

## YOU CAME TO ME AFFECTIONATELY WHEN OTHERS CALLED ME MAD . . .

I GRANT to myself the pleasure and the privilege of speaking approving words to our Legionaries who are engaged in the visiting of mental patients. Those efforts do particular service to the Legion, because that is a work which must receive our devotion; it is among the pitiful and painful works. Yet its very character tends to exclude it from attention, and the Legion is not giving it enough attention.

I suppose it could be said that there is no other work in the Legion which is more difficult. It is not, of course, of the brand of our Hostels where on any given evening you may walk into a pitched battle and sustain injury, and where even the most peaceful evening is not free from the feeling of adventure.

Your task is not severe in that way. Its chief difficulty springs up from inside yourself, from disheartenment in some form. You will be inclined to think that there is little value in the work either for yourselves or for the patients. The lack of variety and signs of progress deprives you of the natural aids which are available in other occupations. But all this is only equivalent to saying that you are engaged in an exercise of the highest Legionary spirit.

A phrase in the *Handbook* calls for "a stiffening up of our spirit." If there is any employment in the Legion which requires that stiffening of spirit, it is this one. It can weigh you down if you let it. So your work, more than others, must be firmly joined to spiritual roots. Legionary quality must be developed sufficient to stay the course. Initial elements of pity and interest soon exhaust them-



selves, and then there is a struggle to keep going. In what follows I ramble over the whole field of your subject. I am going to mobilise an astonishingly large number of considerations which not only provide adequate motives for persevering but which definitely recommend it as a work of special choice.

I begin in a way which may seem to be a little light but which I mean to raise to a higher plane. I point out that Our Lady is symbolised in the Church by the moon, and that the moon has in a strange fashion always been associated with mental ailments. Formerly the conviction on that point was so complete that the name "lunatic" derived from the moon. The Latin word for moon is "luna". It was supposed that the serene silver orb exerted a sinister influence on some poor minds.

Daily our millions of legionaries proclaim the Antiphon: "Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in battle array?" Our Lady is suitably described as the moon because thereby is shown very well the relation between herself and her Son. The moon shines with the light of the sun; it has no light of its own. Similarly Our Lady is lustrous with the light of her Child; she lives by Him; what she gives is His.

So I begin with that particular symbolism of Our Lady as the moon; and through that traditional superstition as to the moon's part in mental troubles, I invite you to regard her as your special source of confidence. In your cause, as in every other cause, she will be triumphant by the omnipotence which she transmits.

Or to vary somewhat the above imagery. Our Lady will put the moon, typifying the dread mental ailments, beneath her feet. It is not childish to import Our Lady into improbable situations. Because no matter where she enters, there is solution. She accompanies you as the Health of your very Sick ones.

You attack your problem in her name. Your purpose is to bring her into action. You are her agents, her means of



fulfilling herself. Going to your unfortunates, you discharge what must be a unique aspect of her motherhood. Therefore you can rightly expect that an unusual degree of assistance will be given to you—indeed that she may be more with you in that work than she would be in another work. That is if we may be permitted to differentiate between the works to which we are sent.

Being present with you, she will be active in many ways. She will sanctify you because of what you are doing, and she will strengthen you for it; and through your approach she will work on the patients in salutary forms.

There will be many of the cases whose mental state will, because God wills it so, remain unchanged. His loving purposes are being served by that infirmity. But likewise, as the history of mankind shows and the pages of the Gospels particularly evidence, there is a section whom God afflicts but from whom He is in certain circumstances willing to lift the affliction. In this latter process you may have an important part to play, namely that of supplying ingredients which enable Him to grant that relief. If you were not visiting them, this would not be effected.

Supposing that their affliction has originated from incorrect conduct on their part, could it not be that by the faith and charity and sacrifice of your attentions to them, you have helped to neutralise their debt?

Or we might state a different position. Perhaps their deprivation is for reward and not for penalty. Often a person is suffering on account of sin but not for his own sin. This seems to me to apply very much inside families. I have seen countless cases where sinless members have been privileged to bear the offences of others gravely culpable in the same family, thereby to save them and in the same process to tread a loftier road themselves. Into such a dispensation as this you enter and by your sacrificial labours you ease the burden.

