

FROUDE JAMES ANTHONY

BUNYAN

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Bunyan

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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	11
CHAPTER III	19
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	23

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Bunyan

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE

'I was of a low and inconsiderable generation, my father's house being of that rank that is meanest and most despised of all families in the land.' 'I never went to school, to Aristotle or Plato, but was brought up in my father's house in a very mean condition, among a company of poor countrymen.' 'Nevertheless, I bless God that by this door He brought me into the world to partake of the grace and life that is by Christ in His Gospel.' This is the account given of himself and his origin by a man whose writings have for two centuries affected the spiritual opinions of the English race in every part of the world more powerfully than any book or books, except the Bible.

John Bunyan was born at Elstow, a village near Bedford, in the year 1628. It was a memorable epoch in English history, for in that year the House of Commons extorted the consent of Charles I. to the Petition of Right. The stir of politics, however, did not reach the humble household into which the little boy was introduced. His father was hardly occupied in earning bread for his wife and children as a mender of pots and kettles: a tinker, – working in neighbours' houses or at home, at such business as might be brought to him. 'The Bunyans,' says a friend, 'were of the national religion, as men of that calling commonly were.' Bunyan himself, in a passage which has been always understood to refer to his father, describes him 'as an honest poor labouring man, who, like Adam unparadised, had all the world to get his bread in, and was very careful to maintain his family.' In those days there were no village schools in England; the education of the poor was an apprenticeship to agriculture or handicraft; their religion they learnt at home or in church. Young Bunyan was more fortunate. In Bedford there was a grammar school, which had been founded in Queen Mary's time by the Lord Mayor of London, Sir William Harper. Hither, when he was old enough to walk to and fro, over the mile of road between Elstow and Bedford, the child was sent, if not to learn Aristotle and Plato, to learn at least 'to read and write according to the rate of other poor men's children.'

If religion was not taught at school, it was taught with some care in the cottages and farmhouses by parents and masters. It was common in many parts of England, as late as the end of the last century, for the farmers to gather their apprentices about them on Sunday afternoons, and to teach them the Catechism. Rude as was Bunyan's home, religious notions of some kind had been early and vividly impressed upon him. He caught, indeed, the ordinary habits of the boys among whom he was thrown. He learnt to use bad language, and he often lied. When a child's imagination is exceptionally active, the temptations to untruth are correspondingly powerful. The inventive faculty has its dangers, and Bunyan was eminently gifted in that way. He was a violent, passionate boy besides, and thus he says of himself that for lying and swearing he had no equal, and that his parents did not sufficiently correct him. Wickedness, he declares in his own remorseful story of his early years, became a second nature to him. But the estimate which a man forms of himself in later life, if he has arrived at any strong abhorrence of moral evil, is harsher than others at the time would have been likely to have formed. Even then the poor child's conscience must have been curiously sensitive, and it revenged itself upon him in singular tortures.

'My sins,' he says, 'did so offend the Lord that even in my childhood He did scare and affright me with fearful dreams, and did terrify me with dreadful visions. I have been in my bed greatly afflicted while asleep, with apprehensions of devils and wicked spirits, who still, as I then thought, laboured to draw me away with them, of which I could never be rid. I was afflicted with thoughts

of the Day of Judgment night and day, trembling at the thoughts of the fearful torments of hell fire.' When, at ten years old, he was running about with his companions in 'his sports and childish vanities,' these terrors continually recurred to him, yet 'he would not let go his sins.'

Such a boy required rather to be encouraged than checked in seeking innocent amusements. Swearing and lying were definite faults which ought to have been corrected; but his parents, perhaps, saw that there was something unusual in the child. To them he probably appeared not worse than other boys, but considerably better. They may have thought it more likely that he would conquer his own bad inclinations by his own efforts, than that they could mend him by rough rebukes.

When he left school he would naturally have been bound apprentice, but his father brought him up at his own trade. Thus he lived at home, and grew to manhood there, forming his ideas of men and things out of such opportunities as the Elstow neighbourhood afforded.

From the time when the Reformation brought them a translation of it, the Bible was the book most read – it was often the only book which was read – in humble English homes. Familiarity with the words had not yet trampled the sacred writings into practical barrenness. No doubts or questions had yet risen about the Bible's nature or origin. It was received as the authentic word of God Himself. The Old and New Testament alike represented the world as the scene of a struggle between good and evil spirits; and thus every ordinary incident of daily life was an instance or illustration of God's Providence. This was the universal popular belief, not admitted only by the intellect, but accepted and realised by the imagination. No one questioned it, save a few speculative philosophers in their closets. The statesman in the House of Commons, the judge on the Bench, the peasant in a midland village, interpreted literally by this rule the phenomena which they experienced or saw. They not only believed that God had miraculously governed the Israelites, but they believed that as directly and immediately He governed England in the seventeenth century. They not only believed that there had been a witch at Endor, but they believed that there were witches in their own villages, who had made compacts with the devil himself. They believed that the devil still literally walked the earth like a roaring lion: that he and the evil angels were perpetually labouring to destroy the souls of men; and that God was equally busy overthrowing the devil's work, and bringing sin and crimes to eventual punishment.

In this light the common events of life were actually looked at and understood, and the air was filled with anecdotes so told as to illustrate the belief. These stories and these experiences were Bunyan's early mental food. One of them, which had deeply impressed the imagination of the Midland counties, was the story of 'Old Tod.' This man came one day into court, in the Summer Assizes at Bedford, 'all in a dung sweat,' to demand justice upon himself as a felon. No one had accused him, but God's judgment was not to be escaped, and he was forced to accuse himself. 'My Lord,' said Old Tod to the judge, 'I have been a thief from my childhood. I have been a thief ever since. There has not been a robbery committed these many years, within so many miles of this town, but I have been privy to it.' The judge, after a conference, agreed to indict him of certain felonies which he had acknowledged. He pleaded guilty, implicating his wife along with him, and they were both hanged.

