

John Bunyan

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The author of the immortal allegory, "The Pilgrim's Progress," lived in an age of great excitement. The human mind was agitated by the great events that were happening, and, indeed, was stirred to its very depths. John Bunyan was born in rough times, days of revolution and reconstruction; years of tumult, and yet of advance, when some of the most striking events of history took place, and some of the most noted men England has produced gave a page to her annals.

The period of Bunyan's life comprises such events as the Star Chamber and the High Commission; Edgehill, and Naseby, and Marston Moor; and such names as Laud and Strafford, Charles I., Cromwell, and Charles II. The Parliamentary ability of that time was of the highest order; and among the most distinguished members of the House of Commons were Falkland and Hyde, Digby and Harry Vane, and Oliver St. John. But the two foremost men were Pym and Hampden, and by universal consent of friends and enemies, the first place belonged to Hampden. It was a day not only of eminent politicians, but also of great divines. And now it was that such theologians wrote and preached as Charnock and Owen, Howe and Henry and Baxter. These were great Puritans; but the Church of England by no means lacked men of fine mental power and impressive eloquence. To quote the words of the brilliant historian, "Cudworth and Henry More were still living at Cambridge, South was at Oxford, Prideaux in the close at Norwich, and Whitby in the close of Salisbury. Sherlock preached at the Temple, Tillotson at Lincoln's Inn, Burnet at the Rolls, Stillingfleet at St. Paul's Cathedral, Beveridge at St. Peter's, Cornhill. These were men who could set forth the majesty and beauty of Christianity with such justness of thought and such energy of language, that the indolent Charles aroused himself to listen, and the fastidious Buckingham forgot to sneer."

Nor was the day without its poets; some of them not rising above the character of graceful versifiers; but two, and one of these pre-eminent—"a bright particular star"—shining in the literary firmament. In the former rank we may place Waller and Cowley, and the author of the witty "Hudibras;" in the other, Dryden, a poet of the Classical School, satirist and dramatist, who proved his lyric skill in two fine and celebrated odes, and greatest of all John Milton, with eyes shut to the natural beauties of the world, but with that inner sight by which he was enabled to see "the light which never was on sea or shore," and from whose pen flowed as an inspiration the immortal "Paradise Lost."

The age that gave birth to such men also gave birth to John Bunyan, the glorious dreamer, who was a poet in right of the possession of the imaginative faculty, and who, in his moods of exalted and devotional rapture, seems to have heard, to borrow the majestic language of Milton, "a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies." Nor, indeed, should we omit the name of another poet, though following Milton at a great interval, that of the sweet and saintly George Herbert, whose muse drew its inspiration from the Church he loved so well, and of which he was so loyal a son. Bunyan himself, though he may not have had the accomplishment of verse in any eminent degree, yet wrote some pointed and graceful verses, and was gifted with a sympathy with the external world and all beautiful things, which in

equal degree was possessed by few. Some lines of Shakespeare's give us a description of the poet's office which was realized by Bunyan:—

“And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothings
A local habitation and a name.”

John Bunyan was born in the village of Elstow in the year 1628, thirty years after the death of Spenser, twelve years after the death of Shakespeare, when Milton was in his twentieth year, and three years before the birth of Dryden. He was of obscure parentage, “of a low and inconsiderable generation,” his father being a tailor, and some have conjectured, from a passage in “Grace Abounding,” that he was of gipsy blood. “His youth” he tells us, “was passed in excess of riot;” he spent his time “in cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy name of God.” “Yea,” he says,

“so settled and rooted was I in these things, that they became as a second nature to me; the which, as I have also with soberness considered since, did so offend the Lord, that even in my childhood He did scare and affrighten me, with fearful dreams, and did terrify me with fearful visions. For often after I had spent this and the other day in sin, I have in my bed been greatly afflicted while asleep with the apprehensions of devils and wicked spirits, who still, as I then thought, laboured to draw me away with them, of which I never could be rid.”

Those who wish to understand the spiritual struggle through which he passed, and would comprehend how real to him were sin and sorrow, self-abasement and utter self-condemnation, should read his autobiography, entitled “Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners;” a book written in prison some years before the “Pilgrims Progress,” and charged with the highest imagination and the most burning passion. He lives the feelings which he describes. He feels the sensations which he depicts.

I was (he says), as if the strength of my body had been taken away by the power thereof, and often when I was walking was ready to sink with the burden of it. Even crushed to the ground therewith. I saw it, I felt it, I was broken to pieces by it. I could for days together feel my body to shake and totter by reason of this my terror, and was especially at some times as my breastbone would split asunder. I feared also that this was the mark God did set on Cain, even continual fear and trembling under the heavy load of his guilt. Thus did I wind, and twine, and shrink under the burden that was upon me, which burden did also so oppress me that I could neither stand nor go, nor be either at rest or quiet.

