

Life of Bunyan

by Rev. James Hamilton, 1814-1867

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After the pleasant sketches of pens so graceful as Southey's and Montgomery's; after the elaborate biography of Mr Philip, whose researches have left few desiderata for any subsequent devotee; indeed, after Bunyan's own graphic and characteristic narrative, the task on which we are now entering is one which, as we would have courted it the less, so we feel that we have peculiar facilities for performing it. Our main object is to give a simple and coherent account of a most unusual man—and then we should like to turn to some instructive purpose the peculiarities of his singular history, and no less singular works.

John Bunyan was born at Elstow, near Bedford, in 1628. His father was a brazier or tinker, and brought up his son as a craftsman of like occupation. There is no evidence for the gipsy origin of the house of Bunyan; and though extremely poor, John's father gave his son such an education as poor men could then obtain for their children. He was sent to school and taught to read and write.

There has been some needless controversy regarding Bunyan's early days. Some have too readily taken for granted that he was in all respects a reprobate; and others—the chief of whom is Dr Southey—have laboured to shew that there was little in the lad which any would censure, save the righteous overmuch. The truth is, that considering his rank of life, his conduct was not flagitious; for he never was a drunkard, a libertine, or a lover of sanguinary sports: and the profanity and sabbath-breaking and heart-atheism which afterwards preyed on his awakened conscience, are unhappily too frequent to make their perpetrator conspicuous. The thing which gave Bunyan any notoriety in the days of his ungodliness, and which made him afterwards appear to himself such a monster of iniquity, was the energy which he put into all his doings. He had a zeal for idle play, and an enthusiasm in mischief, which were the perverse manifestations of a forceful character, and which may have well entitled him to Southey's epithet—"a blackguard." The reader need not go far to see young Bunyan. Perhaps there is near your dwelling an Elstow—a quiet hamlet of some fifty houses sprinkled about in the picturesque confusion, and with the easy amplitude of space, which gives an old English village its look of leisure and longevity. And it is now verging to the close of the summer's day. The daws are taking short excursions from the steeple, and tamer fowls have gone home from the darkening and dewy green. But old Bunyan's donkey is still browsing there, and yonder is old Bunyan's self—the brawny tramper dispread on the settle, retailing to the more clownish residents tap-room wit and roadside news. However, it is young Bunyan you wish to see. Yonder he is, the noisiest of the party, playing pitch-and-toss—that one with the shaggy eyebrows, whose entire soul is ascending in the twirling penny—grim enough to be the blacksmith's apprentice, but his singed garments hanging round him with a lank and idle freedom which scorns indentures; his energetic movements and authoritative vociferations at once bespeaking the ragamuffin ringleader. The penny has come down with the wrong side uppermost, and the loud execration at once bewrays young Badman. You have only to remember that it is Sabbath evening, and you witness a scene often enacted on Elstow green two hundred years ago.

The strong depraving element in Bunyan's character was *ungodliness*. He walked according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and conscious of his own rebellion, he said unto God, "Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways." The only restraining influence of which he then felt the power, was terror. His days were often gloomy through forebodings of the wrath to come; and his nights were scared with visions, which the boisterous diversions and adventures of his waking-day could not always dispel. He would dream that the last day had come, and that the quaking earth was opening its mouth to let him down to hell; or he would find himself in the grasp of fiends, who were dragging him powerless away. And musing over these terrors of the night, yet feeling that he could not abandon his sins, in his despair of heaven his anxious fancy would suggest to him all sorts of strange desires. He would wish that there had been no hell at all; or that, if he must needs go thither, he might be a devil, "supposing they were only tormentors, and I would rather be a tormentor than tormented myself."

These were the fears of his childhood. As he grew older, he grew harder. He experienced some remarkable providences, but they neither startled nor melted him. He once fell into the sea, and another time out of a boat into Bedford river, and either time had a narrow escape from drowning. One day in the field with a companion, an adder glided across their path. Bunyan's ready switch stunned it in a moment; but with characteristic daring, he forced open the creature's mouth, and plucked out the sting—a foolhardiness which, as he himself observes, might, but for God's mercy, have brought him to his end. In the civil war he was “drawn” as a soldier to go to the siege of Leicester; but when ready to set out, a comrade sought leave to take his place. Bunyan consented. His companion went to Leicester, and, standing sentry, was shot through the head, and died. These interpositions made no impression on him at the time.

He married very early: “And my mercy was to light upon a wife, whose father was counted godly. This woman and I, though we came together as poor as poor might be—not having so much household stuff as a dish or spoon betwixt us, yet this she had for her portion, ‘The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven,’ and ‘The Practice of Piety,’ which her father had left her when he died, in these two books I would sometimes read with her; wherein I also found some things that were somewhat pleasing to me. She also would be often telling of me what a godly man her father was, and what a strict and holy life he lived in his days, both in word and deeds. Wherefore these books, with the relation, though they did not reach my heart to awaken it about my soul and sinful state, yet they did beget within me some desires to reform my vicious life, and fall 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 both say and sing as others did, yet retaining my wicked life. But, withal, I was so overrun with the spirit of superstition, that I adored, and that with great devotion, even all things—the high-place, priest, clerk, vestment, service, 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, because they were the servants, as I then thought, of God, and were principal in the temple to do his work therein.”

So strong was this superstitious feeling—one shared by the ignorant peasantry in many portions of England, even at the present day—that “had he but seen a priest, though never so sordid and debauched in his life, his spirit would fall under him; and he could have lain down at their feet and been trampled upon by them—their name, their garb, and work, did so intoxicate and bewitch him.” It little matters what form superstition takes—image-worship, priest-worship, or temple-worship; nothing is transforming except Christ in the heart, a Saviour realized, accepted, and enthroned. Whilst adoring the altar, and worshipping the surplice, and deifying the individual who wore it, Bunyan continued to curse and blaspheme, and spend his Sabbaths in the same riot as before.

One day, however, he heard a sermon on the sin of Sabbath-breaking. It fell heavy on his conscience; for it seemed all intended for him. It haunted him throughout the day, and when he went to his usual diversion in the afternoon, its cadence was still knelling in his troubled ear. He was busy at a game called “Cat,” and had already struck the ball one blow, and was about to deal another, when “a voice darted from heaven into his soul, ‘Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven,

or have thy sins and go to hell?” His arm was arrested, and looking up to heaven, it seemed as if the Lord Jesus was looking down upon him in remonstrance and severe displeasure; and, at the same instant, the conviction flashed across him, that he had sinned so long that repentance was now too late. “My state is surely miserable—miserable if I leave my sins, and but miserable if I follow them. I can but be damned; and if I must be so, I had as good be damned for many sins as few.” In the desperation of this awful conclusion he resumed the game; and so persuaded was he that heaven was for ever forfeited, that for some time after he made it his deliberate policy to enjoy the pleasures of sin as rapidly and intensely as possible.

To understand the foregoing incident, and some which may follow, the reader must remember that Bunyan was made up of vivid fancy and vehement emotion. He seldom believed; he always felt and saw. And he could do nothing by halves. He threw a whole heart into his love and his hatred; and when he rejoiced or trembled, the entire man and every movement was converted into ecstasy or horror. Many have experienced the dim counterpart of such processes as we are now describing; but will scarcely recognise their own equivalent history in the bright realizations and agonizing vicissitudes of a mind so fervent and ideal.

For a month or more he went on in resolute sinning, only grudging that he could not get such scope as the madness of despair solicited, when one day standing at a neighbour’s window, cursing and swearing, and “playing the madman, after his wonted manner,” the woman of the house protested that he made her tremble, and that truly he was the ungodliest fellow for swearing that she ever heard in all her life, and quite enough to ruin the youth of the whole town. The woman was herself a notoriously worthless character; and so severe a reproof, from so strange a quarter, had a singular effect on Bunyan’s mind. He was in a moment silenced. He blushed before the God of heaven; and as he there stood with hanging head, he wished with all his heart that he were a little child again, that his father might teach him to speak without profanity; for he thought it so inveterate now, that reformation was out of the question. Nevertheless, so it was, from that instant onward he was cured of his wicked habit, and people wondered at the change.