An intense belief in the moral government of the world creates what it insists upon. Horror at sin forces the sinner to confess it, and makes others eager to punish it. 'God's revenge against murder and adultery' becomes thus an actual fact, and justifies the conviction in which it rises. Bunyan was specially attentive to accounts of judgments upon swearing, to which he was himself addicted. He tells a story of a man at Wimbledon, who, after uttering some strange blasphemy, was struck with sickness, and died cursing. Another such scene he probably witnessed himself,¹ and never forgot. An alehouse-keeper in the neighbourhood of Elstow had a son who was half-witted. The favourite amusement, when a party was collected drinking, was for the father to provoke the lad's temper, and for the lad to curse his father and wish the devil had him. The devil at last did have the alehouse-keeper, and rent and tore him till he died. 'I,' says Bunyan, 'was eye and ear witness of what I here

¹ The story is told by Mr. Attentive in the 'Life of Mr. Badman;' but it is almost certain that Bunyan was relating his own experience.

say. I have heard Ned in his roguery cursing his father, and his father laughing thereat most heartily, still provoking of Ned to curse that his mirth might be increased. I saw his father also when he was possessed. I saw him in one of his fits, and saw his flesh as it was thought gathered up in an heap about the bigness of half an egg, to the unutterable torture and affliction of the old man. There was also one Freeman, who was more than an ordinary doctor, sent for to cast out the devil, and I was there when he attempted to do it. The manner whereof was this. They had the possessed in an outroom, and laid him upon his belly upon a form, with his head hanging down over the form's end. Then they bound him down thereto; which done, they set a pan of coals under his mouth, and put something therein which made a great smoke – by this means, as it was said, to fetch out the devil. There they kept the man till he was almost smothered in the smoke, but no devil came out of him, at which Freeman was somewhat abashed, the man greatly afflicted, and I made to go away wondering and fearing. In a little time, therefore, that which possessed the man carried him out of the world, according to the cursed wishes of his son.'

The wretched alehouse-keeper's life was probably sacrificed in this attempt to dispossess the devil. But the incident would naturally leave its mark on the mind of an impressionable boy. Bunyan ceased to frequent such places after he began to lead a religious life. The story, therefore, most likely belongs to the experiences of his first youth after he left school; and there may have been many more of a similar kind, for, except that he was steady at his trade, he grew up a wild lad, the ringleader of the village apprentices in all manner of mischief. He had no books, except a life of Sir Bevis of Southampton, which would not tend to sober him; indeed, he soon forgot all that he had learnt at school, and took to amusements and doubtful adventures, orchard-robbing, perhaps, or poaching, since he hints that he might have brought himself within reach of the law. In the most passionate language of self-abhorrence, he accuses himself of all manner of sins, yet it is improbable that he appeared to others what in later life he appeared to himself. He judged his own conduct as he believed that it was regarded by his Maker, by whom he supposed eternal torment to have been assigned as the just retribution for the lightest offence. Yet he was never drunk. He who never forgot anything with which he could charge himself, would not have passed over drunkenness, if he could remember that he had been guilty of it; and he distinctly asserts, also, that he was never in a single instance unchaste. In our days, a rough tinker who could say as much for himself after he had grown to manhood, would be regarded as a model of self-restraint. If, in Bedford and the neighbourhood, there was no young man more vicious than Bunyan, the moral standard of an English town in the seventeenth century must have been higher than believers in Progress will be pleased to allow.

He declares that he was without God in the world, and in the sense which he afterwards attached to the word this was probably true. But serious thoughts seldom ceased to work in him. Dreams only reproduce the forms and feelings with which the waking imagination is most engaged. Bunyan's rest continued to be haunted with the phantoms which had terrified him when a child. He started in his sleep, and frightened the family with his cries. He saw evil spirits in monstrous shapes and fiends blowing flames out of their nostrils. 'Once,' says a biographer, who knew him well, and had heard the story of his visions from his own lips, 'he dreamed that he saw the face of heaven as it were on fire, the firmament crackling and shivering with the noise of mighty thunder, and an archangel flew in the midst of heaven, sounding a trumpet, and a glorious throne was seated in the east, whereon sat One in brightness like the morning star. Upon which, he thinking it was the end of the world, fell upon his knees and said, "Oh, Lord, have mercy on me! What shall I do? The Day of Judgment is come and I am not prepared."'

At another time 'he dreamed that he was in a pleasant place jovial and rioting, when an earthquake rent the earth, out of which came bloody flames, and the figures of men tossed up in globes of fire, and falling down again with horrible cries and shrieks and execrations, while devils mingled among them, and laughed aloud at their torments. As he stood trembling, the earth sank under him, and a circle of flames embraced him. But when he fancied he was at the point to perish,

One in shining white raiment descended and plucked him out of that dreadful place, while the devils cried after him to take him to the punishment which his sins had deserved. Yet he escaped the danger, and leapt for joy when he awoke and found it was a dream.'

Mr. Southey, who thinks wisely that Bunyan's biographers have exaggerated his early faults, considers that at worst he was a sort of 'blackguard.' This, too, is a wrong word. Young village blackguards do not dream of archangels flying through the midst of heaven, nor were these imaginations invented afterwards, or rhetorically exaggerated. Bunyan was undoubtedly given to story-telling as a boy, and the recollection of it made him peculiarly scrupulous in his statements in later life. One trait he mentions of himself which no one would have thought of who had not experienced the feeling, yet every person can understand it and sympathise with it. These spectres and hobgoblins drove him wild. He says, 'I was so overcome with despair of life and heaven, that I should often wish either that there had been no hell, or that I had been a devil; supposing that they were only tormentors, and that, if it must needs be that I went thither, I might rather be a tormentor than tormented myself.'

The visions at last ceased. God left him to himself, as he puts it, and gave him over to his own wicked inclinations. He fell, he says, into all kinds of vice and ungodliness without further check. The expression is very strong, yet when we look for particulars we can find only that he was fond of games which Puritan preciseness disapproved. He had high animal spirits, and engaged in lawless enterprises. Once or twice he nearly lost his life. He is sparing of details of his outward history, for he regarded it as nothing but vanity; but his escapes from death were providences, and therefore he mentions them. He must have gone to the coast somewhere, for he was once almost drowned in a creek of the sea. He fell out of a boat into the river at another time, and it seems that he could not swim. Afterwards he seized hold of an adder, and was not bitten by it. These mercies were sent as warnings, but he says that he was too careless to profit by them. He thought that he had forgotten God altogether, and yet it is plain that he had not forgotten. A bad young man, who has shaken off religion because it is a restraint, observes with malicious amusement the faults of persons who make a profession of religion. He infers that they do not really believe it, and only differ from their neighbours in being hypocrites. Bunyan notes this disposition in his own history of Mr. Badman. Of himself, he says: 'Though I could sin with delight and ease, and take pleasure in the villanies of my companions, even then, if I saw wicked things done by them that professed goodness, it would make my spirit tremble. Once, when I was in the height of my vanity, hearing one swear that was reckoned a religious man, it made my heart to ache.'