He had horrible internal conflicts with wicked suggestions, and terrible battles with the devil, who was as much a personal presence to him as he was to St. Paul or Martin Luther. The struggle was often fierce and long-continued with this spiritual foe. “In prayer I have been greatly troubled at this time. Sometimes I have thought I have felt him behind me pull my clothes; he would be also continually at me in time of prayer to have done: Break off, make haste, you have prayed enough, and stay no longer.” Macaulay would resolve all his expressions of self-condemnation into a morbid state of mind, and says that “it is doing him gross injustice to understand them other than in a theological sense.” Froude takes the same view, and lays down his self-accusations to a curiously sensitive conscience, which revenged itself upon him in singular torture. But though he was a man of the strongest feelings, and moved by deep religious excitement, we cannot think that his own account of his violent and passionate boyhood was nothing more than the fancy of an illiterate man, whose affections

were warm, whose nerves were excitable, and whose imagination was ungovernable. No doubt his personal experiences were largely coloured by an enthusiastic nature, and the tempestuous workings of a poetic fancy; yet who that remembers the stories of other great sinners who became saints does not see in the humbling self-upbraidings of Milton the work of that Spirit Who convinces of sin, and lays the proudest low in the very dust. "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee," says one; "wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief," says another. And what are we to think of the "Confessions" of St Augustine, and of the battles he fought with his ghostly enemy the devil? And was not Bunyan being thus prepared for giving to the world that immortal allegory which was not only the delight of our childhood, but is our pleasure in manhood and old age? The tinker of Elstow was led, himself, through this valley of the shadow of death, that he might describe with the intense reality that he has done the Progress of his Pilgrim, from a land overhung with darkness, and peopled with devils, and resounding with mourning, lamentation, and woe, through the sheepfolds and orchards of the Delectable Mountains, and thence to the bright and beautiful land of Beulah, where the flowers never wither, and the sun shines night and day for ever.

In his seventeenth year we find Bunyan in the army—"an army where wickedness abounded." Whether he served on the side of the King or on the side of the Parliament is doubtful. He does not tell us himself. It is probable that he served with the Royalists. He was at the siege of Leicester in 1645, where he was the subject of a remarkable providence. He was drawn to be one of the besiegers; but when he was just ready to enter on this perilous service, one of the company desired to go in his room; "to which," says Bunyan, "when I had consented, he took my place; and coming to the siege, as he stood sentinel, he was shot in the heart with a musket-bullet, and died." "Here," he says himself, "were judgments and great mercy, but neither of them did awaken my soul to righteousness; wherefore I sinned still, and grew more and more rebellious against God, and careless of my own salvation." The troop to which he belonged was soon disbanded, and he returned to his tinker's work at Elstow, much as he had left it.

While he was still under twenty years of age, Bunyan married. The only marriage portion he received with his wife was two admirable books—"The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven," and "The Practice of Piety;" but he had a treasure in the woman herself, who had been brought up religiously, and who now gave him a happy and well ordered house. And so he had to acknowledge that a good wife is from the Lord, and her price is far above rubies. The wife's conversation and example, and the perusal of the books she brought as her dower, wrought upon his conscience, and he began to curb his sinful propensities, and to work out an external reformation. He fell in

Very eagerly with the religion of the times—to wit, to go to church twice a day, and that, too, with the foremost, and there should very devoutly say and sing as others did, yet retaining my wicked life; but withal I was so overcome with the spirit of superstition, that I adored, and that with great devotion, even all things, both the high places, priest, clerk, vestments, services, and what else belonging to the church, counting all things holy that were therein contained, and especially the priest and clerk most happy, and without doubt greatly blessed."

It was a strange experience, this bondage to superstition, yet is it not uncommon. It is the only religion which numbers of men have. It is a form of godliness which is keeping many from the Saviour, and throwing up a barrier between the soul and God.

Looking back on the time when he was content to be priest-ridden and to fix his hope of heaven on his membership with the Church, Bunyan lays bare the fatal danger and deception of formalism. He says: "For all this while I was not sensible of the danger and evil of sin; I was kept from considering sin would damn me whatsoever religion I followed, unless I was found in Christ; nay, I never thought of Him, nor whether there were such an one or no."