And so you can with confidence look forward to improvement of various kinds in those you visit. But if this were



never to operate, it should make no difference to you. Your motive goes deeper than any desire to accomplish a physical benefit.

I put before you the 25th Chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew. It describes the judgment of men at the end of the world. Our Lord is represented as addressing the good and summoning them to the heavenly Kingdom. He gives them the reason: "I was hungry and you gave me to eat, thirsty and you gave me to drink, naked and you clothed me, sick and in prison and you visited me."

And they say back to Him: "Lord, when did we ever do those things to you?" And He said: "Whenever you did it to one of my least brethren you did it to me." Those words of His form one of the declarations of the doctrine of the Mystical Body. We minister to Our Lord not only when we are dealing with those stated classes of misfortune but when we deal with all other classes of misery and with all types of men.

But it is to be noted that Our Lord does in that passage assign a particular category to the more miserable ones; a special emphasis of pity enters in. Not only is He served in those people but He is ministered to in His grim necessity. He is suffering in them. Of course His list is not a final one. One could supplement it. For instance you could add on other grave categories of physical distress, such as the down-and-out types, those who are diseased in awful ways, and then that one which you have devotedly made your own, the mentally harassed.

More than that, I wonder if among all those different classes yours may not rank the highest because it is the very least? All those others have lost something external. They have been deprived of some quality: liberty, health, esteem, peace, comfort, food; and these perhaps only temporarily. They have retained the priceless gift of man, their personality, their will, their mind.

But the mentally troubled people have lost something of themselves. They have lost much of their personality. For



that reason we might boldly seize on the key-word in Our Lord's utterance and urge that they are the least of all the least, and therefore that in those persons you go to Our Lord rendering Him a unique service.

An intriguing thought is that one of the charges hurled against Our Lord frequently was that He was mad. I would imagine that it was a very common accusation. Because He was moving around making strange claims for Himself. To materialistic and cynical minds these would have sounded preposterous, insane. So, to follow up that Judgment Scene, it should form an admirable train of thought for you that He may say to you on the Last Day: "You came to Me affectionately when others called Me mad and said I had a devil."

When tempted with those misgivings as to lack of progress and as to whether you should not be otherwise employed, those other compelling ideas will fortify you and keep you on your course. The real danger which lies before you is that of judging a work according to what you think to be success or satisfaction. These are dubious tests. They could point in the opposite direction to the true one—and they do in your case. In other works some sort of fruit is to be seen. Even if a moral growth is not evident, there may be a growth of friendship. Some appreciation will be shown of the legionary efforts for them, and in time there will usually be an improvement in the quality of those being approached.

But in your mission you see so little. Year follows year, and there has not been the slightest improvement. Even if there has been an advance, it may not be so easy to observe it. Seeing them often, a slight ascent is not measurable. It is even possible for us to think they have receded, so that those dismal words may hammer in your mind: "I am wasting my time."

So once again I say it to you that you could not make better use of your time and abilities. This work is a special proof of faith, for on faith you are thrown back; all the minor aids have fallen away from you. Faith is the sole



motive-power left to keep you moving. The Scripture says that he who perseveres to the end shall be saved, thereby assuring us that faith without perseverance is empty, just like faith without good works. Keep your eye upon perseverance as the crowning Christian virtue. "The patient man shall speak of victory," continues Scripture. Perseverance and patience amount to much the same thing.

There is also the important practical and psychological side of your work. You are dealing with a complicated problem and you must bring some wisdom and certain human rules to bear on it.

The first one I present is that you must not underrate those persons. Of course we should not underrate *anybody*. To err in that way is to render ultra-offence to them, and so it is that the *Handbook* almost tiresomely insists on the quality of respect as due by us to all and as being the primary key to influence. In this we are found falling short even in regard to the ordinary people around us. We view their defects harshly and we eye their good qualities without the warmth which would cause them to glow back at us. In this way a wrong relation is established, and the injustice is committed of assigning persons to a status inferior to their true one.