“Quickly after this I fell into company with one poor man that made profession of religion; who, as I then thought, did talk pleasantly of the Scriptures and of the matter of religious. Wherefore, falling into some love and liking of what he said, I betook me to my Bible, and began to take great pleasure in reading, but especially with the historical part thereof; for as for Paul’s Epistles, and such like Scriptures, I could not away with them, being as yet ignorant either of the corruption of my nature, or of the want and worth of Jesus Christ to save me. Wherefore I fell into some outward reformation, both in my words and life, and did set the commandments before me for my way to heaven; which commandments I also did strive to keep, and, as I thought, did keep them pretty well sometimes, and then I should have comfort; yet now and then should break one, and so afflict my conscience; but then I should repent, and say I was sorry for it, and promise God to do better next time, and there got help again; for then I thought I pleased God as well as any man in England. Thus I continued about a year; all which time our neighbours did take me to be a very godly man, a new and religious man, and did

marvel much to see such great and famous alteration in my life and manners; and indeed so it was, though I knew not Christ, nor grace, nor faith, nor hope; for, as I have well since seen, had I then died, my state had been most fearful. But, I say, my neighbours were amazed at this my great conversion, from prodigious profaneness to something like a moral life; and so they well might; for this my conversion was as great as for Tom of Bedlam to become a sober man. Now, therefore, they began to speak well of me, both before my face and behind my back. Now I was, as they said, become godly; now I was become a right honest man. But oh! when I understood these were their words and opinions of me, it pleased me mightily well. For though, as yet, I was nothing but a poor painted hypocrite, yet I loved to be talked of as one that was truly godly... And thus I continued for about a twelvemonth or more.”

Though not acting from enlightened *motives*, Bunyan was now under the guidance of new *influences*. For just as the Spirit of God puts forth a restraining influence on many during the days of their carnality, which makes the change at their conversion less conspicuous than if they had been lifted from the depths of a flagitious reprobacy; so others he long subjects to a preparatory process, during which some of the old and most offensive things of their ungodliness pass away; and when the revolution, effected by the entrance of the evangelic motive, at last takes place, it is rather to personal consciousness than to outward observation that the change is perceptible. The real and final transformation is rather within the man than upon him. So was it with John Bunyan. One by one he abandoned his besetting sins, and made many concessions to conscience, while as yet he had not yielded his heart to the Saviour. It was slowly and regretfully, however, that he severed the “right hand.” One of his principal amusements was one which he could not comfortably continue. It was bell-ringing; by which he probably means the merry peals with which they used to desecrate their Sabbath evenings. It was only by degrees that he was able to abandon this favourite diversion. “What if one of the bells should fall?” To provide against this contingency, he took his stand under a beam fastened across the tower. “But what if the falling bell should rebound from one of the side walls, and hit me after all?” This thought sent him down stairs, and made him take his station, rope in hand, at the steeple door. “But what if the steeple itself should come down?” This thought banished him altogether, and he bade adieu to bell-ringing. And by a similar series of concessions, eventually, but with longer delay, he gave up another practice, for which his conscience checked him—dancing. All these improvements in his conduct were a source of much complacency to himself, though all this while he wanted the soul-emancipating and sin-subduing knowledge of Jesus Christ. The Son had not made him free.

There is such a thing as cant. It is possible for flippant pretenders to acquire a peculiar phraseology, and use it with a painful dexterity; and it is also possible for genuine Christians to subside into a state of mind so listless or secular, that their talk on religious topics will have the inane and heartless sound of the tinkling cymbal. But as there is an experimental religion, so is it possible for those who have felt religion in its vitality to exchange their thoughts regarding it, and to relate what it—or rather, God in it—has done for them. There are few things which indicate a healthier state of personal piety than such a frank and full-

hearted Christian intercourse. It was a specimen of such communings which impressed on the mind of Bunyan the need of something beyond an outside reformation. He had gone to Bedford in prosecution of his calling, when, passing along the street, he noticed a few poor women sitting in a doorway, and talking together. He drew near to listen to their discourse. It surprised him; for though he had by this time become a great talker on sacred subjects, their themes were far beyond his reach. God's work in their souls, the views they had obtained of their natural misery and of God's love in Christ Jesus, what words and promises had particularly refreshed them and strengthened them against the temptations of Satan; it was of matters so personal and vital that they spake to one another. "And methough they spake as if you had made them speak; they spoke with such pleasantness of Scripture language, and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me as if they had found a new world—as if they were 'people that dwelt alone, and were not to be reckoned among their neighbours!'"

The conversation of these poor people made a deep impression on Bunyan's mind. He saw that there was something in real religion into which he had not yet penetrated. He sought the society of these humble instructors, and learned from them much that he had not known before. He began to read the Bible with new avidity; and that portion which had formerly been most distasteful, the Epistles of Paul, now became the subject of his special study. A sect of Antinomians, who boasted that they could do whatsoever they pleased without sinning, now fell in his way. Professors of religion were rapidly embracing their opinions, and there was something in their wild fervour and apparent raptures, prepossessing to the ardent mind of Bunyan. He read their books, and pondered their principles; but prefaced his examination with the simple prayer—"O Lord, I am a fool, and not able to know the truths from error. Lord, leave me not to my own blindness. If this doctrine be of God, let me not despise it; if it be of the devil, let me not embrace it. Lord, in this matter I lay my soul only at thy foot: let me not be deceived, I humbly beseech thee." His prayer was heard, and he was saved from this snare of the devil.

The object to which the eye of an inquiring sinner should be turned, is Christ—the finished work and the sufficient Saviour. But, in point of fact, the chief stress of the more evangelical instruction has usually been laid on Faith—on that act of the mind which unites the soul to the Saviour, and makes salvation personal; and it is only by studying faiths that many have come at last to an indirect and circuitous acquaintance with Christ. By some such misdirection Bunyan was misled. In quest of faith he went a long and joyless journey, and was wearied with the greatness of his way. It was secretly urged upon his mind, that if he had faith he would be able to work miracles; and passages of Scripture were borne in upon his mind, which bespoke the omnipotence of faith. One day, on the road from Elstow to Bedford, it was suggested to his mind to try some miracle, and that miracle should be, "to say to the puddles which were in the horse-pads, 'Be dry,' and to the dry places, 'Be you puddles.'" However, before doing this, he thought he should go over the hedge and pray for faith, and then come and speak the word. "But what if, after you have prayed and tried to do it, nothing happens?" The dread of this alternative made him postpone the anxious experiment, and left him still in doubt.

Then he had a sort of waking vision, suggested by what he had seen in his pious friends at Bedford. "I saw as if they were on the sunny side of some high mountain, there refreshing themselves with the pleasant beams of the sun, while I was shivering and shrinking in the cold, afflicted with frost, snow, and dark clouds. Methought also, betwixt me and them, I saw a wall that did compass about this mountain; now through this wall my soul did greatly desire to pass, concluding that if I could, I would even go into the very midst of them, and there also comfort myself with the heat of their sun. About this wall I thought myself to go again and again, still prying as I went, to see if I could find some gap or passage to enter therein. But none could I find for some time. At the last I saw, as it were, a narrow gap, like a little doorway in the wall, through which I attempted to pass. Now, the passage being very strait and narrow, I made many offers to get in, but all in vain, even until I was wellnigh quite beat out, by striving to get in. At last, with great striving, methought I at first did get in my head, and after that, by a sideling striving, my shoulders and my whole body.⁽¹⁾ Then was I exceeding glad; went and sat down in the midst of them, and so was comforted with the light and heat of their sun. Now, this mountain and wall were thus made out to me: The mountain signified the church of the living God; the sun that shone thereon, the comfortable shining of his merciful face on them that were therein: the wall, I thought, was the world, that did make separation between the Christians and the world; and the gap which was in the wall, I thought was Jesus Christ, who is the way to God the Father. But forasmuch as the passage was wonderful narrow, even so narrow that I could not, but with great difficulty, enter in thereat, it shewed me that none could enter into life but those that were in downright earnest, and unless they left that wicked world behind them; for here was only room for body and soul, but not for body and soul and sin." The dream did him good, for, though it brought him no absolute assurance, it inspirited his efforts after it.