While under the thralldom of superstition, he continued to indulge in his besetting sins; he was a Sabbath-breaker and a profane swearer, and took much delight in all that was evil. A sermon which he heard on the holiness of the Lord's Day smote him to the heart, and for a time almost drove him to despair. But he shook off these convictions, and, "kicking against the pricks," played the madman at such a fearful rate, that even wicked people were amazed at his audacity. On one occasion, while he was "garnishing his discourse" with oaths at the beginning and the end, an abandoned woman who stood by severely reproved him, and told his companions to quit his conversation, or he would make them as bad as himself. This unexpected reproof cut him to the quick, and, standing by the shop-window, he hung his head in silence and in shame. "While I stood there," he says, "I wished with all my heart that I might be a little child again, that my father might learn me to speak without this wicked way of swearing." From that moment he left off this sinful habit, and one by one he relinquished the other sins which so easily beset him, though he was as yet a stranger to the love of Christ, and had a heart alienated still from the life of God. He was under the lash of the law. He had only reached Mount Sinai, "that burned with fire, and the blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words;" and he was distracted by terrors and alarms. "Poor wretch as I was," he says, "I was all this while ignorant of Jesus Christ, and about to establish my own righteousness; and had perished therein had not God in mercy showed me more of my own state by nature."

At this time a new and beautiful light flashed upon his spirit, from the conversation of some godly women who were sitting at a door in the sun, and talking joyfully of the things of God. Bunyan, leaving his occupation, drew near, and eagerly drank in all that they said. "Methought they spake as if joy did make them speak. They spake with much pleasantness of Scripture language, and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me as if I had found a new world; as if they were a people that dwelt alone, and were not to be reckoned among the neighbours."

These holy women, sitting in the sunshine, and talking of heaven and heavenly things, lived in Bunyan's imagination until the incident became for ever glorified in the narrative of "the three shining Ones," who met Christian at the Cross and gave him his robe and his roll. It was a happy providence that brought him into the company of these pious women, for after a time he was persuaded to open his mind to them, and lay bare his spiritual experience. They met him with the sweetest sympathy and most tender counsel; and no sooner had they learned his troubles and difficulties, than they told their pastor, Mr Gifford, the "Evangelist" of his dream, a man of a remarkable piety and of a joyous temperament. Mr Gifford took Bunyan under his careful charge, and invited him to his house, where he could hear the little godly company speak of the things of God, and the unsearchable riches of Christ, and the hopes of the world to come.

"This," says Bunyan, "was as seasonable to my soul as the former and latter rain in their season." Not that all was peace and sunshine, "green pastures and still waters," as yet. He was often in doubt and in darkness. Temptations, fearful in their power and terrible in their

subtly, assaulted his soul. Apollyon met him face to face in the valley of the shadow of death, and their swords struck fire and made the darkness visible. It was some time before the light broke through the gloom. But at length it came, like the shining of the sun after rain, and he saw in its brightness the path which led from the City of Destruction to “the Delectable Mountains;” and the shining light “shone more and more to the perfect day.” But even then his course was not unseldom chequered by conflicts and fears. He became a professed member of the Baptist Church, and was baptized in the Ouse. This was in the year 1653, when he was about twenty-five years of age. And now there fell into his hands the book of a kindred spirit, brave old Martin Luther’s “Commentary on the Galatians,” in which he found his own condition as clearly mirrored in the Reformer’s experience, as if the book had been written out of his own heart. “I must” he said, “declare before all men, that I do prefer this book of Master Luther upon the Galatians, before all the books, excepting the Holy Bible, that I ever have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience.”

Bunyan was at this time in a position greatly superior to that in which he was born. “God,” says a contemporary biographer, “had increased his stores so that he lived in great credit among his neighbours. On May 13th, 1653, Bedfordshire sent an address to Cromwell, approving the dismissal of the Long Parliament, recognising Oliver himself as the Lord’s instrument, and recommending the county magistrates as fit persons to serve in the assembly which was to take its place, and among thirty-six names attached to the document, appears those of Gifford and Bunyan.” This is proof that he was a prosperous householder, and was a person of consideration.

When Mr Gifford’s earthly testimony to Christ came to a close, Bunyan engaged in earnest exhortations to sinners, as a man in chains, “and carried that fire,” he says, “in mine own conscience, that I persuaded them to be aware of.” This would give a terrible earnestness to his preaching, and make him lead with all the reality of one who knew the horrors of the doom from which he urged his hearers to flee, and all the blessedness of the heaven which he would fain persuade them to enter. So preaching, with fire in his eye and pathos in his voice, and the flame of Pentecost on his lips, no wonder that he made an impression on his audience, and that he “commended the truth to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”

