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Some Spiritual Symbols in Puritan Literature

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OMNIFIC AND UBIQUITOUS, the Spirit for Puritans is an arcane power that mysteriously infuses every facet of faith and experience, comprehending the sphere of all human endeavour and searching the heart's hidden nook to its uttermost depth. In so far as Calvinism finds that the Holy Ghost divides men into two camps and favours only one, the Puritan is constantly preoccupied with the grim problem of his ultimate commitment. To resolve the difficulty, however, he has merely to scrutinize his own behaviour, for he is alive to the paramount importance of his fruits as the yield of grace; nevertheless, to help him know himself better, there exists for his study a great library of casuistical works, practical sermons, and conduct-guides, the very yardsticks of the Christian ethic in action. From these the Puritan can not only deduce standards for holy living, but also evaluate his most intimate thoughts or measure the meaning of the life that he exhibits day by day in the multifarious concerns engaging him. And largely through such usage, as time dispenses grace to deal wisdom, there are articulated around him idioms of symbol and association that come to form an informed shorthand, with which to write the absorbing story of the Spirit's transactions. Most of these images, it is true, are found in Holy Writ, from which they draw both weight and warrant, but by the popular writers they are wrought into a kind of hard demotic argot that gives them fresh vigour.

In Puritan art a number of the spiritual symbols coalesce in the recrudescence of pilgrimage literature, of which Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) is but the finest example. The allegory of the soul's odyssey is based mainly on two metaphors, the warfare and the journey, which seem always to have been sympathetic vehicles for the mind's personifying tendency; at any rate both antedate the appearance of the Seven Deadly Sins, although they are afterwards linked with that great religious concept. One of the earliest figures of Christian thought, the warfare is at least as old as the fifth-century *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, and is a fascinating motif in the sermons and drama of the Middle Ages. When it is combined with the ancient image of the journey, there is produced a fertile soil for the cultivation in English literature of the conflict between the Sins and the human soul.¹ The battle is fought as early as the *Ancren Riwle*, in which the Jerusalem-bound pilgrim is shown beset with seven fierce beasts, and it flares up again in Lydgate's *Assembly of the Gods* and in his translation

1. The image of the journey embodies a conception of life that is perhaps as old as the Fall story itself. Is it not implicit in the idea of the serpent's bruising man's heel, causing him henceforth to limp along life's way?

of the unconscionably lengthy fourteenth-century poem, Guillaume de Deguileville's *Le Pèlerinage de l'âme*. Spiritual warfare is also the backbone of the English morality play, as in *The Castell of Perseverance*. In the seventeenth century, a whole army of artists employed these antique emblems, either separately or together. John Downname in *The Christian Warfare* (1612) and William Gouge in *The Whole Armour of God* (1616) are only two stout champions of the faith, who discover in St. Paul's image (Eph. 6: 13-17) a strong ally in the battle of the spirit and inspiration enough to treat it alone. For others, the two tropes united comprise a more advantageous medium; hence it is hardly surprising to come upon a host of tracts and pamphlets suggestive of Bunyan's work, of which the following are but a few: Leonard Wright, *The Pilgrimage to Paradise* (1591); David Lindsey, *The Godly Mans Iourney to Heaven* (1625); John Welles, *The Soules's Progresse to the Celestiall Canaan, or Heavenly Ierusalem* (1639); R. M. Gent., *The Pilgrim's Pass to the New Ierusalem* (1659); and Simon Patrick, *The Parable of the Pilgrim* (1663). Of these the earliest supplies a particularly interesting illustration of the way in which the popular preacher strives to develop an imagistic technique of indoctrination by interlacing the two figures mentioned. Having announced on the title-page his intensely practical aim of "the direction, comfort, and resolution of Gods poore distressed children, in passing through this irksome wilderness of temptation and tryall," Wright wastes no time tilting at windmills, but at once gets down to business. The man who would taste the fruits of Paradise, he points out, must first learn humility in the imbroglio of this hectic life, and the goal is not won easily, but only after continual struggle. For this reason the journey may aptly be compared to a warfare, in which the chief captain is Christ himself, under whose banner the armed pilgrim must travel with patience. Since the way is long and the going rough, constancy in time of trial is crucial; Wright therefore adds an exhortation to the would-be pilgrim to remain steadfast. He ends with a comfortable consolation for the faithful:

This is a place of temptation and triall: a moment of time, whereof dependeth eternity of life to come. The figure of this life: with all the glory, pompe, and vanity thereof: shall vanish and passe away, and all things must be new. New Heauen: new earth: new bodies: new mindes: and all thinges new: such as neither eye hath seene: eare hath heard: nor heart hath understood before.²

If Wright views the informing, onthrusting capacity of the Holy Spirit in this manner, it is quite otherwise with the doughty Scot, David Lindsey, "Minister of God's Word at Leith." His work consists of ten treatises, which together present a picture of a journey undertaken in "an heauenly chariot," with Christ as a sort of later Jehu. Here is a somewhat unusual variation on the theme of the spiritual progress that would argue the book's claim to be an early forerunner of Hawthorne's *The Celestial Railroad*, were it not that whilst the pilgrim feet, safely ensconced in the chariot, are saved

2. Leonard Wright, *The Pilgrimage to Paradise* (London, 1591), ch. xv.

much of the heat and dust of travel, the expedition itself is made no more agreeable, since rocks and boulders are strewn in the way. In spite of their differences, however, both Wright and Lindsey show a real desire to develop the metaphors which were to be more fully exploited later in the seventeenth century, and to strike home with them to the hearts of their readers.

Although these images carry the over-all burden of the Puritan saga, there are others no less forceful which characterize the Holy Spirit at its most explicit. In Scripture the spirit that quickens and gives life, awaking the soul from its dark night, stirring it from a torpor of dull and dead reflection, is frequently signified by the wind, as in the case of the mighty rushing wind at Pentecost. Among the Fathers this symbol is commonly employed: Tertullian, for instance, points its widespread exploitation in answering Marcion's cavil that the Fall is imputable to God because man's soul is a portion of the Creator's spiritual essence; he makes a subtle but mature distinction between the iconographical representation of image as opposed to reality, which he holds is involved in the use of "afflatus" rather than "spirit," "breeze" rather than "wind": "*Afflatus*, observe then, is less than spirit, although it comes from spirit; it is the spirit's gentle breeze, but is not the spirit. . . . One may call a breeze the image of the spirit. *Afflatus* is therefore the image of the spirit."³ With the authoritative model of the patristic writers before them, other religious authors could not but profit. In her frequent excursions into the golden realm of Renaissance imagery, Miss Rosemond Tuve has brought back to twentieth-century notice many persistent medieval icons that were familiar to seventeenth-century poets and prose-writers alike, and among the most striking from the *Speculum humanae salvationis* is the figure of the crucified Christ as a lyre, the wind as instrumentalist, and love as the music.⁴ In Donne and Herbert appears the metaphor of man as God's music, his heart-strings taut like those of a harped instrument, the wind of the Spirit playing sweet music upon him.⁵ As a symbol of inspiration, the wind or a "correspondent breeze" is also employed by the Romantic poets, notably Wordsworth and Shelley.⁶ Towards the end of the Second Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1684), Bunyan uses the image in a very similar fashion, for shortly after the stumbling pilgrims received the light of the Word to help them through the fog that clung to the Enchanted Ground, "a Wind arose, that drove away the Fog, so the air became more clear."⁷ Elsewhere in Scripture the Spirit is spoken of as fire, symbolic both of the transforming energy of love and the destructive power of anger, attributes equally capable of being displayed in the Godhead. This is one of the figures that Benjamin Keach, a Baptist who

3. *Tertullian Against Marcion*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885-87), III, 304.

4. Rosemond Tuve, *A Reading of George Herbert* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 145.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

6. M. H. Abrams, "The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor," *Kenyon Review*, XIX (1957), 113-130.

7. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. J. B. Wharey, 2nd ed. rev. Roger Sharrock (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 299.