He was now seventeen, and we can form a tolerably accurate picture of him – a tall, active lad, working as his father's apprentice, at his pots and kettles, ignorant of books, and with no notion of the world beyond what he could learn in his daily drudgery, and the talk of the alehouse and the village green; inventing lies to amuse his companions, and swearing that they were true; playing bowls and tipcat, ready for any reckless action, and always a leader in it, yet all the while singularly pure from the more brutal forms of vice, and haunted with feverish thoughts, which he tried to forget in amusements. It has been the fashion to take his account of himself literally, and represent him as the worst of reprobates, in order to magnify the effects of his conversion, and perhaps to make intelligible to his admiring followers the reproaches which he heaps upon himself. They may have felt that they could not be wrong in explaining his own language in the only sense in which they could attach a meaning to it. Yet, sinner though he may have been, like all the rest of us, his sins were not the sins of coarseness and vulgarity. They were the sins of a youth of sensitive nature and very peculiar gifts: gifts which brought special temptations with them, and inclined him to be careless and desperate, yet from causes singularly unlike those which are usually operative in dissipated and uneducated boys.

It was now the year 1645. Naseby Field was near, and the first Civil War was drawing to its close. At this crisis Bunyan was, as he says, drawn to be a soldier; and it is extremely characteristic of him and of the body to which he belonged, that he leaves us to guess on which side he served. He

does not tell us himself. His friends in after life did not care to ask him, or he to inform them, or else they also thought the matter of too small importance to be worth mentioning with exactness. There were two traditions, and his biographers chose between them as we do. Close as the connection was in that great struggle between civil and religious liberty – flung as Bunyan was flung into the very centre of the conflict between the English people and the Crown and Church and aristocracy – victim as he was himself of intolerance and persecution, he never but once took any political part, and then only in signing an address to Cromwell. He never showed any active interest in political questions; and if he spoke on such questions at all after the Restoration, it was to advise submission to the Stuart Government. By the side of the stupendous issues of human life, such miserable *rights* as men might pretend to in this world were not worth contending for. The only *right* of man that he thought much about, was the right to be eternally damned if he did not lay hold of grace. King and subject were alike creatures whose sole significance lay in their individual immortal souls. Their relations with one another upon earth were nothing in the presence of the awful judgment which awaited them both. Thus whether Bunyan's brief career in the army was under Charles or under Fairfax must remain doubtful. Probability is on the side of his having been with the Royalists. His father was of 'the national religion.' He himself had as yet no special convictions of his own. John Gifford, the Baptist minister at Bedford, had been a Royalist. The only incident which Bunyan speaks of connected with his military experience points in the same direction. 'When I was a soldier,' he says, 'I was with others drawn out to go to such a place to besiege it. But when I was just ready to go, one of the company desired to go in my room. Coming to the siege as he stood sentinel he was shot in the heart with a musket bullet and died.' Tradition agrees that the place to which these words refer was Leicester. Leicester was stormed by the King's troops a few days before the battle of Naseby. It was recovered afterwards by the Parliamentarians, but on the second occasion there was no fighting, as it capitulated without a shot being fired. Mr. Carlyle supposes that Bunyan was not with the attacking party, but was in the town as one of the garrison, and was taken prisoner there. But this cannot be, for he says expressly that he was one of the besiegers. Legend gathers freely about eminent men, about men especially who are eminent in religion, whether they are Catholic or Protestant. Lord Macaulay is not only positive that the hero of the English Dissenters fought on the side of the Commonwealth, but he says, without a word of caution on the imperfection of the evidence, 'His Greatheart, his Captain Boanerges, and his Captain Credence, are evidently portraits of which the originals were among those martial saints who fought and expounded in Fairfax's army.'²

If the martial saints had impressed Bunyan so deeply, it is inconceivable that he should have made no more allusion to his military service than in this brief passage. He refers to the siege and all connected with it merely as another occasion of his own providential escapes from death.

Let the truth of this be what it may, the troop to which he belonged was soon disbanded. He returned at the end of the year to his tinker's work at Elstow, much as he had left it. The saints, if he had met with saints, had not converted him. 'I sinned still,' he says, 'and grew more and more rebellious against God and careless of my own salvation.' An important change of another kind, however, lay before him. Young as he was he married. His friends advised it, for they thought that marriage would make him steady. The step was less imprudent than it would have been had Bunyan been in a higher rank of life, or had aimed at rising into it. The girl whom he chose was a poor orphan, but she had been carefully and piously brought up, and from her acceptance of him, something more may be inferred about his character. Had he been a dissolute idle scamp, it is unlikely that a respectable woman would have become his wife when he was a mere boy. His sins, whatever these were, had not injured his outward circumstances; it is clear that all along he worked skilfully and industriously at his tinkering business. He had none of the habits which bring men to beggary. From the beginning

² *Life of Bunyan: Collected Works*, vol. vii. p. 299.

of his life to the end of it he was a prudent, careful man, and, considering the station to which he belonged, a very successful man.

'I lighted on a wife,' he says, 'whose father was counted godly. We came together as poor as poor might be, not having so much household stuff as a dish or a spoon between us. But she had for her portion two books, "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 sometimes read with her. I found some things pleasing to me, but all this while I met with no conviction. She often told me what a godly man her father was, how he would reprove and correct vice both in his house and among his neighbours, what a strict and holy life he lived in his day both in word and deed. These books, though they did not reach my heart, did light in me some desire to religion.'

There was still an Established Church in England, and the constitution of it had not yet been altered. The Presbyterian platform threatened to take the place of Episcopacy, and soon did take it; but the clergyman was still a priest and was still regarded with pious veneration in the country districts as a semi-supernatural being. The altar yet stood in its place, the minister still appeared in his surplice, and the Prayers of the Liturgy continued to be read or intoned. The old familiar bells, Catholic as they were in all the emotions which they suggested, called the congregation together with their musical peal, though in the midst of triumphant Puritanism. The 'Book of Sports,' which, under an order from Charles I., had been read regularly in Church, had in 1644 been laid under a ban; but the gloom of a Presbyterian Sunday was, is, and for ever will be detestable to the natural man; and the Elstow population gathered persistently after service on the village green for their dancing, and their leaping, and their archery. Long habit cannot be transformed in a day by an Edict of Council, and amidst army manifestoes and battles of Marston Moor, and a king dethroned and imprisoned, old English life in Bedfordshire preserved its familiar features. These Sunday sports had been a special delight to Bunyan, and it is to them which he refers in the following passage, when speaking of his persistent wickedness. On his marriage he became regular and respectable in his habits. He says, 'I fell in with the religion of the times to go to church twice a day, very devoutly to say and sing as the others did, yet retaining my wicked life. Withal I was so overrun with the spirit of superstition that I adored with great devotion even all things, both the high place, priest, clerk, vestment, service, and what else belonging to the Church, counting all things holy therein contained, and especially the priest and clerk most happy and without doubt greatly blessed. This conceit grew so strong in my spirit, that had I but seen a priest, though never so sordid and debauched in his life, I should find my spirit fall under him, reverence, and be knit to him. Their name, their garb, and work did so intoxicate and bewitch me.'