He soon felt himself constrained by the inward call of the Spirit, and by the urgent entreaty of men who understood his rich mental gifts, and felt the power of his words, to undertake the regular ministry of the Gospel. His preaching was with demonstration of the Spirit and with power. His fame spread through the Midland Counties, and all thronged to hear him. The doctrines which he preached, and which he took from the Word of God, stirred the hearts of men to their depths, and none could resist the intense earnestness, the burning passion, of his addresses. Election, conversion, regeneration, judgment, eternity, heaven and hell—these were all real things to him, as real as anything that he saw, or heard, or handled. Nay, more real; these were the substance, all earthly things were to him but as shadows. He had felt the terrors of the Lord; he had known the stings of conscience and the horrors of the great darkness which is wrought by sin; he had rejoiced in the peace of faith, the joy of hope, the light, the liberty, the life, that are found in Christ; and therefore he was fitted to testify the things that he had seen and heard, to plead with man for God, and with God for man. We have the same truths for our use in the ministry of today; we can give no credence to Froude when he says, “The bloom is gone from the flower.” We cannot consent to his dictum, that “the most solemn of all realities have been degraded into the passwords of technical theology.” God forbid! The only hope of the world lies in the faithful and earnest delivery of a message which is the same in all ages, and which, if it be preached as a reality, in sincerity,

and in dependence on the Holy Spirit, is still “the wisdom of God” and “the power of God unto salvation.”

After preaching and suffering for fifteen years, he was appointed to the pastoral office, or eldership, and his great object was the same that it had ever been, to bring sinners in penitence and faith to the foot of His Cross who “came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.” And success attended his words; thousands hung upon his lips; numerous converts were added to the Church; the proud were humbled; drunkards became sober; the licentious chaste; blasphemers sang the praises of God, and the spiritual desert bid fair to rejoice and to blossom as the rose.

Bunyan was during all this time engaged in controversy—controversy with members of the Church of England, controversy with the Ranters, controversy with the Quakers, all of whom he attacked by mouth and pen.

His reputation for zeal brought with it hostility, and roused the baser passions of enemies to truth. He was slandered and reviled. No name was thought too bad for him. He was said to be a Jesuit, and a highwayman. He was accused of witchcraft; he was charged with using incantations and charms. The vilest calumnies were uttered against him; he was accused of unchastity, of having two wives, and of many other vices and crimes, which were all the most utter falsehoods.

But now came a more serious trial. Oliver Cromwell passed away. His son was unable to grasp the helm of public affairs, which he soon let fall from a feeble hand. Charles II was brought back to the throne. The Act of Uniformity was revived. The Church of England was reinstated in her old place. The King, who before his restoration had declared his determination to publish an amnesty for all political offences, and to proclaim a liberty to tender consciences, when once seated securely on the throne passed the most oppressive and tyrannical acts, compelled uniformity in belief and in the mode of conducting public worship.

Under the 35th of Elizabeth, it was enacted that Nonconformists refusing to attend worship in the parish churches were to be imprisoned till they made their submission. Three months were allowed them to consider; if at the end of that time they were still obstinate, they were to be banished the realm; and if they subsequently returned to England without permission from the Crown, they were liable to execution as felons. This Act had fallen with the Long Parliament; but at the Restoration it was held to have revived, and to be still in force. The effect was that religious liberty was at an end. Dissenters’ chapels were closed. Informers were everywhere on the track of the Nonconformists, and men were obliged to attend their parish churches under certain penalties. Many were the hardships and cruelties that befell those whose consciences would not submit to the dictation of an unrighteous Act. Bunyan was stern and resolute enough to refuse submission. He would not be silenced. He held services everywhere—in barns, milk-houses, stables, or in any convenient place where they were not likely to be disturbed. At length an information was laid against him, and he was caught in the very act of worshipping God with some of his people whom he had arranged to meet once more, that they might hear from his lips a parting address, as he intended to leave Bedford till more quiet times. Though he had no fear of martyrdom, he had no desire to court it unnecessarily. On November 12th, 1660, as the winter was setting in, having been invited to preach at Samsell, a village in Bedfordshire, he prepared a sermon on the words, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” Francis Wingate, a justice of the peace on the adjoining district, having been informed of the intended meeting, issued his warrant to bring Bunyan before