rivalled Bunyan in popularity, opens in his *Tropes and Figures; or a Treatise of the Metaphors, Allegories, and Expres Similitudes, &c. contained in the Bible of the Old and New Testaments* (1682). Keach points out that some fire is so vehement that water thrown upon it will not quench it, but rather cause it to burn more fiercely, and then proceeds to draw the parallel that the grace of love is of so strong a nature that it is impossible utterly to extinguish it in the soul. The identity had already been marked in one of the great emblems that the Interpreter shows Christian; and Bunyan's figure is the more effective in that it is combined with another noble token of the sway of the Spirit, as the fire is kept continuously burning by the secret feeding with oil. Since in Calvinistic thought it is this unction that consecrates the believer and makes him a priest unto God, it follows that the graceless state, the condition of the disordered mind in which noxious thoughts run riot, is one that lacks the oil of the Spirit.⁸ But the oil image is curiously infrequent in Puritan writings, whereas the symbol of water occurs again and again, and is certainly Bunyan's favourite among the figures he took over from Scripture.⁹ Bunyan is sufficiently non-sectarian to avoid concentrating on the cleansing property of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism; rather he fastens on the satisfying and refreshing quality of water, and shows that as it banishes all dryness and barrenness from the thirsty soul in its December afternoon, so at the same time it brings about a rejuvenating springtide.¹⁰ Water is for most of the Puritans symbolic of the Spirit that permeates human life, washing away the grubby marks of our inheritance, preventing our lustful thoughts and making us productive of good works. Again, however, Bunyan best exemplifies the notion; his beautiful description of the weary pilgrims' halt by the River of Life, where they find a spiritual relief with which to solace themselves, is the very peak of Puritan prose art:

Now their way lay just upon the bank of the River: here therefore *Christian* and his Companion walked with great delight; they drank also of the water of the River, which was pleasant and enlivening to their weary Spirits: besides, on the banks of this River, on either side, were *green Trees*, that bore all manner of Fruit; and the leaves of the Trees were good for Medicine; with

8. This idea has an important relevance to the Doubting Castle episode of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, in which Christian finds extreme difficulty in unlocking the last of the three doors with the key of Promise. Mr. Roger Sharrock has acutely perceived that in Bunyan's remark about the lock that went "damnable hard" there is much more than the earthy, colloquial warmth, commonly and naively found by some of Bunyan's critics: "there is also a grim theological pun involving the whole conception of the soul's struggle against the despair which means damnation." *John Bunyan* (London: Hutchinson, 1954), p. 86. But there is also present an ominous token of the graceless situation that causes total self-surrender, for the unwieldy lock and the creaky iron gate clearly lack the oil that would make them move easily.

9. I count the following references in both parts of *The Pilgrim's Progress*: wind, 9; fire, 37; oil, 3; water, 55.

10. To illustrate the cleansing efficacy of the Holy Spirit received in baptism, Bunyan does include an interesting episode in the Second Part, in which the Interpreter leads the pilgrims to an open-air pool, "the bath Sanctification," from which they later emerge "not only sweet, and clean; but also much enlivened and strengthened in their Joynts" (Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 207.)

the Fruit of these Trees they were also much delighted; and the leaves they eat to prevent Surfeits, and other Diseases that are incident to those that heat their blood by Travels. On either side of the River was also a Meadow, curiously beautified with Lilies; And it was green all the year long. In this Meadow they lay down and slept, for here they might *lie down safely*.¹¹

The green tree, nourished by the River of Life and producing health-giving leaves and luscious fruits, is a recurrent symbol of consolation and hope, which grows out of the water-image, and which, since it constitutes an evaluation of the latter, sums up the practical purpose behind the Puritan artist's use of all these biblical symbols, to magnify the wonder of grace and ascribe the splendour of the peerless handiwork of man and nature to its proper source in the eternal Creator.

Nowhere is the excelling nature of this glory more beautifully evoked than in the image of the garden. No metaphor seems more appealing to the literary artist of all ages than this one, perhaps because the garden has an unusual ability to incorporate within itself a multitude of other images which are naturally inclined and sensuous enough to figure indelibly the spiritual order that is predicated. As a means of demonstrating the characteristic joys of the life of virtue and of revealing the tiptoe delights of inner serenity, St. Bernard of Clairvaux finds the garden an inspiring token:

But it is not to be thought that this paradise of inward pleasure is material. It is not with the feet, but with the affections that a man enters therein. . . . There also spring most glorious lilies, and when the flowers appear there is heard the voice of the turtle-dove (*Cant. Cant.* ii, 12). There the ointment of the spouse yields its most fragrant odour, and the rest of sweet smells pervade when the north wind has fled and the south wind blows gently (*Cant. Cant.* i, 11; iv, 16). There in the midst is the tree of life (*Gen.* ii, 9) that apple-tree of the Song of Songs, more precious than all the trees of the wood. . . . And these are not to be reckoned amongst the rewards of eternal life, but as the wages of our bodily warfare; nor do they belong to what is promised to the Church in the future, nay rather, to what is promised to her now (*I Tim.* iv, 8).¹²

This quest for the paradise of the heart in the here-and-now, through the woods and down the labyrinths of this world, has attracted numerous writers besides Dante and Comenius, and in seventeenth-century English literature the garden image as a sacred symbol of internal order is hallowed by long tradition. In addition to his famous English work, Marvell has a Latin poem, *Hortus*, on the theme; for him the garden is full of spiritual values, and at the end of "The Garden," the reference to the gardener at least glances at the divine Cultivator. Cowley has an essay on the garden; the opening sentence of Bacon's famous essay puts the whole subject on the plane of the Divine; and Book IV of *Paradise Lost* has its own place in the great tradition. Actually, many strands are intertwined with the garden image, two of the most interesting being the Horatian theme of

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 110f.

12. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Of Conversion*, translated by Watkin Williams (London: Burns Oates, 1938), pp. 35-36.

beatus ille qui or *beatus vir*, and the cult of rural retirement and solitude.¹³ Partly responsible for the establishment of these in English poetry is the Polish humanist, Jesuit, and poet, Mathias Casimire Sarbiewski, whose poems, first appearing in Latin until an English translation was produced in the late 1640's, exercise an influence from 1628 onwards by their genuine re-creation of the quiddity of Horace.¹⁴ Cognate, then, to the metaphor of the garden, and investing it with further significance, is the image of rural solitude as a figure of seventeenth-century happiness. The tradition occurs in Milton's "Lycidas," and in "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," where it is also linked with the pleasures of melancholy and the debate on the respective merits of the active and the contemplative life.¹⁵

Since every Puritan divine is aware that the Enchanted Ground of the human soul is overgrown with briars and thorns, that the way of the world is a luxuriant intermixture of good and evil, he finds the garden image convenient to counsel men to sort out the tangle. Probably its most notable use occurs in the well-known passage in *Areopagitica*, concerning good and evil growing up together "in the field of this world"; but Milton's use of the symbol is actually traditional, and his treatment follows that of Lactantius.¹⁶ Although the garden may signify the consolations or good thoughts of the Christian life, as in the jointly authored *A Garden of Spirituall Flowers* (1632), it is most commonly applied as a token of order both in the individual and in society. Bunyan so employs it, and towards the end of his *Christian Behaviour* (1674), composes the lovely analogy of garden flowers to express the ideal harmony of Christian fellowship:

Christians are like the several flowers in a garden, that have upon each of them the dew of heaven, which being shaken with the wind, they let fall their dew at each other's roots, whereby they are jointly nourished, and become nourishers of one another. For Christians to commune savourily of God's matters one with another, it is as if they opened to each other's nostrils boxes of perfume.¹⁷

It is a magnificent image, so poetically evocative that he does not hesitate to utilize it again and again. The Epistle to the Reader, which sends forth the great conduct-book, calls attention to it, and the Interpreter of the Second Part crystallizes it in one of the most memorable of his emblems.¹⁸

Allied to this figure of the garden, when it indicates the internal order or disorder of man as microcosm, is the concept of the rose without or with its thorn. Originally a symbol of innocence and pure love, the rose acquires

13. The phrase *beatus vir* occurs often in the Psalms, and constitutes the opening of the first Psalm in the Vulgate. On the *beatus ille qui* and *beatus vir* traditions, see Maren-Sofie Røstvig, *The Happy Man. Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal, 1600-1700* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1954).

14. It is legitimate to cite these poems alongside Milton, since they were written in Latin and enjoyed European fame.

15. This debate appears also in Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*: it is the ground-theme of Marvell's "The Garden," and it occurs again in his *Horatian Ode* in the picture of Cromwell's enforced forsaking his books to lead the life of action.

16. *The Divine Institutes*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, VII, 180.

