viz. the force of Satan, cf. verse 16. 4

This spirit had paralysed her physically and mentally. Although they are insufficiently defined, the symptoms bring hysteria to mind. Ebstein states that in violent hysterical conditions the contraction of groups of muscles can be observed. Though rather long, the period of eighteen years is still possible, Ebstein thinks. The "spirit of infirmity" may be interpreted as "attendant mental symptoms. . .

1 Bultmann, Die Geschichte der synopt. Tradition, p. 10, classifies the account among the apophthegms, Streit- und Schulgespräche.
2 Von Ammon, Die Geschichte des Lebens Jesu, III, p. 10, thinks that this woman was sitting by the synagogue as a beggar.
3 Lk. 13:11, καὶ μὴ δυναμένη ἀνακύψαι εἰς τὸ παντέλες. The Greek sentence-construction allows of either translation. Literally it reads: "and not having the power to lift herself up altogether."
4 Cf. Strack-Billerbeck, IV, 1, p. 521 ff., on the activity of demons as producers of disease. Stählin, TWNT, I, p. 491. Greydanus, Lukas, rightly points out that obviously possession is not meant here. Keulers, Marcus en Lucas: "There is no question of genuine possession, but the disease was caused by an evil spirit, as Jesus says in verse 16." Smitt, De Daemoniacis, p. 162 f., says that this is a case of circumcissio daemonica, but not of possessio. Förster, TWNT, VII, p. 159: "Es kann auch eine Krankheit, die nicht die Zeichen der Besessenheit trägt, als von Satan verursacht angesprochen werden (Lk 13, 16)." Calvin, Comm. in quattuor Evangelistas, re Lk. 13:11, thinks that it was probably no ordinary disease that physicians could deal with, hence the use of "spirit of infirmity." For the devil often afflicts people with unusual ills. (Quia speciem morbi aliter non designat, verisimile est non vulgarem fuissse, vel cuius ratio medicis constaret: ideo vocat infirmitatis spiritum. Scimus enim diaboli opera ut plurimum insolititis malis, et non naturalibus affligi homines.)
which as a rule accompany such highly hysterical conditions and which, like the convulsions or the paralysis, can be healed.”

Micklem does not believe that a diagnosis is possible, but compares this story with a similar case, that of a young sailor, nineteen years of age, who, hypnotized by Janet, recovered immediately.

According to Fenner the woman was bent forward, and probably suffered from scoliosis hysterica, hysterical curvature of the spine.

Von Ammon believes that we are concerned here with a contracture of the second cervical vertebra, which had become chronic through mental causes. As a result of Jesus laying His hands upon her, “the pressure on the nerves” disappeared. With this view he does not follow in the footsteps of his rationalistic predecessor, Paulus, who believes that there is no reason to think of contracture or possibly tetanus. The woman was suffering from hysteria or melancholia, and she had not been bowed for the full eighteen years, but “was bent, bowed,” i.e. she was now, and had been for some time.

There is thus considerable difference of opinion, which is due to the scanty data, but it seems to us that the text is not strained if we stress the mental impotence of the woman.

When Jesus saw her — Jesus thus took the initiative — He said to her: “Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.” With these words Jesus thus establishes the healing, the liberation from the pa-

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2 Micklem, Miracles and the New Psychology, p. 125. “The case of the young sailor is reported by P. Janet, l’Automatisme psychologique, 8me édition, p. 361. This patient was: ‘attente d’hystéro-épilepsie et anesthétique de presque tout le corps.’ Weatherhead, Psychology, Religion and Healing, p. 60: ‘The fact that she was ‘immediately made straight’ (v. 13) suggests a hysterical paraplegia rather than an osteitis, as Hastings’ ‘Dictionary’ suggests (Vol. III, p. 328), and the idea of a spirit of infirmity suggests a nervous origin. Luke, the doctor, is fond of ascribing disease to demons.”
3 Fenner, Die Krankheit im N.T., p. 54 f. Traub, Die Wunder im N.T., p. 36, likewise envisages severe hysteria. According to Mackinnon, The Historic Jesus, p. 343, it was “evidently a case of paralysis.”
4 Von Ammon, op. cit., III, p. 9 ff.: “Wer jemals solche Beschwerden des zweiten oder vorletzten Halswirbels empfunden hat, weiss es aus eigener Erfahrung, mit welcher dankbaren Freude er den Wiedergebrauch dieses Gliedes begrüsste.” However, the description “bent, bowed” invalidates this view of so limited a disorder. Lagrange, too, thinks that we must conceive of the woman being incapable of lifting her head; see Klostermann, Das Lukasevangelium. Smir, op. cit., p. 163, envisages a physical complaint, viz. arthritis deformans.
5 Paulus, Exegetisches Handbuch, II, p. 201 ff.
6 γύναι, ἀπολέλυσαί τῆς ἁθενεῖς σου. It sounds like a command: the hostile disorder is defeated!