him. His friends heard of it, and becoming alarmed for his safety, advised him to forego the opportunity. It was a trying moment for him. He had a wife whom he loved; for having been left a widower a year or two before, he had married a second time, and had four children, one of them blind, depending upon his exertions for their daily bread, and also many opportunities, if he found himself still at liberty, to preach the Gospel of the grace of God. But his mind was made up. He would not flinch from what he considered to be a duty, and would witness a good confession in the face of bonds or imprisonments, or even of death itself "No," he said to the friends who wished him to consult his safety; "no, by no means; I will not stir, neither will I have the meeting dismissed. Come, be of good cheer; let us not be daunted. Our cause is good; we need not be ashamed of it. To preach God's Word is so good a work, that we shall be well rewarded if we suffer for that." So at the time and place which had been appointed, with his Bible in his hand, he was in the room at Samsell, and was about to read the text, when the constable and his attendants came in and exhibited their warrant. Being commanded in the King's name, he made no resistance, but went with the officers, accompanied by some of his friends, to the magistrate's residence. As the justice was from home, the constable, to save the expense and trouble of charging a watch to secure his prisoner, allowed him to go home, one of his friends undertaking to be answerable for his appearance the next day. On the following morning they went to the constable, and thence to the justice.

When Bunyan and the constable came before Justice Wingate, he, supposing that the prisoner had been guilty of treasonable practices, inquired how many arms had been found at the meeting. When he learned that those who attended the meeting were unarmed, and had only assembled to hear the preaching of the Word, Wingate was disposed to treat the matter as of little consequence. He asked Bunyan why he did not follow his calling and go to Church? Bunyan said that "all his intention was to instruct and counsel people to forsake their sins, and that he did, without confusion, both follow his calling and preach the Word." At this the justice ordered his committal to gaol, refusing bail unless he would promise to give up preaching. Bunyan refused to be bailed on such conditions. Nothing should stop him from preaching. He felt constrained, like the Apostles of old, to obey God rather than men. So the committal was made out, and Bunyan was being taken away, when he met two of his friends who were known to Wingate, and they begged the constable to wait. They sought an interview with the magistrate, and told him who and what Bunyan was. The magistrate was disposed to be lenient; and it was agreed that if the prisoner would give some general promise of a vague kind he might be released and go where he pleased. Another magistrate, who was acquainted with Wingate, now joined him, and both declared their reluctance to send him to prison, and said that if he would promise not to call the people together any more he might go home. But Bunyan stood firm. He would not accept freedom on the terms of an evasion. He said he would not force the people to come together; but if they assembled to hear him, knowing that he would speak, he might be said to have called them together. There were many ways of calling a meeting, and if he were in a place where the people were met, he should certainly speak to them. So the magistrates were compelled to commit him to Bedford Gaol to wait for the sessions.

Thus Bunyan suffered for conscience' sake. The trial was a bitter one, and aggravated by the delicate state of his wife's health at the time. The agitation at her husband's arrest brought on a premature confinement, and she was lying in her house in a most critical state. He was a man of a tender heart, and the separation from his wife at such a time was peculiarly painful. After lying in prison for some seven weeks, the Sessions were held at Bedford, and Bunyan was indicted "for devilishly and perniciously abstaining from coming to church to hear

Divine service, and as a common upholder of unlawful meetings and conventicles, to the great disturbance and distraction of the good subjects of this kingdom, contrary to the laws of our Sovereign Lord the King.” Justice Keelin presided at the trial, and entered into a long argument with the prisoner, asking him why he did not go to church, and warning him of his danger if he spoke lightly of the Prayer Book. Bunyan argued that prayer was purely spiritual, the offering of the heart, and not the reading of a form. Keelin said—and the words have been a standing jest with the biographers of Bunyan from that time to this—“We know the Common Prayer Book hath been ever since the Apostles’ time, and is lawful to be used in the Church.” After a further examination, in which he remained steady to his convictions, he was sent back to prison for three months; if at the end of three months he still refused to conform, he was to be transported, and if he came back without license he would be hanged. Bunyan made answer, “I am at a point with you; if I were out of prison today, I would preach the Gospel again tomorrow by the help of God.”