17. *Works*, ed. George Offor (3 vols., Glasgow: Blackie, 1856), II, 570.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 550; III, 186.

in medieval literature, particularly in such romances as Guillaume de Lorris's *Roman de la Rose*, where it is adopted into the courtly-love tradition, an intricate web of associative significance. In Puritan eyes this union of the rose with the adulterous courtly code is naturally a peculiarly unholy one, and the typical anathematizing reaction to it is hauntingly epitomized by Spenser in the song about the evanescent rose in the Bower of Bliss episode of *The Faerie Queene* (II, xii). Despite the complex connotation of the rose, the thorn remains, at least in literature, a token that is relatively unsophisticated and precise. Even as early as St. Paul's insistence on "the thorn in the flesh," the thorn comes to represent more than the thousand shocks and ills to which the flesh is heir: it stands as a generic term for the moral imperfection and all our woe that entered the world through the Fall. Reading the curse mentioned in the Genesis story in this way, the Fathers quickly take up the notion of the *rosa sine spina* of the lost Eden, create the tradition to which Herrick refers:

Before man's fall the Rose was born,
St. Ambrose says, without the thorn—

and so establish one of the principal cultural utensils for Milton's poetic recapture of Paradise.¹⁹ As an emblem of sin, the thorn is reinforced by Isaiah's reference (5:6) to the Lord's vineyard as choked with briars and thorns, and by the direct relevance of Christ's crown of thorns received at Calvary. George Herbert calls upon all these levels of meaning simultaneously in "The Sacrifice," as does Lewis Bayley in *The Practice of Piety* (1612), as Miss Tuve has shown.²⁰ The freshness of the nymph playing amid the flowers suggests to Marvell the possibility of removing Nature's blight by disarming "roses of their thorns."²¹ A sentimental age later, in Burns's lyric "The Banks o' Doon," the thorn includes the hint of sexual transgression:

Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose
Upon its thorny tree;
But my fause luver staw my rose,
And left the thorn wi' me;

for the thorn may here relate to the lass's unfortunate pregnancy. But seventeenth-century Puritan morality is never sicklied over with mawkishness, sexual or otherwise; sin is sin, never a petty peccadillo. Consequently in

19. Robert Herrick, "The Rose"; Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IV, 256 ("Flowers of all hue, and without Thorn the Rose"). The patristic background to this line has been documented in George W. Whiting, "And without Thorn the Rose," *Review of English Studies*, X, 37 (February, 1959), 60-62.

20. Tuve, *A Reading of George Herbert*, pp. 62f. and note.

21. "The Picture of Little T. C. in a Prospect of Flowers." Marvell's use of the garden symbol, and of horticultural imagery generally, is considerable. The gardens of "Upon Appleton House" are described as laid out in a pattern, while the flowers are depicted by military metaphors; the grass, mown only to grow again, becomes a token of the rhythmical order of the universe. Perhaps it is this hopeful sense of natural harmony, of the essential timelessness of ephemeral things, that explains Marvell's well-known preference for green as a colour-symbol.

Puritan literature the magnitude of the thorn is not presumptuously diminished, nor its sharpness blunted. Among the popular writers, Thomas Adams, whose colourful style earned him the soubriquet "Shakespeare of the Puritans," seems most fascinated by the awesome force of the image. In *The Forrest of Thornes*, he characteristically strips and twists the thorns to wrest as much drama from them as possible; at his personifying touch they masquerade as Deadly Sins appropriately indigenous to different European countries.²² Adams, however, does not agree with those who hold that thorns owe their existence solely to the Fall, but believes that "these *thornes* and *bryers* should have beene, though man had never fallen"; accordingly, he finds God's purpose as evidenced in the thorn no thorny subject, but in *The Ende of Thornes* becomes entranced by the contraries of human experience capable of being reconciled in this metaphor:

Luther saith, There are two fiends, that torment man in this world: and they are Sinne, and a badde Conscience. The latter followes the former: or if you will, the former wounds the latter: for Sinne is the *Thorne*, and the Conscience the subiect it strikes. This *Thorne* often prickes deepe; to the very heart. . . . Sinne to the affections, whiles it is doing, is *oleum vngens*, supple Oyle. Sinne to the Conscience when it is done, is *tribulus pungens*, a pricking *thorne*. What extreame contraries doe often wicked conceits runne into? In their time of securitie they cannot bee brought, to thinke sinne to bee sinne. At last desperately, they thinke it such a sinne, that it cannot bee forgiuen. At first they are delighted with the sense and smell of their iniquitie, as of a sweete Rose: but the Rose of their delight withers, and there is a *thorne* vnder it, that prickes the heart.²³

This use of the thorn symbol to signify both the sin and the pang of conscience, the evil and the good thought about the evil, points up the vigour of the garden image in general to make quite concrete, in the act of expressing, the very opposite of what it utters. For no garden exists but what has earlier been tamed and shaped from the wilderness; nor is that human mind paradisaical which has not first been weeded of rank thoughts.