There is scarcely a fear which can assail an inquiring spirit which did not at some stage of his progress arrest the mind of Bunyan. At one time he was afflicted by an erroneous view of the doctrine of election. Looking at them from the outer and under side, those purposes of everlasting love which secure their safety who have already got within the precincts of salvation, appeared bristling and forbidding—a frowning *chevaux de frise*, rather than a fence of protection and preservation. And when somewhat relieved from this perplexity, he fell into another. He feared that the day of grace was gone; and so impressed on his mind was this mournful conviction, that he could do little else than upbraid his own infatuation for allowing the one propitious season to pass for ever away. But the words, "Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled;" and those others, "And yet there is room," brought him relief. Then, again, he saw that the call of Christ was needful to make a man a disciple; and he feared that he should never get that call. "But oh! how I now loved those words that spake of a Christian's calling as when the Lord said to one, Follow me; and to another, Come after me: and oh! thought I, that he would say so to me too: how gladly would I run after him! How lovely now was every one in my eyes, that I thought to be converted, whether man or woman! They shone, they walked like a people that carried the broad seal of heaven upon them. Oh! I saw the lot was fallen to them in pleasant

places, and they had a goodly heritage. But that which made me sick, was that of Christ—‘He went up into a mountain, and called to him whom he would, and they came unto him.’ This Scripture made me faint and fear, yet it kindled fire in my soul. That which made me fear was this: lest Christ should have no liking to me, for he called whom he would. But oh! the glory that I saw in that condition did still so engage my heart, that I could seldom read of any that Christ did call but I presently wished, ‘Would I had been in their clothes! would I had been born Peter! would I had been born John! or, would I had been by, and had heard him when he called them, how would I have cried, O Lord, call me also. But oh! I feared he would not call me.’”

There was at that time a minister in Bedford whose history was almost as remarkable as Bunyan’s own. His name was Gifford. He had been a staunch royalist, and concerned in the rising in Kent. He was arrested, and, with eleven of his comrades, was doomed to die. The night before the day fixed for his execution his sister came to visit him. She found the guard asleep, and, with her assistance, the prisoner effected his escape. For three days he was hid in a field, in the bottom of a deep ditch; but at last he contrived to get away to a place of safety in the neighbourhood of Bedford. Being there a perfect stranger, he ventured on the practice of physic; but he was still abandoned to reckless habits and outrageous vice. One evening he lost a large sum of money at the gaming-table, and in the fierceness of his chagrin his mind was filled with the most desperate thoughts of the providence of God. In his vexation he snatched up a book. It was a volume of Bolton, a solemn and forceful writer then well known. A sentence in this book so fixed on his conscience that for many weeks he could get no rest in his spirit. When at last he found forgiveness through the blood of Christ, his joy was extreme, and, except for two days before his death, he never lost the comfortable persuasion of God’s love. For some time the few pious individuals in that neighbourhood would not believe that such a reprobate was really converted; but, nothing daunted by their distrust, like his prototype of Tarsus, he began to preach the Word with boldness, and, endowed with a vigorous mind and a fervent spirit, remarkable success attended his ministry. A little church was formed, and he was invited to become its pastor; and there he continued till he died.⁽²⁾ It was to this Mr Gifford that Bunyan was at this time introduced; and though the conversations of this “Evangelist” brought him no immediate comfort, it was well for him to enjoy the friendship and sympathy of one whose own views were so clear and happy.

It is instructive to find, that, amid all the depression of these anxious days, it was not any one sin, nor any particular class of sins, which made him so fearful and unhappy. He felt that he was a sinner, and as a sinner he wanted a perfect righteousness to present him faultless before God. This righteousness, he also knew, was nowhere to be found except in the person of Jesus Christ. “My original and inward pollution,—that was my plague and affliction. *That* I saw at a dreadful rate, always putting forth itself within me,—that I had the guilt of to amazement; by reason of that I was more loathsome in mine own eyes than a toad; and I thought I was so in God’s eyes too. Sin and corruption, I said, would as naturally bubble out of my heart as water would out of a fountain. I thought now that every one had a better heart than I had. I could have changed hearts with any body. I thought none but the devil himself could equalize me for inward wickedness and

pollution of mind. I fell, therefore, at the sight of my own vileness, deeply into despair; for I concluded that this condition that I was in could not stand with a state of grace. Sure, thought I, I am forsaken of God; sure I am given up to the devil and a reprobate mind. And thus I continued a long while, even for some years together.”

During these painful apprehensions regarding his own state, it is no marvel that he looked on secular things with an apathetic eye. “While thus afflicted with the fears of my own damnation, there were two things would make me wonder: the one was, when I saw old people hunting after the things of this life, as if they should live here always; the other was, when I found professors much distressed and cast down when they met with outward losses, as of husband, wife, child, &c. Lord, thought I, what a-do is here about such little things as these! What seeking after carnal things by some, and what grief in others for the loss of them! If they so much labour after, and shied so many tears for the things of this present life, how am I to be bemoaned, pitied, and prayed for! My soul is dying, my soul is damning. Were my soul but in a good condition, and were I but sure of it, ah! how rich would I esteem myself, though blessed but with bread and water! I should count those but small afflictions, and bear them as little burdens. A wounded spirit who can bear?”

This long interval of gloom was at last relieved by a brief sunburst of joy. He heard a sermon on the text, “Behold, thou art fair, my love;” in which the preacher said, that a ransomed soul is precious to the Saviour, even when it appears very worthless to itself,—that Christ loves it when tempted, assaulted, afflicted, and mourning under the hiding of God’s countenance. Bunyan went home musing on the words, till the truth of what the preacher said began to force itself upon his mind; and half incredulous at first, a hesitating hope dawned in upon his spirit. “Then I began to give place to the word, which, with power, did over and over make this joyful sound within my soul—“Thou art my love, thou art my love; and nothing shall separate thee from my love.” And with that my heart was filled full of comfort and hope; and now I could believe that my sins should be forgiven me: yea, I was now so taken with the love and mercy of God, that I remember I could not tell how to contain till I got home. I thought I could have spoken of his love, and have told of his mercy to me, even to the very crows that sat upon the ploughed lands before me, had they been capable to have understood me. Wherefore, I said in my soul, with much gladness, Well, I would I had pen and ink here. I would write this down before I go any farther; for surely I will not forget this forty years hence.”

However, as he himself remarks, in less than forty days he had forgotten it all. A flood of new and fierce temptations broke over him, and had it not been for a strong sustaining arm which unseen upheld him, his soul must have sunk in the deep and angry waters. At one time he was almost overwhelmed in a hurricane of blasphemous suggestions, and at another time his faith had wellnigh made shipwreck on the shoals of infidelity or deliberate atheism. But the very reluctance and dismay of his spirit showed that a new nature was in him. “I often, when these temptations have been with force upon me, did compare myself to the case of such a child whom some gipsy hath by force took up in her arms, and is carrying from friend and country; kick sometimes I did, and also shriek and cry;

but yet I was bound in the wings of the temptation, and the wind would carry me away." It was all that he could do to refrain from articulating such words as he imagined would amount to the sin against the Holy Ghost; and for a year together he was haunted with such diabolical suggestions that he was weary of his life, and fain would have changed condition with a horse or a dog. During this dreary term it is no wonder that his heart felt hard. "Though he should have given a thousand pounds for a tear, he could not shed one; and often he had not even the desire to shed one." Every ordinance was an affliction. He could not listen to a sermon, or take up a religious book, but a crowd of wild and horrid fancies rushed in betwixt the subject and his bewildered mind, he could not assume the attitude of prayer but he felt impelled to break off, almost as if some one had been pulling him away; or, to mar his devotion, some ridiculous object was sure to be presented to his fancy. It is not surprising that he should have concluded that he was possessed by the devil; and it is scarcely possible to peruse his own and similar recitals without the forcible conviction that they are more than the mere workings of the mind, either in its sane or its disordered state.