At the end of three months he became anxious to know what was to be his lot. He was resolved to persevere in the course he had adopted. The clerk of the peace, Mr Cobb, was sent to persuade him into some kind of compliance. He was asked to give up preaching in public; if he would so far conform, the going to church would not be insisted on. He was told that he was at full liberty to “exhort his neighbours in private discourse,” if only he would not collect the people together in large numbers, as this the magistrates would be bound to notice. Bunyan would not yield. He was a representative man; the cause of religious liberty was bound up with the course which he should pursue, and so he resolved at all hazards to stand firm. The magistrates, knowing his freedom from seditious intentions and regarding him more as a religious fanatic than a leader in rebellion, wished to deal as leniently with him as possible; and so instead of bringing him before them again, and finding themselves compelled to pronounce a sentence of banishment, left him in prison. His wife and children were allowed to visit him daily, and he had all the alleviations, temporal and spiritual, which such a condition as his permitted. His gaoler, with the sanction of the sheriff, let him go where he pleased—once even so far as London. He used his liberty, as he had declared he would, in preaching the Gospel. But this disobedience to the law could only last for a time, and all indulgences being withdrawn, he was put into close confinement. He petitioned to be brought to trial again, but as he could only have had liberty on the condition of exile, the judges and magistrates thought it better to leave him in prison. At the coronation of Charles, April 23, 1661, an order was issued for the release of prisoners who were in gaol for any offence short of felony. Those who were waiting their trials were to be released at once, and those convicted and under sentence might sue out a pardon under the Great Seal at any time within a year from the proclamation. Bunyan determined to seek his liberty by a petition to the judges. His wife resolved to present it in person; and having obtained a hearing, the judges listened courteously to what she had to say. Sir Matthew Hale was much affected by her earnest pleading for one so dear to her, and whose life was of such value to his children. Hale remarked that she looked very young to have four children. “I am but mother-in-law to them,” she said, “having not been married yet full two years. I was with child when my husband was first apprehended; but being young, I being dismayed at the news, fell in labour, and so continued for eight days. I was delivered, but my child died.” Hale, whose heart was touched by the Divine love, treated her with marked kindness, but at the same time told her that as the conviction had been recorded, it could not be set aside, and she returned to the prison with a heavy heart.

Bunyan’s imprisonment lasted in all for more than twelve years, and might have ended at any time if he would have promised to conform to what he considered an unrighteous law. It did

end after six years, when he was set free under the first Declaration of Indulgence; but as he at once began to preach, he was arrested again. Another six years passed, and he was again released, but was arrested once more as he was found preaching in a wood. This time he was detained but a few months, and in form more than in reality. In 1672, Richard Carver, one of the Society of Friends, who had been mate of the vessel in which King Charles escaped to France after his defeat at Worcester, and who had carried the King on his back through the surf, and landed him on French soil, claimed, as his reward the release of his co-religionists who crowded the gaols throughout the land. After some hesitation, Charles was shamed into compliance. A cumbrous deed was prepared, and under the provisions of that deed, which was so framed as to include sufferers of other persuasions, Bunyan obtained deliverance; and he was free for the rest of his life.

When his long confinement ended, Bunyan was forty-four years old. The order for his release was made out on May 8th, 1672, and he was licensed as pastor of the Baptist Chapel at Bedford on the 9th of that month. He established himself in a small house in the town, and began to make arrangements for his worldly business and to provide for the wants of his family, a matter of little difficulty, as their habits were so frugal. "Though by reason of losses which he sustained by imprisonment," says one of his biographers, "his treasure swelled not to excess, he always had sufficient to live decently and creditably." His writings and his sufferings made his name famous throughout England, and he lived the rest of his days usefully and honourably: preaching where he pleased, and never more molested in his work for God. His influence gradually extended, through his writings, to America, and as he neared the Everlasting Hills, Doubting Castle faded from view, and he dwelt in the land of Beulah, where his hope was ever bright, and his peace flowed like a river.

Bunyan uses some remarkable words when he writes of his being delivered up to the gaoler's hands, and placed in Bedford Gaol. "I was had home to prison," he says. "Home to prison!" And did he not make it a "home"? and did he not illustrate the truth of the words:

"Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for a hermitage?"

And in another and better sense than that in which Sir John Suckling uses the words, he might have added:

"If I have freedom in my love,
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone, that soar above,
Enjoy such liberty."

He had leisure in his prison to think and reflect, and to give his inventive faculties full play. He had not many books, nor was he a great reader at any time; but he had the Bible, which, as has been well observed, "if thoroughly known, is a literature in itself;" and he had "Foxe's Book of Martyrs," with its records of the men who, for the truth's sake, were "stoned, were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword," and who went from the stake to heaven in a chariot of fire. With such companions he soars beyond the walls of his dungeon and is in an ideal world; visions of heaven float before his eyes, songs of heaven ring in his ears; "the light that never was on sea or shore" is around him; gales from the Delectable Mountains blow freshly across his brow, and from the summit of the Hill Clear he beholds