If that is the tendency in regard to the ordinary people around, it is a certainty in regard to your poor world. The signs of their impoverishment stare you in the face. You must resolutely resist that evidence of your senses. You must not let yourself degrade them in your thoughts, because on their status in your mind will depend your behaviour towards them.

Many of your poor sufferers will show their abnormality in their faces. Some will be vacant, and some even repulsive, contorted into strange inhuman expressions. So it is no simple act to give respect and to see possibilities. Yet you must do these things. How?

Well, here is one thought which belongs to that very misery and yet which answers it. Many of those persons,



and who will limit their number, are already registered for Heaven, being without sin and incapable of sin, almost as close to God as if they were in Purgatory! This is really an awesome reflection, providing that needed drastic readjustment of improper thinking.

Delving a while ago into Mahommedan traditions, I discovered a kindred idea, helpful to us here, that the insane are often regarded by the superstitious Moslems as sainted. Madmen and fools are esteemed by them the favourites of Heaven. It is believed that their minds have been taken away from their tenement of clay to talk with angels in the high regions. Therefore people will beg the blessing of an idiot when they meet him in the street, and bending forward they will kiss his garment with the most profound veneration.

Superstitious or not, a little of that extremity of respect must adorn your own method.

Another working rule for you to go by is that they understand far more than they are given credit for. They appreciate a right attitude to them. This does not alter the fact that they can trade on it. Sometimes their crudity of behaviour is shown in a cunning way, that is lavished on those whom they know will bear it from them, rather than on the officials whom they hold in awe. You who are in the category of friendship may be the recipients of rough demonstrations at their hands. That should hearten rather than discourage you. It is a sign that you are getting on well with them.

I suppose we could generalise and say that most things look worse than they really are. Take the unromantic example of a very sick stomach. It is only a slight disorder in one organ, yet it reduces one to wreckage. We are so demoralised that we could not put up a fight to save our lives. I am sure that a similar process operates in the mind, more so perhaps than in the body. We know that the intolerable seasickness is not as bad as it seems. But we are not so well able to reassure ourselves in the case of some disturbance of the mind. Everything in that department exaggerates itself so that a particular upset might be only of



a minor order like unto the sick stomach. Excitement or shocks can produce bad effects on minds which are precariously balanced. Conceivably these may be as much in the line of remedy as that disturbed stomach. The remedy which you will offer to the victim is the certainty that you are a faithful friend, sure to be along this week and all weeks, interested, smiling, soothing, sympathetic, ready to listen and even willing to receive abuse. That remedy may quickly abate the mental seasickness.

Another example, if it is not over-labouring the picture, is that of the drunkard. He has delivered himself into the grip of his enemy and has abandoned all effort. He lets himself drift in a tide of neglect and depravity. Nevertheless that hopeless-looking position is only a few degrees worse than the seasickness. Remove the cause and the decent human being reappears.

Admittedly it is not easy to establish standards of comparison between these purely physical ills and the infinitely less tangible field of mental trouble. But my contention is only that there is a certain amount of parity, at least in some cases, and that we must look for those cases. Or rather I would go further and say that our behaviour towards all the cases should be the same, i.e. one of looking for the best in them even where we have no justification for thinking that there are sound elements on which to base our campaign towards amelioration.

So apply the analogy of the seasick man or the drunkard to your cases. It is a legitimate supposition that a little failure in the mind can have the power to produce a disproportionate demoralisation and leave the subject flopping around in a helpless way.

Your principle must be to find, so to speak, a solid spot in them on which you will aim to build. This is no more than the general plan of life. For instance, the communicating of knowledge proceeds from the known to the unknown. Starting off with one item, another kindred one is added to it, and so on indefinitely. It is a process like unto the growing of a plant. The new grows out of the



old and becomes part of it. Finally there is a complete growth.