Only relieved by some glimpses of comfort, "which, like Peter's sheet, were of a sudden caught up from him into heaven again," this horrible darkness lasted no less than a year. The light which first stole in upon it, and in which it finally melted away, was a clear discovery of the person of Christ, more especially a distinct perception of the dispositions which he manifested while here on earth. And one thing greatly helped him. He alighted on a congenial mind, and an experience almost identical with his own. From the emancipation which this new acquaintance gave to his spirit, as well as the tone which he imparted to Bunyan's theology, we had best relate the incident in his own words. "Before I had got thus far out of my temptations, I did greatly long to see some ancient godly man's experience, who had writ some hundreds of years before I was born; for those who had writ in our days, I thought (but I desire them now to pardon me) that they had writ only that which others felt; or else had, through the strength of their wits and parts, studied to answer such objections as they perceived others perplexed with, without going down themselves into the deep. Well, after many such longings in my mind, the God in whose hands are all our days and ways, did cast into my hands one day a book of Martin Luther's: it was his Comment on the Galatians; it also was so old that it was ready to fall piece from piece if I did but turn it over. Now I was pleased much that such an old book had fallen into my hands; the which, when I had but a little way perused, I found my condition in his experience so largely and profoundly handled, as if his book had been written out of my heart. This made me marvel: for thus, thought I, this man could not know anything of the state of Christians now, but must needs write and speak the experience of former days. Besides, he doth most gravely also, in that book, debate of the sin of these temptations, namely, blasphemy, desperation, and the like; shewing that the law of Moses, as well as the devil, death, and hell, hath a very great hand therein: flee which, at first, was very strange to me; but considering and watching, I found it so indeed. But of particulars here I intend nothing; only this, methinks, I must let fall before all men, I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians—excepting the Holy Bible—before all the books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience."

There was one thing of which Bunyan was very conscious—that his extrication from the fearful pit was the work of an almighty hand. The transition was very blissful; but just because his present views were so bright and assuring, he knew that flesh and blood had not revealed them. “Now I had an evidence, as I thought, of my salvation from heaven, with many golden seals thereon, all hanging in my sight. Now could I remember this manifestation and the other discovery of grace with comfort, and should often long and desire that the last day were come, that I might be for ever inflamed with the sight and joy and communion with him, whose head was crowned with thorns, whose face was spit on and body broken, and soul made an offering for my sins: for, whereas before I lay continually trembling at the mouth of hell, now methought I was got so far therefrom, that I could not, when I looked back, scarce discern it. And oh! thought I, that I were fourscore years old now, that I might die quickly, that my soul might be gone to rest.” “And now I found, as I thought, that I loved Christ dearly. Oh! methought that my soul cleaved unto him, my affections cleaved unto him. I felt love to him as hot as fire; and new, as Job said, I thought I should die in my nest.”

Another period of fearful agony, however, awaited him, and, like the last, it continued for a year. In perusing his own recital of these terrible conflicts, the first relief to our tortured sympathy is in the recollection that it is all over now, and that the sufferer, escaped from his great tribulation, is long ago before the throne. But in the calmer, because remoter, contemplation of this fiery trial, it is easy to see “the end of the Lord.” When He permitted Satan to tempt his servant Job, it was not for Job’s sake merely, nor for the sake of the blessed contrast which surprised his latter days, that he allowed such thick-coming woes to gather round the patriarch; but it was to provide in his parallel experience a storehouse of encouragement and hope for the future children of sorrow. And when the Lord permitted the adversary so violently to assail our worthy, and when he caused so many of his own waves and billows to pass over him, it was not merely for the sake of Bunyan; it was for the sake of Bunyan’s readers down to the end of time. By selecting this strong spirit as the subject of these trials, the Lord provided, in his intense feelings and vivid realizations, a normal type—a glaring instance of those experiences which, in their fainter modifications, are common to most Christians; and, through his graphic pen, secured a guidebook for Zion’s pilgrims in ages yet to come. In the temptations we are now called to record, there is something so peculiar, that we do not know if Christian biography supplies any exact counterpart; but the time and manner of its occurrence have many and painful parallels. It was after he had entered into “rest”—when he had received joyful assurance of his admission into God’s family, and was desiring to depart and be with Christ—it was then that this assault was made on his constancy, and it was a fiercer assault than any. If we do not greatly err, it is not uncommon for believers to be visited after conversion with temptations from which they were exempt in the days of their ignorance; as well as temptations which, but for their conversion, could not have existed.

The temptation to which we have alluded, took this strange and dreadful form—to sell and part with his Saviour, to exchange him for the things of this life—for anything. This horrid thought he could not shake out of his mind, day nor night, for many months together. It intermixed itself with every occupation, however

sacred, or however trivial. "He could not eat his food, stoop for a pin, chop a stick, nor cast his eye to look on this or that, but still the temptation would come, 'Sell Christ for this, sell Christ for that, sell him, sell him.' Sometimes it would run in my thoughts not so little as a hundred times together, Sell him, sell him, sell him: Against which, I may say, for whole hours together, I have been forced to stand as continually leaning and forcing my spirit against it; lest haply, before I was aware, some wicked thought might arise in my heart that might consent thereto: and sometimes the tempter would make me believe I had consented to it; but then should I be as tortured on a rack for whole days together."—"But, to be brief, one morning as I did lie in my bed, I was, as at other times, most fiercely assaulted with this temptation to sell and part with Christ—the wicked suggestion still running in my mind, Sell him, sell him, sell him, sell him, as fast as a man could speak, against which I also, as at other times, answered, No, no; not for thousands, thousands, thousands, at least twenty times together. But at last, after much striving, even until I was almost out of breath, I felt this thought pass through my heart, Let him go, if he will; and I thought also that I felt my heart freely consent thereto. Oh, the diligence of Satan! Oh, the desperateness of man's heart! Now was the battle won, and down fell I, as a bird that is shot from the top of a tree, into great guilt and fearful despair. Thus getting out of my bed, I went moping into the field, but, God knows, with as heavy a heart as mortal man, I think, could bear. Where, for the space of two hours, I was like a man bereft of life, and as now past all recovery, and bound over to eternal punishment. And withal, that scripture did seize upon my soul, 'O profane person, as Esau, who, for one morsel of meat, sold his birth-right; for ye know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.' These words were to my soul like fetters of brass, in the continual sound of which I went for several months together."

The anxious casuistry in which he sought relief, and the alternation of wistful hope and blank despair, in which for many a dismal day he was tossed to and fro, none but himself can properly describe. They are deeply affecting, and to some may prove instructive.

"Then began I, with sad and careful heart, to consider of the nature and largeness of my sin, and to search into the word of God, if in any place I could espy a word of promise, or any encouraging sentence by which I might take relief. Wherefore I began to consider that of Mark iii., 'All manner of sins and blasphemies shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, wherewith soever they shall blaspheme:' which place, methought, at a blush, did contain a large and glorious promise for the pardon of high offences. But considering the place more fully, I thought it was rather to be understood as relating more chiefly to those who had, while in a natural state, committed such things as there are mentioned; but not to me, who had not only received light and mercy, but that had, both after and also contrary to that, so slighted Christ as I had done. I feared, therefore, that this wicked sin of mine might be that sin unpardonable, of which he there thus speaketh, 'But he that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.'

“And now was I both a burden and a terror to myself; nor did I ever so know as now what it was to be weary of my life and yet afraid to die. O how gladly would I have been anybody but myself! anything but a man! and in any condition but my own! for there was nothing did pass more frequently over my mind, than that it was impossible for me to be forgiven my transgression, and to be saved from wrath to come.”

He set himself to compare his sin with that of David and Peter, but saw that there were specialties in his guilt which made it far greater. The only case which he could compare to his own was that of Judas.