the splendours of the Celestial City, and sees the saints with crowns on their heads and palms in their hands, standing on the sea of glass mingled with fire. He is in a prison no longer. His soul has risen beyond the measure of his cell. And as great thoughts surge through his heart, and kindle in his eye, and flush his cheek, he in this moment of inspiration seizes the pen, and the page becomes instinct with "thoughts that breathe, and words that burn." The "Pilgrim's Progress" grows into life and beauty under his marvellous hand. Of the "Pilgrim's Progress" there is no need to speak in terms of eulogy; it has been praised by all ranks and conditions of men. "It has been copied and travestied; turned into an oratorio, done into verse, quoted in the novel and in the sermon, in the speech and in the play." "There has been a Roman Catholic version, with Giant Pope left out; a Socinian parody and a Tractarian travesty, where the author, dissatisfied with Bunyan's theology, alters, with a careful delicacy towards Rome, every expression which might be distasteful to a Roman Catholic reader. It is a remarkable proof of the power and beauty of the work, that it has extorted praise from men the most diverse in sentiment and genius. Southey, a hater of Calvinism, confesses: "If Calvinism had never worn a blacker appearance than in Bunyan's works, it would never have become a term of reproach." Coleridge knows of no book, the Bible excepted, which he thought taught so nearly the whole of saving truth as the "Pilgrim's Progress." He writes: "This wonderful book is one of the few books which may be read over repeatedly with a new and different pleasure. I read it once as a theologian, once as a poet, once with devotional feelings. I could not have believed beforehand that Calvinism could be painted in such exquisitely delightful colours." Dr Arnold held John Bunyan to have been incomparably the greatest divine England has produced, and loved the "Pilgrim's Progress" with all his heart. "I cannot trust myself," he used to say, "to read the account of Christian going up to the Celestial Gate, after his passage through the river of death." In one of his letters from Naples, he says: "Far be it from me, or from my friends, to live or sojourn in such a place, the very opposite, as it seems to me, of the Hill Difficulty, and of the House Beautiful, and of the land Beulah." Macaulay, in his "Essay on John Bunyan," has these words: "Bunyan is almost the only writer who ever gave to the abstract the interest of the concrete." And again: "There is no work in our literature on which we would so readily stake the fame of the old unpolluted English language, no book which shows so well how rich that language is in its own proper wealth, and how little it has been improved by all that it has borrowed."

We must pass by with a word Bunyan's other works. "Grace Abounding," which is the story of his own spiritual conflicts; and the "Holy War," greatly inferior in interest to the "Pilgrim's Progress," but which Macaulay thinks, if there had been no "Pilgrim's Progress," would have been the first of religious allegories. Froude shortly sums up, what probably is the opinion of most readers, in these words: "The 'Holy War' would have entitled Bunyan to a place among the masters of English literature. It would never have made his name a household word in every English-speaking family on the globe."

A few words here may not be out of place on Bunyan's writings in relation to spiritual conflict. In reading Bunyan, one is especially struck with, if I may so express myself, the warlike character of his allegories. The "Holy War" is the story of spiritual conflict from the beginning to the end. Mansoul had been created pure and happy, and was a town altogether so commodious and so advantageous that there was not its equal under heaven. Shaddai built it for his own delight, and had raised in its midst a stately palace which He intended for Himself. By this palace, Bunyan tells us, he means the heart. Mansoul, the body, could never be broke down unless the townsmen allowed it. It had five gates, which could only be forced by consent of those within. These gates were Ear-gate, Eye-gate, Mouth-gate, Nose-gate, and Feet-gate. Diabolus, once a chief servant of Shaddai, but who having through ambition

formed a conspiracy against him, and being defeated with his crew and banished from his territory, plotted against this town, and took it and defiled it. Shaddai comes to its rescue, drives out the devil, executes his officers, and destroys his works. But between the defeat of Mansoul and his victory over his subtle foe, there is many a struggle and peril; many enemies on the right hand and on the left to be vanquished; many a fortress to be taken, and many a stronghold to be cast down. Bunyan may have thought of his old fighting days in the Civil wars as he composed the story of Mansoul's defeat and deliverance; and this no doubt gave reality to his picture of the fight to the death, not only "against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

So in the "Pilgrim's Progress," the Pilgrims have to clothe themselves in armour, and to fight every stage of the journey. The conflict assumes various shapes and forms, and is waged with different foes; but it is always a fight unto the death; there is "no discharge from the warfare;" and it is carried on with all the sternness of men who, to use Bunyan's characteristic words, "are not yet out of gun-shot of the devil." Enemies? Yes, the Pilgrims found them on every hand. Their name was "Legion." Mr Worldly-Wiseman; Mr Legality; the three sleepy gentleman, Simple, Sloth, and Presumption; the two travellers from the land of Vain-glory, Formalist and Hypocrisy; the two giants, Pope and Pagan; and Mr Talkative, ready to talk of things heavenly or things earthly, things moral or things evangelical, things sacred or things profane, things past or things to come, things foreign or things at home, things essential or things circumstantial, "provided that all be done unto our profit." We have only a word for Vanity Fair, Bye-path Meadow, Doubting Castle, and Giant Despair, from each of which Christian finds new dangers and temptations, but from all of which he is mercifully delivered; and, recovering the pilgrim path again, at length reaches the Delectable Mountains in Emmanuel's own land.