Surely if there were no other evidence, these words would show that the writer of them had never listened to the expositions of the martial saints.

CHAPTER II

CONVICTION OF SIN

The 'Pilgrim's Progress' is the history of the struggle of human nature to overcome temptation and shake off the bondage of sin, under the convictions which prevailed among serious men in England in the seventeenth century. The allegory is the life of its author cast in an imaginative form. Every step in Christian's journey had been first trodden by Bunyan himself; every pang of fear and shame, every spasm of despair, every breath of hope and consolation, which is there described, is but a reflexion as on a mirror from personal experience. It has spoken to the hearts of all later generations of Englishmen because it came from the heart; because it is the true record of the genuine emotions of a human soul; and to such a record the emotions of other men will respond, as one stringed instrument vibrates responsively to another. The poet's power lies in creating sympathy; but he cannot, however richly gifted, stir feelings which he has not himself known in all their intensity.

Ut ridentibus arident ita flentibus adflent
Humani vultus. Si vis me flere dolendum est
Primum ipsi tibi.

The religious history of man is essentially the same in all ages. It takes its rise in the duality of his nature. He is an animal, and as an animal he desires bodily pleasure and shrinks from bodily pain. As a being capable of morality, he is conscious that for him there exists a right and wrong. Something, whatever that something may be, binds him to choose one and avoid the other. This is his religion, his religatio, his obligation, in the sense in which the Romans, from whom we take it, used the word; and obligation implies some superior power to which man owes obedience. The conflict between his two dispositions agitates his heart, and perplexes his intellect. To do what the superior power requires of him, he must thwart his inclinations. He dreads punishment, if he neglects to do it. He invents methods by which he can indulge his appetites, and finds a substitute by which he can propitiate his invisible ruler or rulers. He offers sacrifices; he institutes ceremonies and observances. This is the religion of the body, the religion of fear. It is what we call superstition. In his nobler moods he feels that this is but to evade the difficulty. He perceives that the sacrifice required is the sacrifice of himself. It is not the penalty for sin which he must fear, but the sin itself. He must conquer his own lower nature. He must detach his heart from his pleasures, and he must love good for its own sake, and because it is his only real good; and this is spiritual religion or piety. Between these two forms of worship of the unseen, the human race has swayed to and fro from the first moment in which they learnt to discern between good and evil. Superstition attracts, because it is indulgent to immorality by providing means by which God can be pacified. But it carries its antidote along with it, for it keeps alive the sense of God's existence; and when it has produced its natural effects, when the believer rests in his observances and lives practically as if there was no God at all, the conscience again awakes. Sacrifices and ceremonies become detested as idolatry, and religion becomes conviction of sin, a fiery determination to fight with the whole soul against appetite, vanity, self-seeking, and every mean propensity which the most sensitive alarm can detect. The battle unhappily is attended with many vicissitudes. The victory, though practically it may be won, is never wholly won. The struggle brings with it every variety of emotion, alternations of humility and confidence, despondency and hope. The essence of it is always the same – the effort of the higher nature to overcome the lower. The form of it varies from period to period, according to the conditions of the time, the temperament of different people, the conception of the character of the Supreme Power, which the state of knowledge enables men to form. It will be found even when the puzzled intellect can see no light in Heaven at all, in the

stern and silent fulfilment of moral duty. It will appear as enthusiasm; it will appear as asceticism. It will appear wherever there is courage to sacrifice personal enjoyment for a cause believed to be holy. We must all live. We must all, as we suppose, in one shape or other give account for our actions; and accounts of the conflict are most individually interesting when it is an open wrestle with the enemy; as we find in the penances and austerities of the Catholic saints, or when the difficulties of belief are confessed and detailed, as in David's Psalms, or in the Epistles of St. Paul. St. Paul, like the rest of mankind, found a law in his members warring against the law which was in his heart. The problem presented to him was how one was to be brought into subjection to the other, and the solution was by 'the putting on of Christ.' St. Paul's mind was charged with the ideas of Oriental and Greek philosophy then prevalent in the Roman Empire. His hearers understood him, because he spoke in the language of the prevailing speculations. We who have not the clue cannot, perhaps, perfectly understand him; but his words have been variously interpreted as human intelligence has expanded, and have formed the basis of the two great theologies which have been developed out of Christianity. The Christian religion taught that evil could not be overcome by natural human strength. The Son of God had come miraculously upon earth, had lived a life of stainless purity, and had been offered as a sacrifice to redeem men conditionally from the power of sin. The conditions, as English Protestant theology understands them, are nowhere more completely represented than in the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' The Catholic theology, rising as it did in the two centuries immediately following St. Paul, approached probably nearer to what he really intended to say.

Catholic theology, as a system, is a development of Platonism. The Platonists had discovered that the seat of moral evil was material substance. In matter, and therefore in the human body, there was either some inherent imperfection, or some ingrained perversity and antagonism to good. The soul so long as it was attached to the body was necessarily infected by it; and as human life on earth consisted in the connection of soul and body, every single man was necessarily subject to infirmity. Catholic theology accepted the position and formulated an escape from it. The evil in matter was a fact. It was explained by Adam's sin. But there it was. The taint was inherited by all Adam's posterity. The flesh of man was incurably vitiated, and if he was to be saved a new body must be prepared for him. This Christ had done. That Christ's body was not as other men's bodies was proved after his resurrection, when it showed itself independent of the limitations of extended substance. In virtue of these mysterious properties it became the body of the Corporate Church into which believers were admitted by baptism. The natural body was not at once destroyed, but a new element was introduced into it, by the power of which, assisted by penance and mortification, and the spiritual food of the Eucharist, the grosser qualities were gradually subdued, and the corporeal system was changed. Then body and spirit became alike pure together, and the saint became capable of obedience, so perfect as not only to suffice for himself, but to supply the wants of others. The corruptible put on incorruption. The bodies of the saints worked miracles, and their flesh was found unaffected by decay after hundreds of years.