“About this time I did light on the dreadful story of that miserable mortal, Francis Spira. Every sentence in that book, every groan of that man, with all the rest of his actions in his dolours, as his tears, his prayers, his gnashing of teeth, his wringing of hands, his twisting, and languishing, and pining away, under the mighty hand of God that was upon him, was as knives and daggers to my soul; especially that sentence of his was frightful to me, ‘Man knows the beginning of sin, but who bounds the issues thereof!’ Then would the former sentence, as the conclusion of all, fall like a hot thunderbolt again upon my conscience, ‘For you know how, that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.’ Then should I be struck into a very great trembling, insomuch that at sometimes I could, for whole days together, feel my very body, as well as my mind, to shake and totter under the sense of this dreadful judgment of God.

“Now I should find my mind to flee from God as from the face of a dreadful judge; yet this was my torment, I could not escape his hand. ‘It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.’ But blessed be his grace, that scripture in these flying fits would call as running after me—‘I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins; return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.’ This, I say, would come in upon my mind when I was fleeing from the face of God; for I did flee from his face, that is, my mind and spirit fled before him: by reason of his highness I could not endure. Then would that text cry, Return unto me; it would cry aloud, with a very great voice, Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee. Indeed this would make me make a little stop, and, as it were, look over my shoulder behind me, to see if I could discern that the God of grace did follow me with a pardon in his hand.

“Once as I was walking to and fro in a good man’s shop, bemoaning of myself in my sad and doleful state, afflicting myself with self-abhorrence for this wicked and ungodly thought; lamenting also this hard hap of mine, for that I should commit so great a sin, greatly fearing I should not be pardoned; praying also in my heart, that if this sin of mine did differ from that against the Holy Ghost, the Lord would shew it me; and being now ready to sink with fear, suddenly there was as if there had rushed in at the window the noise of wind upon me, but very pleasant, and as if I heard a voice speaking,—‘Didst ever refuse to be justified by the blood of Christ?’ And withal my whole life of profession past was in a moment opened to me, wherein I was made to see that designedly I had not; so my heart answered groaningly, No. Then fell with power that word of God upon me, See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. This made a strange seizure upon my spirit: it brought light with it, and commanded a silence in my heart of all those tumultuous

thoughts that before did rise, like masterless hell-hounds, to roar and bellow, and make a hideous noise within me. It shewed me also that Jesus Christ had yet a word of grace and mercy for me that he had not, as I feared, quite forsaken and cast off my soul: Yea, this was a kind of check for my proneness to desperation; a kind of threatening of me if I did not, notwithstanding my sins and the heinousness of them, venture my salvation upon the Son of God. But as to my determining about this strange dispensation, what it was, I know not. I have not yet in twenty years' time been able to make a judgment of it. I thought then what here I should be loath to speak. But verily, that sudden rushing wind was as if an angel had come upon me; but both it and the salvation, I will leave until the day of judgment. Only this I say, it commanded a great calm in my soul. It persuaded me there might be hope; it shewed me, as I thought, what the sin unpardonable was, and that my soul had yet the blessed privilege to flee to Jesus Christ for mercy. But I say concerning this dispensation, I know not what yet to say unto it. I leave it to be thought on by men of sound judgment. I lay not the stress of my salvation thereupon, but upon the Lord Jesus in the promise; yet seeing I am here unfolding of my secret things, I thought it might not be altogether inexpedient to let this also shew itself, though I cannot now relate the matter as then I did experience it. This lasted in the savour thereof about three or four days, and then I began to mistrust and despair again."

No solid peace can enter the soul except that which is brought by the Comforter. It is not the word read and heard, but the word revealed by the Spirit, which is saving and assuring. There is undoubtedly a divine operation on the mind wherever any special impression is produced by the truths of God; and whether that impression should be made with audible and visible manifestations accompanying it—as on the day of Pentecost—or should be so vivid as to convert a mental perception into a bodily sensation, as we are disposed to think was the case with some of the remarkable sights and heavenly voices which good men have recorded, is really of little moment. In Bunyan's case, so warm was his imagination, that every clear perception was sure to be instantaneously sounding in his ear, or standing out a bright vision before his admiring eyes. This feature of his mental conformation has been noticed already; but this may be the proper place to allude to it again.

After the short breathing time we just noticed, Bunyan began to sink in the deep waters again. It was in vain that he asked the prayers of God's people, and equally in vain that he imparted his grief to those who had passed through the same conflicts with the devil. One "ancient Christian," to whom he stated his fear that he had committed the sin for which there is no forgiveness, thought so too. "Thus was I always sinking, whatever I did think or do. So one day I walked to a neighbouring town, and sat down upon a settle in the street, and fell into a very deep panic about the most fearful state my sin had brought me to; and after long musing, I lifted up my head; but methought I saw as if the sun that shineth in the heavens did grudge to give light; and as if the very stones in the street, and tiles upon the houses, did bend themselves against me: methought that they all combined together to banish me out of the world; I was abhorred of them, and unfit to dwell among them, or be partaker of their benefits, because I had sinned against the Saviour. Then breaking out in the bitterness of my soul, I said to my

soul, with a grievous sigh, 'How can God comfort such a wretch as I am?' I had no sooner said it, but this returned upon me, as an echo doth answer a voice, 'This sin is not unto death.' At which I was as if raised out of the grave, and cried out again, 'Lord, how couldst thou find out such a word as this?' for I was filled with admiration at the fitness and at the unexpectedness of the sentence. The fitness of the word; the rightness of the timing of it; the power and sweetness and light and glory that came with it also, were marvellous to me to find. I was now for the time out of doubt as to that about which I was so much in doubt before. I seemed now to stand upon the same ground with other sinners, and to have as good right to the word and prayer as any of them."

In coming to this conclusion, he had made a great step in advance. His misery had hitherto been occasioned by a device of the devil, which keeps many anxious souls from comfort. He regarded his own case as a special exception to which a gospel, otherwise general, did not apply; but this snare was now broken, and, though with halting pace, he was on the way to settled rest and joy. Frequently he would feel that his transgressions had cut him off from Christ, and left him "neither foot-hold nor handhold among all the props and stays in the precious word of life;" but presently he would find some gracious assurance—he knew not how—sustaining him. At one time he would appear to himself like a child fallen into a mill-pond, "who thought it could make some shift to sprawl and scramble in the water," yet, as it could find nothing to which to cling, must sink at last; but by and by he would perceive that an unseen power was buoying him up, and encouraging him to cry from the depths. At another time he would be so discouraged and daunted, that he scarcely dared to pray, and yet in a sort of desperation beginning, he found it true that "men ought always to pray and not to faint." On one occasion, whilst endeavouring to draw near the throne of grace, the tempter suggested "that neither the mercy of God, nor yet the blood of Christ, at all concerned him, nor could they help him by reason of his sin; therefore it was vain to pray." Yet he thought with himself, "I will pray." "But," said the tempter, "your sin is unpardonable." "Well," said he, "I will pray." "It is to no boot," said the adversary. And still he answered, "I will pray." And so he began his prayer, "Lord, Satan tells me that neither thy mercy, nor Christ's blood, is sufficient to save my soul. Lord, shall I honour thee most by believing thou wilt and canst? or him, by believing thou neither wilt nor canst? Lord, I would fain honour thee by believing thou canst and thou wilt." And whilst he was thus speaking, "as if some one had clapped him on the back," that scripture fastened on his mind, "O man great is thy faith."

Relief came slowly but steadily, and was the more abiding, because he had learned by experience to distrust any comfort which did not come from the word of God. Such passages as these, "My grace is sufficient for thee," and "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out," greatly lightened his burden; but he derived still stronger encouragement from considering that the Gospel, with its benignity, is much more expressive of the mind and disposition of God than the law with its severity. "Mercy rejoiceth over judgment. How shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious, had no glory in this respect, by

reason of the glory that excelleth.” Or, as the same truth presented itself to his mind in an aspect more arresting to a mind like his, “And Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say, for he was sore afraid. And there was a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son, hear him.” “Then I saw that Moses and Elias must both vanish, and leave Christ and his saints alone.”