Or take another example from medicine. A person's skin has been so badly damaged that its ordinary recuperative power has been destroyed. The remedy is to graft. A portion of the patient's healthy skin, no more than the size of a postage stamp, is taken and caused to adhere to the devastated area. When it has set, the same is repeated again and again. Those patches are not put down methodically beside each other but, as one might think, haphazardly. Eventually that living patchwork expands and covers the whole space. Perhaps the special virtue of this grafting image is that if you are able to produce a number of little ameliorations of different kinds in a patient, you might be able to accomplish a restoration resembling that marvellous grafting business.

So look for the healthy territory in them with a view to making it a taking-off point for further exploration. Try to find something in which they take an interest; a hobby, a line of thought, games, animals, flowers, pictures, an aptitude of any kind—for writing, poetry, drawing, painting, chess, studies; or lesser pursuits like cross-words or other competitions. Your ingenuity must be put on overtime!

Even if you can only find a single sensible idea, it is for you to concentrate on that, and seek to build out from it. If after a while you should be able to observe something proceeding from your efforts, it would undoubtedly encourage you. You have broken the stagnation. To the patient that gain might represent itself as in the order of the sensational, with consequent stabilising power.

One hears it stated often that those patients do not feel their unhappy condition. Such a general statement cannot be made. There are infinite shadings in the mental state of man. It cannot be said: Here is a dividing line; these are afflicted and those are not. The mind is too complex to be ticketed like that. It can be said seriously that we all have a touch of madness in us. Maybe that suggestion



expresses an idea which is good; that what is thus rather crudely put is only equivalent to saying that the breath of inspiration is in us.

A quality may be normal and yet can so easily go out of control. Good tempered persons enter into violent rages. Prudent ones can be carried off into extreme follies. Kind ones can act cruelly. Yet basically there is nothing wrong with them. The essential worth is there even though it commits treason occasionally. So there is no need to be unduly dismayed if at times we feel extravagant stirrings in ourselves. They may be an indication of vehement mental vigour whose ruthless surgings find it hard to compose themselves to strict order.

The fullness of life can be aggressive, even explosive. A little too much effervescence and things are out of control temporarily—or perhaps permanently if unchecked. It would be an error to conclude that someone is “mental” because uncouth displays are sometimes given. If the like were never to assert itself in us, it might be no good sign. Is too much balance, or too little of that mental excitement, a good thing? It could mean a descent into the realm of slower mental movement, that is to say into unintelligence. Who would be a clod for the sake of escaping the discomforts which are the inevitable product of an intensely active brain?

Genius and many mental inconveniences abide close together. As the choice strains of the violin are dependent on the tension of the strings, so in regard to the tensions of the mind which possess their disadvantages as well as their gifts. But may I venture on the thought that it is so often the fault of the owner of that delicate brain if it goes astray? Too frequently the genius regards himself as a law unto himself, so that he will not impose law on his mind. Instead of seeking to balance its erratic movements with humble, holy and calming ideas and behaviour, the opposite treatment is administered to it. If something in any order, spiritual, mental, physical, is only constructed to bear a certain strain, it is looking for disaster to pile more weight upon it.

So just as it is unprofitable to try to make distinctions



between the ordinary ones among us and that alleged class of genius, so let us not allow ourselves to interpose a sharp dividing line between ourselves and the mental class for whom we are working. The vulgar phrase is applied to them that there is a screw loose in them. The screw is not loose in them alone. It is loose in all humanity in varying degrees and ways. What does one do with a loose screw? One tightens it. To do that very thing is the legionary mission to all men. It is your trade in regard to your poor folk. Set yourself to tighten that screw. A little turn may be all that is required in many cases.

Your means is contact, and the soul of that contact is genuine interest. This cannot be put on like a garment. If you have not got that interest, the mere contact is not going to be fruitful. A lifeless contact is like the dead wires which do not carry the electricity. It will be dead in the natural order, and still more so in the spiritual order. For in both of those orders interest is akin to love. In the higher order love brings grace.

As cannot be said too often, interest is shown by listening. If you are really interested in a person, you will listen to him. But just observe carefully what goes on when people meet and talk. How few can claim a sustained attention! How few are prepared to listen at all!