This belief so long as it was sincerely held issued naturally in characters of extreme beauty; of beauty so great as almost to demonstrate its truth. The purpose of it, so far as it affected action, was self-conquest. Those who try with their whole souls to conquer themselves find the effort lightened by a conviction that they are receiving supernatural assistance; and the form in which the Catholic theory supposed the assistance to be given was at least perfectly innocent. But it is in the nature of human speculations, though they may have been entertained at first in entire good faith, to break down under trial, if they are not in conformity with fact. Catholic theology furnished Europe with a rule of faith and action which lasted 1500 years. For the last three centuries of that period it was changing from a religion into a superstition, till, from being the world's guide, it became its scandal. 'The body of Christ' had become a kingdom of this world, insulting its subjects by the effrontery of its ministers, the insolence of its pretensions, the mountains of lies which it was teaching as sacred

truths. Luther spoke; and over half the Western world the Catholic Church collapsed, and a new theory and Christianity had to be constructed out of the fragments of it.

There was left behind a fixed belief in God and in the Bible as His revealed word, in a future judgment, in the fall of man, in the atonement made for sin by the death of Christ, and in the new life which was made possible by His resurrection. The change was in the conception of the method by which the atonement was imagined to be efficacious. The material or sacramental view of it, though it lingered inconsistently in the mind even of Luther himself, was substantially gone. New ideas adopted in enthusiasm are necessarily extreme. The wrath of God was held to be inseparably and eternally attached to every act of sin, however infirm the sinner. That his nature could be changed, and that he could be mystically strengthened by incorporation with Christ's body in the Church was contrary to experience, and was no longer credible. The conscience of every man, in the Church or out of it, told him that he was daily and hourly offending. God's law demanded a life of perfect obedience, eternal death being the penalty of the lightest breach of it. No human being was capable of such perfect obedience. He could not do one single act which would endure so strict a scrutiny. All mankind were thus included under sin. The Catholic Purgatory was swept away. It had degenerated into a contrivance for feeding the priests with money, and it implied that human nature could in itself be renovated by its own sufferings. Thus nothing lay before the whole race except everlasting reprobation. But the door of hope had been opened on the cross of Christ. Christ had done what man could never do. He had fulfilled the law perfectly. God was ready to accept Christ's perfect righteousness as a substitute for the righteousness which man was required to present to him, but could not. The conditions of acceptance were no longer sacraments or outward acts, or lame and impotent efforts after a moral life, but faith in what Christ had done; a complete self-abnegation, a resigned consciousness of utter unworthiness, and an unreserved acceptance of the mercy held out through the Atonement. It might have been thought that since man was born so weak that it was impossible for him to do what the law required, consideration would be had for his infirmity; that it was even dangerous to attribute to the Almighty a character so arbitrary as that He would exact an account from his creatures which the creature's necessary inadequacy rendered him incapable of meeting. But the impetuosity of the new theology would listen to no such excuses. God was infinitely pure, and nothing impure could stand in his sight. Man, so long as he rested on merit of his own, must be for ever excluded from his presence. He must accept grace on the terms on which it was held out to him. Then and then only God would extend his pity to him. He was no longer a child of wrath: he was God's child. His infirmities remained, but they were constantly obliterated by the merits of Christ. And he had strength given to him, partially, at least, to overcome temptation, under which, but for that strength, he would have fallen. Though nothing which he could do could deserve reward, yet he received grace in proportion to the firmness of his belief; and his efforts after obedience, imperfect though they might be, were accepted for Christ's sake. A good life, or a constant effort after a good life, was still the object which a man was bound to labour after. Though giving no claim to pardon, still less for reward, it was the necessary fruit of a sense of what Christ had done, and of love and gratitude towards him. Good works were the test of saving faith, and if there were no signs of them, the faith was barren: it was not real faith at all.

This was the Puritan belief in England in the seventeenth century. The reason starts at it, but all religion is paradoxical to reason. God hates sin, yet sin exists. He is omnipotent, yet evil is not overcome. The will of man is free, or there can be no guilt, yet the action of the will, so far as experience can throw light on its operation, is as much determined by antecedent causes as every other natural force. Prayer is addressed to a Being assumed to be omniscient, who knows better what is good for us than we can know, who sees our thought without requiring to hear them in words, whose will is fixed and cannot be changed. Prayer, therefore, in the eye of reason is an impertinence. The Puritan theology is not more open to objection on the ground of unreasonableness than the Catholic theology or any other which regards man as answerable to God for his conduct. We must judge of a

creed by its effects on character, as we judge of the wholesomeness of food as it conduces to bodily health. And the creed which swept like a wave through England at that time, and recommended itself to the noblest and most powerful intellects, produced also in those who accepted it a horror of sin, an enthusiasm for justice, purity, and manliness, which can be paralleled only in the first age of Christianity. Certainly there never was such a theory to take man's conceit out of him. He was a miserable wretch, so worthless at his best as to deserve everlasting perdition. If he was to be saved at all, he could be saved only by the unmerited grace of God. In himself he was a child of the devil; and hell, not in metaphor, but in hard and palpable fact, inevitably waited for him. This belief, or the affectation of this belief, continues to be professed, but without a realisation of its tremendous meaning. The form of words is repeated by multitudes who do not care to think what they are saying. Who can measure the effect of such a conviction upon men who were in earnest about their souls, who were assured that this account of their situation was actually true, and on whom, therefore, it bore with increasing weight in proportion to their sincerity?

With these few prefatory words, I now return to Bunyan. He had begun to go regularly to church, and by Church he meant the Church of England. The change in the constitution of it, even when it came, did not much alter its practical character in the country districts. At Elstow, as we have seen, there was still a high place; there was still a liturgy; there was still a surplice. The Church of England is a compromise between the old theology and the new. The Bishops have the apostolical succession, but many of them disbelieve that they derive any virtue from it. The clergyman is either a priest who can absolve men from sins, or he is a minister as in other Protestant communions. The sacraments are either means of grace, or mere outward signs. A Christian is either saved by baptism, or saved by faith, as he pleases to believe. In either case he may be a member of the Church of England. The effect of such uncertain utterances is to leave an impression that in defining such points closely, theologians are laying down lines of doctrines about subjects of which they know nothing, that the real truth of religion lies in what is common to the two theories, the obligation to lead a moral life; and to this sensible view of their functions the bishops and clergy had in fact gradually arrived in the last century, when the revival of what is called earnestness, first in the form of Evangelicalism, and then of Anglo-Catholicism, awoke again the old controversies.