We have now arrived at the happy time when these doubts and distractions were exchanged for songs of deliverance. We relate it in the words of Bunyan’s own narrative: “One day as I was passing into the field, and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest yet all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, ‘Thy righteousness is in heaven;’ and methought withal, I saw with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God’s right hand; there, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, ‘He wants my righteousness,’ for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, ‘the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.’ Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed; I was loosed from my afflictions and my irons; my temptations also fled away; so that from that time those dreadful scriptures of God left off to trouble me. Now went I also home rejoicing for the grace and love of God; so when I came home I looked to see if I could find that sentence, ‘Thy righteousness is in heaven,’ but could not find such a saying; wherefore my heart began to sink again, only that was brought to my remembrance, ‘He is made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption;’ by this word I saw the other sentence true.

For, by this scripture, I saw that the man Christ Jesus, as he is distinct from us as touching his bodily presence, so he is our righteousness and sanctification before God. Here, therefore, I lived for some time very sweetly at peace with God through Christ. Oh! methought, Christ, Christ! There was nothing but Christ that was before my eyes. I was not now for looking upon this and the other benefits of Christ apart, as of his blood, burial, or resurrection, but considering him as a whole Christ, as he is when all these, and all other his virtues, relations, offices, and operations met together, and that he sat on the right hand of God in heaven. ’Twas glorious to me to see his exaltation, and the worth and prevalency of all his benefits; and that because now I could look from myself to him, and would reckon that all those graces of God that now were green on me, were yet but like those cracked groats and fourpence-halfpennies that rich men carry in their purses, when their gold is in their trunks at home: Oh! I saw my gold was in my trunk at home! in Christ my Lord and Saviour. Now Christ was all; all my *righteousness*, all my *sanctification*, and all my *redemption*.

“Further, the Lord did also lead me into the mystery of union with the Son of God; that I was joined to him, that I was ‘flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone’ (Eph. v. 30); and now was that word of St Paul sweet to me. By this also was my faith in him as my righteousness the more confirmed in me; for if he and I were one, then his righteousness was mine, his merits mine, his victory also mine. Now could I see myself in heaven and earth at once: in heaven by my Christ, by my

head, by my righteousness and life; though on earth by my body or person. Now I saw Christ Jesus was looked upon of God, and should also be looked upon by us, as that common or public person, in whom all the whole body of his elect are always to be considered and reckoned; that we fulfilled the law by him, rose from the dead by him, got the victory over sin, death, the devil, and hell by him; when he died, we died; and so of his resurrection. 'Thy dead men shall live; together with my dead body shall they arise,' saith he: and again, 'After two days he will revive us, and the third day we shall live in his sight:' which is now fulfilled by the sitting down of the Son of Man on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, according to that to the Ephesians, 'He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' Ah! these blessed considerations and scriptures, with many others of like nature, were in those days made to spangle in mine eye, so that I have cause to say, 'Praise ye the Lord God in his sanctuary; praise him in the firmament of his power; praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.'"

Extricated from the Slough of Despond, Bunyan went on his way rejoicing; and though sometimes interrupted by disquieting thoughts and strong temptations, his subsequent career was a path of growing comfort and prevailing peace. At the age of twenty-six he was admitted a member of that Baptist church of which Mr Gifford was the faithful pastor,—a rare man, who, in angry times, and in a small communion, preserved his catholicity. Holding that "union with Christ," and not agreement concerning any ordinances or things external, is the foundation of Christian fellowship, with his dying hand he addressed a letter to his beloved people, in which the following sentence occurs, the utterance of a heart enlarged by Christian magnanimity, and bent on those objects which alone look important when the believer is waiting on the top of Pisgah:—"Concerning separation from the Church about baptism, laying on of hands, anointing with oil, psalms, or any other externals, I charge every one of you respectively, as you will give an account of it to our Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge both quick and dead at his coming, that none of you be found guilty of this great evil, which some have committed, and that through a zeal for God, yet not according to knowledge. They have erred from the law of the love of Christ, and have made a rent in the true Church, which is but one." If our Baptist brethren are justly proud that the burning and shining light of Bunyan was set upon their candlestick, they have equal reason to boast of the torch at which his bland and diffusive light was kindled. John Bunyan doubtless owed to John Gifford the peculiar type of his Christianity, its comprehensiveness, and its sect-forgetting zeal for the things of Jesus Christ.

He had not long been a member of the church when he was called to exercise its actual ministry. Gifford was gone to his everlasting rest; and as a substitute for his labours, it was put upon a few of the brethren to speak the word of exhortation to the rest. Of these Bunyan was one. At first he did not venture farther than to address his friends in their more private meetings, or to follow up, with a brief application, the sermons delivered by others in their village-preaching. But these exercises having afforded the utmost satisfaction to his judicious though warm-hearted hearers, he was urged forward to more public services. These he was too humble to covet, and too earnest to refuse. Though his education was sufficiently rude, God had given him from the first a strong athletic mind and a glowing

heart—that downright logic and teeming fancy, whose bold strokes and burning images heat the Saxon temper to the welding point, and make the popular orator of our English multitude.

Then his low original and rough wild history, however much they might have subjected him to scorn had he exchanged the leathern apron for a silken one, or scrambled from the hedge-side into the high-places of the church, entailed no suspicion, and awakened much surprise, when the Bedford townsmen saw their blaspheming neighbour a new man, and in a way so disinterested preaching the faith which he once destroyed. The town turned out to hear, and though there was some mockery, many were deeply moved. His own account of it is:—“At first I could not believe that God should speak by me to the heart of any man, still counting myself unworthy; yet those who were thus touched, would love me, and have a particular respect for me; and though I did put it from me, that they should be awakened by me, still they would confess it and affirm it before the saints of God... Wherefore, seeing them in both their words and deeds to be so constant, and also in their hearts so earnestly pressing after the knowledge of Jesus Christ, rejoicing that ever God did send me where they were, then I began to conclude it might be so, that God had owned in his work such a foolish one as I; and then came that word of God to my heart with such sweet refreshment: ‘The blessing of them that were ready to perish is come upon me; yea, I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.’ At this, therefore, I rejoiced; yea, the tears of those whom God had awakened by my preaching would be both solace and encouragement to me. I thought on those sayings, ‘Who is he that maketh me glad, but the same that is made sorry by me!’ And again, ‘Though I be not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am unto you: for the seal of my apostleship are ye in the Lord.’”

There was a solemnizing and subduing power in Bunyan’s ministry, because it was heart-felt. So far as the truths he uttered were capable of becoming subjects of personal consciousness, he had experienced them; and so far as they were subjects of intellectual conviction, he was not only fully persuaded of them, but saw them so clear and evident, that his realizations were continually quickening into sensations. He thus began with a John-Baptist ministry, to which succeeded a Pentecostal evangel; and at last it grew into the Pauline amplitude and completeness, “the whole counsel of God.” “In my preaching of the word, I took special notice of this one thing, namely, that the Lord did lead me to begin where the word begins with sinners; that is, to condemn all flesh, and to open and allege that the curse of God by the law doth belong to and lay hold on all men as they come into the world, because of sin. Now this part of my work I fulfilled with great sense; for the terrors of the law, and guilt for my transgressions, lay heavy on my conscience. I preached what I felt, what I smartingly did feel; even that under which my poor soul did groan and tremble to astonishment.

Indeed I have been as one sent to them from the dead; I went myself in chains to preach to them in chains; and carried that fire in my own conscience that I persuaded them to be aware of... Thus I went on for the space of two years, crying out against men’s sins, and their fearful state because of them. After which the Lord came in upon my own soul with some sure peace and comfort through Christ; for he did give me many sweet discoveries of his blessed grace through him. Wherefore now I altered in my preaching (for still I preached what I saw and

felt). Now, therefore, I did much labour to hold forth Jesus Christ in all his offices, relations, and benefits, unto the world, and did strive also to discover, to condemn, and remove those false supports and props on which the world doth both lean, and by them fall and perish. On these things also I staid as long as on the other. After this, God led me into something of the mystery of union with Christ; wherefore, that I discovered and shewed to them also. And when I had travelled through these three chief points of the word of God, I was caught in my present practice, and cast into prison, where I have lain alone as long again to confirm the truth by way of suffering, as I was before in testifying of it, according to the scriptures, in a way of preaching.”