To the Puritan, the uncultivated soul, overgrown with an accumulation of hypocrisies, stifled by a plague of vicious parasites feeding on whatever virtue it possesses, is one that is barren of good works and void also of the strength of the Holy Spirit. This is a fundamental truth whose inescapable ramifications are exceedingly awful, and to inculcate it the Puritan writer has need of a most vivid image. He discovers it in Christ's own parable of the barren fig-tree, as told by St. Luke (13:6-9). Luke's account has had an enormous influence, not at all confined to seventeenth-century Puritan thought, and it is fair to assume that any consideration of the rôle of analogy in Western thought would have to take the most serious notice of it. In the story of his conversion, St. Augustine surely introduces the fertile fig-tree as no meretricious embellishment, but as an obverted symbol

22. Thomas Adams, *Workes* (London, 1630), p. 1056.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 1055 and 1062. Adams consequently disagrees with Thomas Burnet, who in his *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1684) regards all Nature's imperfections as directly traceable to the Fall.

of the sort of positive response he feels called upon to make at his climactic hour, when about to break with a decadent culture.²⁴ Puritan artists regard the barren fig-tree as an emblem no less compelling, and the uses to which they put it are legion. Milton perhaps has it in mind in his bitter attack in "Lycidas" on the fruitless clergy of his day: the "two-handed engine at the door," a crux that has given rise to endless speculative commentary, may refer to the axe wielded by the two hands of the husbandman, who keeps it just inside the door of his cottage, as the woodcutter normally does. The barren fig-tree is a common target also of the more popular Puritan preachers, many of whom, like Thomas Adams, seek to characterize him imaginatively in sermon after sermon. As an exhortation to good works, the image may also be used effectively to elicit urgent political action, as in the curious tail-piece attached to the anonymous *Greevous Grones for the poore* (1621):

The Figge-tree without fruite,
yet flourishing Leaves did beare:
Our Saviour Christ did Curse,
which may make vs feare
That beare the Leaves of Light,
professing much his Name:
And yet small Love do show
to them that neede the same.

Bunyan's interest in the image is constant. Between the two parts of his greatest work he devotes a whole treatise, *The Barren Fig-Tree* (1682), to giving a detailed exposition of the parable, and a few years later, he again examines it as the very first of the emblems in *A Book for Boys and Girls* (1686), afterwards reprinted as *Divine Emblems*. So pregnant is the symbol for him that when he comes to consider the fig-leaf aprons in his *Exposition of the First 10 Chapters of Genesis* (1692), he views them as a type of man's attempt to hide his sins under his own good works.²⁵ Finally, in *The Pilgrim's Progress* the figure is an indication of hypocrisy, the vice he especially abhors: the Interpreter shows Christiana and Mercy a rotten tree, and compares it to those "Who with their mouths speak high in behalf of God, but indeed will do nothing for him: Whose Leaves are fair; but their heart Good for nothing, but to be *Tinder* for the Devils *Tinder-box*."²⁶ Nor is Talkative the only fruitless professor met with in the pilgrim way. Bunyan's use of the barren tree image bespeaks his own belief in the necessity of inner rightness, as well as the certainty that lies behind Christian's remark to Faithful that "The Soul of Religion is the practick part."²⁷ It is really this significant aspect of Calvinism—its insistence on regarding works as tokens of faith—that allows the figure of the barren fig-tree to be permanently valid for every Puritan writer.

24. *Confessions*, VIII, 28.