To a man of fervid temperament suddenly convinced of sin, incapable of being satisfied with ambiguous answers to questions which mean life or death to him, the Church of England has little to say. If he is quiet and reasonable, he finds in it all that he desires. Enthusiastic ages and enthusiastical temperaments demand something more complete and consistent. The clergy under the Long Parliament caught partially the tone of the prevailing spirit. The reading of the 'Book of Sports' had been interdicted, and from their pulpits they lectured their congregations on the ungodliness of the Sabbath amusements. But the congregations were slow to listen, and the sports went on.

One Sunday morning, when Bunyan was at church with his wife, a sermon was delivered on this subject. It seemed to be especially addressed to himself, and it much affected him. He shook off the impression, and after dinner he went as usual to the green. He was on the point of striking at a ball when the thought rushed across his mind, Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to Heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell? He looked up. The reflection of his own emotion was before him in visible form. He imagined that he saw Christ himself looking down at him from the sky. But he concluded that it was too late for him to repent. He was past pardon. He was sure to be damned, and he might as well be damned for many sins as for few. Sin at all events was pleasant, the only pleasant thing that he knew, therefore he would take his fill of it. The sin was the game, and nothing but the game. He continued to play, but the Puritan sensitiveness had taken hold of him. An artificial offence had become a real offence when his conscience was wounded by it. He was reckless and desperate.

'This temptation of the devil,' he says, 'is more usual among poor creatures than many are aware of. It continued with me about a month or more; but one day as I was standing at a neighbour's shop-window, and there cursing and swearing after my wonted manner, there sate within the woman of

the house and heard me, who, though she was a loose and ungodly wretch, protested that I swore and cursed at such a rate that she trembled to hear me. I was able to spoil all the youths in a whole town. At this reproof I was silenced and put to secret shame, and that too, as I thought, before the God of Heaven. I stood hanging down my head and wishing that I might be a little child that my father might learn me to speak without this wicked sin of swearing, for, thought I, I am so accustomed to it that it is vain to think of a reformation.'

These words have been sometimes taken as a reflection on Bunyan's own father, as if he had not sufficiently checked the first symptoms of a bad habit. If this was so, too much may be easily made of it. The language in the homes of ignorant workmen is seldom select. They have not a large vocabulary, and the words which they use do not mean what they seem to mean. But so sharp and sudden remorse speaks remarkably for Bunyan himself. At this time he could have been barely twenty years old, and already he was quick to see when he was doing wrong, to be sorry for it, and to wish that he could do better. Vain the effort seemed to him, yet from that moment 'he did leave off swearing to his own great wonder,' and he found 'that he could speak better and more pleasantly than he did before.'

It lies in the nature of human advance on the road of improvement, that, whatever be a man's occupation, be it handicraft, or art, or knowledge, or moral conquest of self, at each forward step which he takes he grows more conscious of his shortcomings. It is thus with his whole career, and those who rise highest are least satisfied with themselves. Very simply Bunyan tells the story of his progress. On his outward history, on his business and his fortunes with it, he is totally silent. Worldly interests were not worth mentioning. He is solely occupied with his rescue from spiritual perdition. Soon after he had profited by the woman's rebuke, he fell in 'with a poor man that made profession of religion and talked pleasantly of the Scriptures.' Earnestness in such matters was growing common among English labourers. Under his new friend's example, Bunyan 'betook him to the Bible, and began to take great pleasure in reading it,' but especially, as he admits frankly (and most people's experience will have been the same), 'especially the historical part; for as for St. Paul's Epistles and Scriptures of that nature, he could not away with them, being as yet ignorant of the corruption of his nature, or of the want and worth of Jesus Christ to save him.'

Not as yet understanding these mysteries, he set himself to reform his life. He became strict with himself in word and deed. 'He set the Commandments before him for his way to Heaven.' 'He thought if he could but keep them pretty well he should have comfort.' If now and then he broke one of them, he suffered in conscience; he repented of his fault, he made good resolutions for the future and struggled to carry them out. 'His neighbours took him to be a new man, and marvelled at the alteration.' Pleasure of any kind, even the most innocent, he considered to be a snare to him, and he abandoned it; he had been fond of dancing, but he gave it up. Music and singing he parted with, though it distressed him to leave them. Of all amusements, that in which he had most delighted had been in ringing the bells in Elstow church tower. With his bells he could not part all at once. He would no longer ring himself: but when his friends were enjoying themselves with the ropes, he could not help going now and then to the tower door to look on and listen; but he feared at last that the steeple might fall upon him and kill him. We call such scruples in these days exaggerated and fantastic. We are no longer in danger ourselves of suffering from similar emotions. Whether we are the better for having got rid of them, will be seen in the future history of our race.

Notwithstanding his struggles and his sacrifices, Bunyan found that they did not bring him the peace which he expected. A man can change his outward conduct, but if he is in earnest he comes in sight of other features in himself which he cannot change so easily; the meannesses, the paltrinesses, the selfishnesses which haunt him in spite of himself, which start out upon him at moments the most unlocked for, which taint the best of his actions and make him loathe and hate himself. Bunyan's life was now for so young a person a model of correctness; but he had no sooner brought his actions straight than he discovered that he was admiring and approving of himself. No situation is more humiliating, none brings with it a feeling of more entire hopelessness. 'All this while,' he says, 'I knew

not Christ, nor grace, nor faith, nor hope, and had I then died my state had been most fearful. I was but a poor painted hypocrite, going about to establish my own righteousness.'

Like his own Pilgrim, he had the burden on his back of his conscious unworthiness. How was he to be rid of it?

'One day in a street in Bedford, as he was at work in his calling, he fell in with three or four poor women sitting at a door in the sun talking about the things of God.' He was himself at that time 'a brisk talker' about the matters of religion, and he joined these women. Their expressions were wholly unintelligible to him. 'They were speaking of the wretchedness of their own hearts, of their unbelief, of their miserable state. They did condemn, slight, and abhor their own righteousness as filthy and insufficient to do them any good. They spoke of a new birth and of the work of God in their hearts, which comforted and strengthened them against the temptations of the Devil.'

The language of the poor women has lost its old meaning. They themselves, if they were alive, would not use it any longer. The conventional phrases of Evangelical Christianity ring untrue in a modern ear like a cracked bell. We have grown so accustomed to them as a cant, that we can hardly believe that they ever stood for sincere convictions. Yet these forms were once alive with the profoundest of all moral truths; a truth not of a narrow theology, but which lies at the very bottom of the well, at the fountain-head of human morality; namely, that a man who would work out his salvation must cast out self, though he rend his heart-strings in doing it; not love of self-indulgence only, but self-applause, self-confidence, self-conceit and vanity, desire or expectation of reward; self in all the subtle ingenuities with which it winds about the soul. In one dialect or another, he must recognise that he is himself a poor creature not worth thinking of, or he will not take the first step towards excellence in any single thing which he undertakes.