Bunyan’s preaching was no incoherent rant. Words of truth and soberness formed the staple of each sermon; and his burning words and startling images were only the electric scintillations along the chain of his scriptural eloquence. Though the common people heard him most gladly, he had occasional hearers of a higher class. Once on a week-day he was expected to preach in a parish church near Cambridge, and a concourse of people had already collected in the churchyard. A gay student was riding past, when he noticed the crowd, and asked what had brought them together. He was told that the people had come out to hear one Bunyan, a tinker, preach. He instantly dismounted, and gave a boy twopence to hold his horse, for he declared he was determined to hear the tinker prate. So he went into the church, and heard the tinker; but so deep was the impression which that sermon made on the scholar, that he took every subsequent opportunity to attend Bunyan’s ministry, and himself became a renowned preacher of the gospel in Cambridgeshire. Still he felt that his errand was to the multitude, and his great anxiety was to penetrate the darkest places of the land, and preach to the most abandoned people. In these labours of unostentatious heroism, he sometimes excited the jealousy of the regular parish ministers, and even under the tolerant rule of the Protector, was in some danger of imprisonment. However, it was not till the Restoration that he was in serious jeopardy; but thereafter he was among the first victims of the grand combination betwixt priests and rulers to exterminate the gospel in England.

On the 12th of November 1660, he had promised to meet a little congregation in a private house at Samsell in Bedfordshire. Before the hour of meeting he was apprised that a warrant was out to seize him; but he felt that he owed it to the gospel not to run away at such a time. Accordingly when the people were assembled with no weapons but their Bibles, the constable entered and arrested the preacher. He had only time to speak a few words of counsel and encouragement to his hearers, “You see we are prevented of our opportunity to speak and hear the word of God, and are likely to suffer for the same. But be not discouraged. It is a mercy to suffer for so good a cause. We might have been apprehended as thieves or murderers, or for other wickedness; but blessed be God, it is not so. We suffer as Christians for well doing; and better be the persecuted than the persecutors.” After being taken before a justice, he was committed to gaol till the ensuing sessions should be held at Bedford. There an indictment was preferred—“That John Bunyan, of the town of Bedford, labourer, being a person of such and such conditions, he hath since such a time devilishly and perniciously abstained from coming to church to hear divine service; and is a

common upholder of several 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," &c. Of course he was convicted, and sentenced to imprisonment, with certification, that if he did not conform within a given period, he would be banished out of the kingdom.

After Bunyan ceases to be his own biographer, our materials become exceeding scanty. This is the less to be lamented when we reflect that the history of his "hidden life" is already told. The processes have now been related which formed and developed the inner man; and the few external events that befel him, and the few important things that he did, during the remaining eight-and-twenty years of his mortal pilgrimage, may be recorded in a single page.

His imprisonment was protracted from sessions to sessions, till he had measured out twelve weary years in Bedford gaol. Perhaps we should not call them *weary*. They had their alleviations. His wife and children were allowed to visit him. His blind and most beloved daughter was permitted to cheer his solitude and her own. He had his Bible, and his "Book of Martyrs." He had his imagination, and his pen. Above all, he had a good conscience. He felt it a blessed exchange to quit the "iron cage" of despair for a "den" oft visited by a celestial comforter; and which, however cheerless, did not lack a door to heaven.

Whether it was the man's own humanity, or whether it was that God who assuaged Joseph's captivity, gave Bunyan special favour in the eyes of the keeper of his prison, the fact is certain, that he met with singular indulgence at the least likely hands. Not only was he allowed many a little indulgence in his cell, but he was suffered to go and come with a freedom which could hardly have been exceeded had the county gaol been his own hired house. For months together he was a constant attender of the church-meetings of his brethren in Bedford, and was actually chosen pastor during the period of his incarceration. On one occasion some of the bishops who had heard a rumour of the unusual liberty conceded to him, sent a messenger from London to Bedford to ascertain the truth. The officer was instructed to call at the prison during the night. It was a night when Bunyan had received permission to stay at home with his family; but so uneasy did he feel, that he told his wife he must go back to his old quarters. So late was it that the gaoler blamed him for coming at such an untimely hour; but a little afterwards the messenger arrived. "Are all the prisoners safe?" "Yes." "Is John Bunyan safe?" "Yes." "Let me see him." Bunyan was called, and the messenger went his way; and when he was gone the gaoler told him, "Well, you may go out again just when you think proper; for you know when to return better than I can tell you."

But the best alleviations of his captivity were those wonderful works which he there projected or composed. Some of these were controversial; but one of them was his own life, under the title, "Grace abounding to the Chief of Sinners," and another was the "Pilgrim's Progress."

In 1672 he obtained his liberty, and his friends immediately built for him a large meeting-house, where he continued to preach with little interruption till his death. Once a year he visited London, and was there so popular, that twelve hundred people would gather together at seven in the morning of a winter's working-day to hear him. Amongst the admiring listeners, Dr Owen was

frequently found; and once when Charles the Second asked how a learned man like him could sit down to hear a tinker prate, the great theologian is said to have answered, "May it please your Majesty, could I possess the tinker's abilities for preaching, I would most gladly relinquish all my learning." But popular as he was, he was not fond of praise. One day after he had concluded an impressive discourse, his friends pressed round to thank him for his "sweet sermon." "Aye," he bluntly answered, "you need not remind me of that; for the devil told me as much before I left the pulpit."

He had numbered sixty years, and written as many books, when he was released from his abundant labours. A young gentleman, his neighbour, had fallen under his father's displeasure, and was much concerned at his father's estrangement as well as at the prospect of being disinherited. He begged Mr Bunyan's friendly interposition to propitiate his father, and prepare the way for his return to parental favour and affection. The kind-hearted man undertook the task, and having successfully achieved it, was returning from Reading to London on horseback, when he was thoroughly drenched with excessive rains. He arrived cold and wet at the house of Mr Strudwick, a grocer on Snow Hill. Here he was seized with fits of shivering, which passed off in violent fever, and after ten days' sickness, on the 31st of August 1688, his pilgrimage ended, and he went in by the gate into the city.

As the most appropriate introduction to the following selections from the practical writings of Bunyan, we would chose this rapid history of the Man, with a few remarks on the Theologian and the Author.

I. Bunyan's theological merits we rank very high. No one can turn over his pages without noticing the abundance of his Scriptural quotations; and these quotations no one can examine without perceiving how minutely he had studied, and how deeply he had pondered, the word of God. But it is possible to be very *textual*, and yet by no means very scriptural. A man may heave an exact acquaintance with the literal Bible, and yet entirely miss the great Bible message. He may possess a dexterous command of detached passages and insulated sentences, and yet be entirely ignorant of that peculiar scheme which forms the great gospel revelation. But this was Bunyan's peculiar excellence. He was even better acquainted with the Gospel as the scheme of God, than he was familiar with the Bible-text; and the consequence is, that though he is sometimes irrelevant in his references, and fanciful in interpreting particular passages, his doctrine is almost always according to the analogy of faith. The doctrine of a free and instant justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, none even of the Puritans could state with more Luther-like boldness, nor defend with an affection more worthy of Paul. In his last and best days, Coleridge wrote, "I know of no book, the Bible excepted, as above all comparison, which I, according to my judgment and experience, could so safely recommend as teaching and enforcing the whole saving truth, according to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, as the Pilgrim's Progress. It is in my conviction the best *Summa Theologiæ Evangelicæ* ever produced by a writer not miraculously inspired."⁽³⁾ Without questioning this verdict, we would include in the encomium some of his other writings, which possibly Coleridge never saw. Such as the Tracts contained in this volume.⁽⁴⁾ They exhibit Gospel-

truths in so clear a light, and state them in such a frank and happy tone, that he who runs may read, and he who reads in earnest will rejoice. The Pilgrim is a peerless guide to those who have already passed in at the wicket-gate; but those who are still seeking peace to their troubled souls, will find the best directory in *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved*.