So do not go to volley forth a lot of talk. Go to prove your love-inspired interest. This is doubly necessary because you are dealing with those who are full of an inferiority sense. To counter this you must convince them that you value them. Someone has written that admiration elicits gentleness and warmth from an ageing woman. But not from her alone; all need some drops of that intoxicating commodity. Praise is too meanly measured out. Give it, and at once is visible the hunger for it.

Let your speech be a self-starter which will set their tongues moving. Then let them talk to their hearts' content. Stimulate their memories—rake up the days of their youth, their home-life, and of course it is permissible for you to show the further interest of commenting and questioning in



moderation. Then on subsequent visits come back on those things and let them see you have remembered. They mark that fact. Do not let appearances cause you to think otherwise. They are touched in their inner depths.

Do not deluge them with religion. But do not leave it out either. You will need wisdom to tell you when and how much. To be especially avoided is the air of what is called preaching. Here you have an expedient in talking the Legion to them. Tell them you want their good opinion of it and eventually their membership. Describe its adventurous operations in all places. So doing, you cannot keep away from its spiritual roots. But these enter in naturally so that you are teaching without that flavour of preaching.

To those who are readers, the life of Edel Quinn should be introduced. It is a thrilling, heartening tale of an invalid who surpassed her plight and helped to mould the world and make history. I have never known of anyone who heard her story and remained unmoved by it. Create that mood and use it as the foundation for a building.

Auxiliary membership must be an early objective, and then—to the extent that it is practicable—our new Adjutorian degree. Groups of those members could then be formed who would then essay recruiting among their fellows. In every other way, too, the patients should be encouraged to help each other.

But if those degrees of membership are practicable, why not active membership? Many mental hospitals have praesidia composed of the inmates. To have such in the institution is to set at work there a potent leaven. Those legionaries have abundant time to spend on their activities amongst the other patients, and they can raise themselves to a high pitch of sanctity. The value of their Legion membership—on its lesser level as a therapeutic or healing force to themselves—has been so evident as to be everywhere recognised by the medical staffs of those places.

More than in any other legionary work you must associate yourself with Our Lady. You are more thrown back on spiritual considerations, because your words will weigh



lighter than in any other work. Sometimes you are not even listened to. So more weight must proceed from the spiritual background. Concentrate your thought on the vital principle of your legionary mission: your approach to those persons must be in such a spirit of faith and love that through you the Person of Our Lord is being seen and served by His beloved Mother. You go bearing her.

As perhaps a particular aspect of devotion, you might place before you the Babyhood of Our Lord. For so many of the patients will exhibit that quality of immaturity and helplessness. Your role becomes that of enabling Our Lady to mother her helpless Babe. So in the more difficult cases keep her in the forefront of your consciousness as thus engaged with Jesus. It would be an impiety to think that such a work of pure faith would be left without its due fruit.

Success. What is success? Your great success will consist, as I have already suggested, in persevering. It will entitle you to hear addressed to yourselves one day those words of shattering import: "Thou good and faithful servant."

And what about your patients? The method of your work has made a peremptory claim on the divine help, and that help shall be given according to promise. There will be success in every case, not of course according to your notions. In many cases there will be nothing to see in the way of improvement so that the counsel against loss of heart must be borne in mind. But in a certain number of cases you will see an improvement which is ascribable to your work. And no doubt there will be even more—complete cures.

In a couple of places in Scripture we read of veritable campaigns of healing by Our Lord. One reference reads that they brought the sick to Him from far and wide and the stupefying comment is added that He healed them one and all.

Why should it not be hoped that in your work, which reflects back to Him so many of the things He taught and asked for: unshakable faith, love, heroic sacrifice, tender



pity, perseverance, and other virtues—He will operate on similarly open-handed terms, healing them all—some in soul, others in mind, in body, in visible forms or invisible ones—but in the end *all*.

When nature has come to its last gasp, the supernatural often intervenes with an impressive demonstration to remind man that there is a higher law which can be summoned by heroic faith.