Bunyan left the women and went about his work, but their talk went with him. 'He was greatly affected.' 'He saw that he wanted the true tokens of a godly man.' He sought them out and spoke with them again and again. He could not stay away; and the more he went the more he questioned his condition.

'I found two things,' he says, 'at which I did sometimes marvel, considering what a blind ungodly wretch but just before I was; one a great softness and tenderness of heart, which caused me to fall under the conviction of what, by Scripture, they asserted; the other a great bending of my mind to a continual meditating on it. My mind was now like a horse-leech at the vein, still crying Give, give; so fixed on eternity and on the kingdom of heaven (though I knew but little), that neither pleasure, nor profit, nor persuasion, nor threats could loosen it or make it let go its hold. It is in very deed a certain truth; it would have been then as difficult for me to have taken my mind from heaven to earth, as I have found it often since to get it from earth to heaven.'

Ordinary persons who are conscious of trying to do right, who resist temptations, are sorry when they slip, and determine to be more on their guard for the future, are well contented with the condition which they have reached. They are respectable, they are right-minded in common things, they fulfil their every-day duties to their families and to society with a sufficiency for which the world speaks well of them, as indeed it ought to speak; and they themselves acquiesce in the world's verdict. Any passionate agitation about the state of their souls they consider unreal and affected. Such men may be amiable in private life, good neighbours, and useful citizens; but be their talents what they may, they could not write a 'Pilgrim's Progress,' or ever reach the Delectable Mountains, or even be conscious that such mountains exist.

Bunyan was on the threshold of the higher life. He knew that he was a very poor creature. He longed to rise to something better. He was a mere ignorant, untaught mechanic. He had not been to school with Aristotle and Plato. He could not help himself or lose himself in the speculations of poets and philosophers. He had only the Bible, and studying the Bible he found that the wonder-working power in man's nature was Faith. Faith! What was it? What did it mean? Had he faith? He was but 'a poor sot,' and yet he thought that he could not be wholly without it. The Bible told him that if he had

faith as a grain of mustard seed, he could work miracles. He did not understand Oriental metaphors; here was a simple test which could be at once applied.

'One day,' he writes, 'as I was between Elstow and Bedford, the temptation was hot upon me to try if I had faith by doing some miracle. I must say to the puddles that were in the horse-pads, "be dry," and truly at one time I was agoing to say so indeed. But just as I was about to speak, the thought came into my mind: Go under yonder hedge first and pray that God would make you able. But when I had concluded to pray, this came hot upon me, that if I prayed and came again and tried to do it, and yet did nothing notwithstanding, then be sure I had no faith but was a castaway and lost. Nay, thought I, if it be so, I will never try it yet, but will stay a little longer. Thus was I tossed between the Devil and my own ignorance, and so perplexed at some times that I could not tell what to do.'

Common sense will call this disease, and will think impatiently that the young tinker would have done better to attend to his business. But it must be observed that Bunyan was attending to his business, toiling all the while with grimed hands over his pots and kettles. No one ever complained that the pots and kettles were ill-mended. It was merely that being simple-minded, he found in his Bible that besides earning his bread he had to save or lose his soul. Having no other guide he took its words literally, and the directions puzzled him.

He grew more and more unhappy – more lowly in his own eyes —

'Wishing him like to those more rich in hope' —

like the women who were so far beyond him on the heavenly road. He was a poet without knowing it, and his gifts only served to perplex him further. His speculations assumed bodily forms which he supposed to be actual visions. He saw his poor friends sitting on the sunny side of a high mountain refreshing themselves in the warmth, while he was shivering in frost and snow and mist. The mountain was surrounded by a wall, through which he tried to pass, and searched long in vain for an opening through it. At last he found one, very straight and narrow, through which he struggled after desperate efforts. 'It showed him,' he said, 'that none could enter into life but those who were in downright earnest, and unless they left the wicked world behind them, for here was only room for body and soul, but not for body and soul and sin.' The vision brought him no comfort, for it passed away and left him still on the wrong side: a little comfortable self-conceit would have set him at rest. But, like all real men, Bunyan had the worst opinion of himself. He looked at his Bible again. He found that he must be elected. Was he elected? He could as little tell as whether he had faith. He knew that he longed to be elected, but 'the Scripture trampled on his desire,' for it said, 'It is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy;' therefore, unless God had chosen him his labour was in vain. The Devil saw his opportunity; the Devil among his other attributes must have possessed that of omnipresence, for whenever any human soul was in straits, he was personally at hand to take advantage of it.

'It may be that you are not elected,' the tempter said to Bunyan. 'It may be so indeed,' thought he. 'Why then,' said Satan, 'you had as good leave off and strive no farther; for if indeed you should not be elected and chosen of God, there is no talk of your being saved.'

A comforting text suggested itself. 'Look at the generations of old; did any ever trust in the Lord and was confounded?' But these exact words, unfortunately, were only to be found in the Apocrypha. And there was a further distressing possibility, which has occurred to others besides Bunyan. Perhaps the day of grace was passed. It came on him one day as he walked in the country that perhaps those good people in Bedford were all that the Lord would save in those parts, and that he came too late for the blessing. True, Christ had said, 'Compel them to come in, for yet there is room.' It might be 'that when Christ spoke those words,' He was thinking of him – him among the rest that he had chosen, and had meant to encourage him. But Bunyan was too simply modest to gather comfort from such aspiring thoughts. He desired to be converted, craved for it, longed for it with all his heart and soul.

'Could it have been gotten for gold,' he said, 'what would I not have given for it. Had I had a whole world it had all gone ten thousand times over for this, that my soul might have been in a converted state. But, oh! I was made sick by that saying of Christ: "He called to Him whom He would, and they came to Him." I feared He would not call me.'

Election, conversion, day of grace, coming to Christ, have been pawed and fingered by unctuous hands for now two hundred years. The bloom is gone from the flower. The plumage, once shining with hues direct from heaven, is soiled and bedraggled. The most solemn of all realities have been degraded into the passwords of technical theology. In Bunyan's day, in camp and council chamber, in High Courts of Parliament, and among the poor drudges in English villages, they were still radiant with spiritual meaning. The dialect may alter; but if man is more than a brief floating bubble on the eternal river of time; if there be really an immortal part of him which need not perish; and if his business on earth is to save it from perishing, he will still try to pierce the mountain barrier. He will still find the work as hard as Bunyan found it. We live in days of progress and enlightenment; nature on a hundred sides has unlocked her storehouses of knowledge. But she has furnished no 'open sesame' to bid the mountain gate fly wide which leads to conquest of self. There is still no passage there for 'body and soul and sin.'