II. Invaluable as a theologian, Bunyan stands alone as a contributor to theological literature. In recent times no man has done so much to draw the world's delighted attention to the subjects of supreme solicitude. No production of a mortal pen has found so many readers as one work of his; and none has awakened so frequently the sighing behest, "Let me die the death of the righteous."

None has painted the beauty of holiness in taints more lovely, nor spoken in tones more thrilling to the heart of universal humanity. At first the favourite of the vulgar, he is now the wonder of the learned; and from the obscurity, not inglorious, of smoky cupboards and cottage chimneys, he has been escorted up to the highest places of classical renown, and duly canonized by the pontiffs of taste and literature. The man, whom Cowper praised anonymously,

"Lest so despised a name should move a sneer,"

has at last extorted emulous plaudits from a larger host of writers than ever conspired to praise a man of genius, who was also a man of God. Johnson and Franklin, Scott, Coleridge, and Southey, Byron and Montgomery, Macintosh and Macaulay, have exerted their philosophical acumen and poetic feeling to analyze his various spell, and account for his unequalled fame; and though the round-cornered copies, with their diverting woodcuts, have not disappeared from the poor man's ingle, illustrated editions blaze from the shelves of every sumptuous library, new pictures, from its exhaustless themes, light up the walls of each annual exhibition; and amidst the graceful litter of the drawing-room table, you are sure to take up designs from the Pilgrim's Progress. So universal is the ascendancy of the tinker-teacher, so world-wide the diocese of him whom Whitefield created Bishop Bunyan, that probably half the ideas which the outside-world entertains regarding experimental piety, they have, in some form or other, derived from him. One of the most popular preachers in his day, in his little treatises, as well as in his longer allegories, he preaches to countless thousands still. The cause of this unexampled popularity is a question of great practical moment.

And, first of all, Bunyan speaks to the whole of man,—to his imagination, his intellect, his heart. He had in himself all these ingredients of full-formed humanity, and in his books he lets all of them out. French writers and preachers are apt to deal too exclusively in the one article—fancy; and though you are amused for the moment with the rocket-shower of brilliant and many-tinted ideas which fall sparkling around you, when the exhibition is ended, you are disappointed to find that the whole was momentary, and that from all the ruby and emerald rain scarcely one gem of solid thought remains.⁽⁵⁾ Scottish writers and preachers are apt to indulge the argumentative cacoëthes of their country, and cramming into a tract or sermon as much hard-thinking as the Bramah-pressure of hydrostatic intellects can condense into the iron paragraphs, they leave no room for such delicate materials as fancy or feeling, illustration, imagery, or affectionate appeal;⁽⁶⁾ whilst Irish authors and pulpit-orators are so surcharged

with their own exuberant enthusiasm, that their main hope of making you think as they think, is to make you feel as they feel. The heart is their Aristotle; and if they cannot win you by a smile or melt you by a tear, they would think it labour lost to try a syllogism. Bunyan was neither French, nor Scotch, nor Irish. He embodied in his person, though greatly magnified, the average mind of England—playful, affectionate, downright.

His intellectual power comes chiefly out in that homely self-commending sense—the brief business-like reasoning, which might be termed Saxon logic, and of which Swift in one century, and Cobbett in another, are obvious instances. His premises are not always true, nor his inferences always legitimate; but there is such evident absence of sophistry, and even of that refining and hair-splitting which usually beget the suspicion of sophistry—his statements are so sincere, and his conclusions so direct, the language is so perspicuous, and the appeal is made so honestly to each reader's understanding, that his popularity as a reasoner is inevitable. We need not say that the author of the Pilgrim possessed imagination; but it is important to note the service it rendered to his preaching, and the charm which it still imparts to his miscellaneous works. The pictorial power he possessed in a rare degree. His mental eye perceived the truth most vividly. Some minds are moving in a constant mystery. They see men like trees walking. The different doctrines of the Bible all wear dim outlines to them, jostling and jumbling; and after a perplexing morrice of bewildering hints and half discoveries, they vanish into the misty back-ground of nonentity. To Bunyan's bright and broad-waking eye all things were clear. Thee men walked and the trees stood still. Everything was seen in sharp relief and definite outline—a *reality*. And besides the pictorial, he possessed in highest perfection the illustrative faculty. Not only did his own mind perceive the truth most vividly, but he saw the very way to give others a clear perception of it also.

This is the great secret of successful teaching. Like a man who has chambered his difficult way to the top of a rocky eminence, but who, once he has reached the summit, perceives an easier path, and directs his companions along its gentler slopes, and gives them a helping-hand to lift them over the final obstacles; it was by giant struggles over the debris of crumbling hopes, and through jungles of despair, and up the cliffs of apparent impossibility, that Bunyan forced his way to the pinnacle of his eventual joy; but no sooner was he standing there, than his eagle-eye detected the easier path, and he made it the business of his benevolent ministry to guide others into it. Though not the truth, an illustration is a stepping-stone towards it; an indentation in the rock which makes it easier to climb. No man had a happier knack in hewing out these notches in the cliff, and no one knew better where to place them, than this pilgrim's pioneer. Besides, he rightly judged that the value of these suggestive similes—these illustrative stepping-stones—depends very much on their breadth and frequency. But Bunyan appeals not only to the intellect and imagination, but to the hearts of men. There was no bitterness in Bunyan. He was a man of kindness and compassion. How sorry he is for Mr Badman! and how he makes you sympathize with Christian and Mr Ready-to-halt and Mr Feeble-mind, and all the other interesting companions of that eventful journey! And in his sermons how piteously he pleads with sinners for their own souls! and how impressive is the

undisguised vehemency of his yearning affections! In the same sentence Bunyan has a word for the man of sense, and another for the man of fancy, and a third for the man of feeling; and by thus blending the intellectual, the imaginative, and the affectionate, he speaks home to the whole of man, and has made his works a lesson-book for all mankind.

Another secret of Bunyan's popularity is the felicity of his style. His English is vernacular, idiomatic, universal; varying with the subject; homely in the continuous narrative; racy and pungent in his lively and often rapid discourse; and, when occasion requires, "a model of unaffected dignity and rhythmical flow;" but always plain, strong, and natural. However, in speaking of his style, we do not so much intend his words as his entire mode of expression. A thought is like a gem; but like a gem it may be spoiled in the setting. A careless artist may chip it and grievously curtail its dimensions; a clumsy craftsman, in his fear of destroying it, may not sufficiently polish it; or in his solicitude to show off its beauty, may overdo the accompanying ornaments. Bunyan was too skilful a workman so to mismanage the matter. His expression neither curtails nor encumbers the thought, but makes the most of it; that is, presents it to the reader as it is seen by the writer. Though there is a great appearance of amplitude about his compositions, few of his words could be wanted. Some styles are an ill-spun thread, full of inequalities, and shaggy from beginning to end with projecting fibres which spoil its beauty, and add nothing to its strength; but in its easy continuousness and trim compactness, the thread of Bunyan's discourse flows firm and smooth from first to last. Its fulness regales the ear, and its felicity aids the understanding.

[**Note:** Footnotes renumbered in consecutive order.]

(1) Those who are interested in the historic parallels supplied by Christian biography, will find a similar instructive dream in the *Life of General Burn*, vol. i. pp. 127-130.

(2) Ivimey's *Life of Bunyan*, pp. 51-53.

(3) *Remains*, vol. iii. p. 391.

(4) The other items contained in the book that this text comes from were: *Jerusalem Sinner Saved; Pharisee and the Publican; The Trinity and the Christian; The Law and a Christian; Bunyan's Last Sermon; Bunyan's Dying Sayings and An Exhortation to Peace and Unity.*

(5) Pascal was an exception. D'Aubigné, so far as writing in French makes a Frenchman, is another. Their works are full of fancy, but it is the fancy which gives to truth its wings. The rocket is charged, not with coloured sparks, but burning jewels.

(6) Here, again, exceptions occur, and the greatest of our Scottish preachers is a contradiction to the characteristic style of his country.