25. Cf. *Works*, I, 311.

26. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 204.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

The introspection of Puritanism and its immediate concern with personal responsibility within the framework of predestination create a community of interest among its adherents that is greatly advantageous to the literary artist. Precisely because writer and reader are in the same position, a close affinity exists between them, and the author can consequently write not only with an understanding of how his work will be interpreted, but also with an awareness of the tremendous complex of signification to which the mere mention of any religious topic will give rise. It is this spiritual consonance that permits the fullest exploitation of symbol in the seventeenth century. In particular, the tree image carries with it a weighty and recognizable tradition, for in Christian art and iconography of the lingering Middle Ages the import of the tree is well established, owing to an acknowledgment of its crucial importance in Biblical narrative. Since there are actually two trees of supreme moment in Holy Writ, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of the Cross, it is a favourite device in medieval literature, as Miss Tuve has demonstrated, to point the parallelism between them in a series of arresting contrasts.²⁸ The motif persists into the seventeenth century, and Giles Fletcher puts it admirably in the thirteenth stanza of his poem, "Christ's Triumph Over Death" (1610), when he mentions that "A Tree was first the instrument of strife. . . . A Tree is now the instrument of life."²⁹ But Lewis Bayley also draws the analogy, as do Benjamin Keach and others, and the very thought of these writers about the Cross is clearly moulded by the tradition. With Keach, for example, the phrase "the Tree of Life" is already a commonplace, and the identification of Christ with the tree quite naturally extends to a connection of Christ with the fruit, and of Christ with specifically the apple-tree, as in his commentary on Cant. 2:3, where his remark that "the Tree of Life is not pal'd, fenc'd, nor wall'd in, as such which are planted in a Garden or Orchard" obviously has a real relevance to the vision of Bunyan, who sees the devil's tree as set in an orchard surrounded by a wall.³⁰ The comparison of Christ to an apple, hung upon the same tree as that on which grew the fruit used to deceive Adam and Eve, is made also in Guillaume de Deguillville's *Le Pèlerinage de l'âme*, which has been examined as a possible source of Bunyan's work, and is assuredly in the same allegorical line. Thus when Bunyan's Mathew (who, after pilfering from the devil's orchard, has fallen sick of the gripes and been cured by a famous purge, widely known in the Restoration period as "Mathew's powders," a heroic nostrum compounded simply, in this instance only, "*ex Carne & Sanguine Christi*") asks from bitter experience if all apples are forbidden, Gaius replies in a few lines of verse that voice the compelling authority of a vast tradition:

Apples were they *with* which we were beguil'd,
Yet *Sin*, not Apples hath our Souls defil'd.

28. Tuve, *A Reading of George Herbert*, p. 83.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Benjamin Keach, *Tropology: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (London, 1681), Part. 2, p. 229; Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 194.

Apples forbid, if eat, corrupts the Blood:
 To eat such, when commanded, does us good.
 Drink of his Flagons then, thou, Church, his Dove,
 And eat *his* Apples, who art sick of Love.³¹

This reconciliation which Gaius effects links Bunyan in thought with Deguilleville, who sees through Christ the original tree now "re-established of that other apple."³² Quite different, then, from the barren fig-tree, and even opposed to it, is the Tree of Life with its evergreen leaves representing the incarnated Word of God, whose protective and restorative power is available to the true believer in time of need, and enables him to regulate and discipline the welter of evil promptings within himself.

As all these Puritan literary symbols make plain, the patterned mind of Christian liberty is achieved only by positive endeavour. In spite of his zealous insistence on predestination, every Puritan author would agree with Bunyan that it is indeed the warfaring pilgrim himself who must "lay hold of that within the veil."³³ The thread of deliverance is divinely laid, but it is the mortal alone who must follow it to extricate himself from the worldly labyrinth. Let him but initiate his own self-mastery, however, and he will discover that the miraculous force of co-operating grace will uplift him to even greater heights, will waft him over mountain-tops to soar into the empyrean of the soul, there to hear the music of the spheres and sing the songs of angels. This is the purport of the Puritan artist's concern, and for his message he finds a Christian rhetoric fit, a convenient symbolism through which to search his listeners, trying the intensity of the response within, testing the presence and power of prevenient grace. And in him who measures up, present joy is felt as no fleeting fantasy, but as the sign, the symbol, and the pledge of future felicity.

31. Bunyan, *ibid.*, p. 262.

32. Quoted in Tuve, *A Reading of George Herbert*, p. 86.

33. Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 233.