There can be no doubt that in the scenes so graphically described we have many of the incidents of Bunyan's own life, and the temptations which assailed him in the mortal struggle between his soul and sin. It is this fact that makes his pictures so substantial and true. There is nothing shadowy about them. Abstractions vanish, and reality takes their place. No wonder, then, that the places, the hills, the valleys, the towns, the people in the great allegory pass out of the land of shadows, and are as familiar on our lips as household words, and become to us as real as the men and women, or the localities which we have seen. Who does not know as well as if he had seen them, the "Wicket Gate," the "Slough of Despond," "Hill Difficulty," the "Valley of the Shadow of Death," "Vanity Fair," "Doubting Castle," the "Palace Beautiful," and "Bye-path Meadow"? Have we not all met Mr Feeble-mind, and Mr Talkative, Mr Cruelty, Mr Lovelust, Madam Bubble, Mr Sloth, Mr Presumption, and, I am thankful to add, Faithful, Hopeful, and the four gracious ladies who entertain Christian in the Palace Beautiful, and give him a room for his sleeping-chamber called "Peace"?

Bunyan's latter years were peaceful. His circumstances were easy. He was happy in his family. The blind child, that lay so near his heart, had died while he was in Bedford Gaol. His other children lived and prospered; and his wife, who had pleaded his cause with such pathos before the judges, was spared to be a blessing in his home. His health, it was said, had suffered from his confinement; but the only serious illness which we hear of was an attack of sweating sickness, which came upon him in 1687, and from which he never thoroughly recovered. He was then fifty-nine, and in the next year he died. His death was brought on by exposure, when he was engaged in an act of charity. A father had been offended with his son, and had threatened to disinherit him. The family, with whom he was acquainted, lived at Reading; and in order to effect a reconciliation, Bunyan made a journey on horseback to that

town, and his errand was crowned with success, though it cost him his life. Returning by way of London, he was overtaken by excessive rains, and, in an exhausted state, he took refuge in the house of Mr Strudwick, one of his attached friends.

Bedford was then two days' journey from London, and it is not known whether his wife and children had the happiness of ministering at his dying bed. In ten days he was no more. He died at the age of sixty. The exact date of his death is uncertain. All of his biographers agree, however, in placing it in the August of 1688; and if so, only two or three months before the landing of King William on our shores. His last words were these: "Take me, for I come to Thee." May not the eye of faith follow him after he "shuffled off the mortal coil," and use the words which he wrote of his own immortal Pilgrim: "I saw in my dream that this man went in at the gate; and lo! as he entered he was transfigured, and he had raiment put on him that shone like gold. There were also that met him with harps and crowns, and gave unto him—the harps to praise withal, and the crowns in token of honour. Then I heard in my dream that all the bells in the city rung again for joy, and that it was said unto him, 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' I also heard the man himself sing with a loud voice, saying, 'Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.'"

Bunyan was buried in Mr Strudwick's vault in the Dissenters' burying-ground at Bunhill Fields, and his tomb has been visited by thousands of pilgrims, who have found pleasure in honouring genius sanctified by the purest devotion. Take him all in all, he was one of the most remarkable men that England has produced; and with rare qualities of head and heart, and a passionate and intense nature, he had that thorough-going conviction of the truth of Christianity which lies at the foundation of all true and earnest work for God or man. It was this conviction that gave the Puritans, amongst whom were found some of England's noblest and best men, their power, and animated them with a fiery resolve to conquer self, and to cast out from the heart and life all that was opposed to the will of God. To some their stern fulfilment of moral duty may have appeared enthusiasm, to others asceticism; but it enabled them to live the noble lives they did, and with the whole soul to oppose "the whole body of sin." This intense faith in the unseen was the strength of the Protestant theology; it gave England her power at the Reformation, it made her great, and has been the origin of her mental, social, political, and religious freedom, the source of any and every blessing that has been the portion of our favoured land. A solemn voice has reached us from the death-bed of the late Archbishop of Canterbury, which has told us that "the Church and the world seem to be entering on totally new phases." It may be so. It is possible we may be standing on the verge of some momentous revolution in the State or in the Church; it is possible we may be about to pass through some strange and unknown manifestations of thought and life. It may be that these changes shall not come in our day. They may be nearer than we think. But our duty is in either case the same, to be loyal to God. We need have no fear for our Church, or country, or ourselves, if we only stand fast by the old truths, and hold with firm grasp that true reformed faith which is the source of our liberties—social, political, religious—the faith which has come down to us from battles which our fathers fought, and from scaffolds where they fell.

CHARLES D. BELL