CHAPTER III

GRACE ABOUNDING

The women in Bedford, to whom Bunyan had opened his mind, had been naturally interested in him. Young and rough as he was, he could not have failed to impress anyone who conversed with him with a sense that he was a remarkable person. They mentioned him to Mr. Gifford, the minister of the Baptist Church at Bedford. John Gifford had, at the beginning of the Civil War, been a loose young officer in the king's army. He had been taken prisoner when engaged in some exploit which was contrary to the usages of war. A court-martial had sentenced him to death, and he was to have been shot in a few hours, when he broke out of his prison with his sister's help, and, after various adventures, settled at Bedford as a doctor. The near escape had not sobered him. He led a disorderly life, drinking and gambling, till the loss of a large sum of money startled him into seriousness. In the language of the time he became convinced of sin, and joined the Baptists, the most thorough-going and consistent of all the Protestant sects. If the Sacrament of Baptism is not a magical form, but is a personal act, in which the baptised person devotes himself to Christ's service, to baptise children at an age when they cannot understand what they are doing may well seem irrational and even impious.

Gifford, who was now the head of the Baptist community in the town, invited Bunyan to his house, and explained the causes of his distress to him. He was a lost sinner. It was true that he had parted with his old faults, and was leading a new life. But his heart was unchanged; his past offences stood in record against him. He was still under the wrath of God, miserable in his position, and therefore miserable in mind. He must become sensible of his lost state, and lay hold of the only remedy, or there was no hope for him.

There was no difficulty in convincing Bunyan that he was in a bad way. He was too well aware of it already. In a work of fiction, the conviction would be followed immediately by consoling grace. In the actual experience of a living human soul, the medicine operates less pleasantly.

'I began,' he says, 'to see something of the vanity and inward wretchedness of my wicked heart, for as yet I knew no great matter therein. But now it began to be discovered unto me, and to work for wickedness as it never did before. Lusts and corruptions would strongly put themselves forth within me in wicked thoughts and desires which I did not regard before. Whereas, before, my soul was full of longing after God; now my heart began to hanker after every foolish vanity.'

Constitutions differ. Mr. Gifford's treatment, if it was ever good for any man, was too sharp for Bunyan. The fierce acid which had been poured into his wounds set them all festering again. He frankly admits that he was now farther from conversion than before. His heart, do what he would, refused to leave off desiring forbidden pleasures, and while this continued, he supposed that he was still under the law, and must perish by it. He compared himself to the child who, as he was being brought to Christ, was thrown down by the devil and wallowed foaming. A less healthy nature might have been destroyed by these artificially created and exaggerated miseries. He supposed he was given over to unbelief and wickedness, and yet he relates with touching simplicity: —

'As to the act of sinning I was never more tender than now. I durst not take up a pin or a stick, though but so big as a straw, for my conscience now was sore and would smart at every touch. I could not tell how to speak my words for fear I should misplace them.'

But the care with which he watched his conduct availed him nothing. He was on a morass 'that shook if he did but stir,' and he was 'there left both of God and Christ and the Spirit, and of all good things.' 'Behind him lay the faults of his childhood and youth, every one of which he believed to be recorded against him. Within were his disobedient inclinations, which he conceived to be the presence of the Devil in his heart. If he was to be presented clean of stain before God he must have a perfect righteousness which was to be found only in Christ, and Christ had rejected him. 'My original

and inward pollution,' he writes, 'was my plague and my affliction. I was more loathsome in my own eyes than was a toad, and I thought I was so in God's eyes too. I thought every one had a better heart than I had. I could have changed heart with anybody. I thought none but the Devil himself could equal me for inward wickedness and pollution. Sure, thought I, I am given up to the Devil and to a reprobate mind; and thus I continued for a long while, even for some years together.'

And all the while the world went on so quietly; these things over which Bunyan was so miserable not seeming to trouble anyone except himself; and, as if they had no existence except on Sundays and in pious talk. Old people were hunting after the treasures of this life, as if they were never to leave the earth. Professors of religion complained when they lost fortune or health; what were fortune and health to the awful possibilities which lay beyond the grave? To Bunyan the future life of Christianity was a reality as certain as the next day's sunrise; and he could have been happy on bread and water if he could have felt himself prepared to enter it. Every created being seemed better off than he was. He was sorry that God had made him a man. He 'blessed the condition of the birds, beasts, and fishes, for they had not a sinful nature. They were not obnoxious to the wrath of God. They were not to go to hell-fire after death.' He recalled the texts which spoke of Christ and forgiveness. He tried to persuade himself that Christ cared for him. He could have talked of Christ's love and mercy 'even to the very crows which sate on the ploughed land before him.' But he was too sincere to satisfy himself with formulas and phrases. He could not, he would not, profess to be convinced that things would go well with him when he was not convinced. Cold spasms of doubt laid hold of him – doubts, not so much of his own salvation, as of the truth of all that he had been taught to believe; and the problem had to be fought and grappled with, which lies in the intellectual nature of every genuine man, whether he be an Æschylus or a Shakespeare, or a poor working Bedfordshire mechanic. No honest soul can look out upon the world and see it as it really is, without the question rising in him whether there be any God that governs it at all. No one can accept the popular notion of heaven and hell as actually true, without being as terrified as Bunyan was. We go on as we do, and attend to our business and enjoy ourselves, because the words have no real meaning to us. Providence in its kindness leaves most of us unblessed or uncursed with natures of too fine a fibre.

Bunyan was hardly dealt with. 'Whole floods of blasphemies,' he says, 'against God, Christ, and the Scriptures were poured upon my spirit; questions against the very being of God and of his only beloved Son, as whether there was in truth a God or Christ, or no, and whether the Holy Scriptures were not rather a fable and cunning story than the holy and pure Word of God.'

'How can you tell,' the tempter whispered, 'but that the Turks have as good a Scripture to prove their Mahomet the Saviour, as we have to prove our Jesus is? Could I think that so many tens of thousands in so many countries and kingdoms should be without the knowledge of the right way to heaven, if there were indeed a heaven, and that we who lie in a corner of the earth, should alone be blessed therewith. Every one doth think his own religion the rightest, both Jews, Moors, and Pagans; and how if all our faith, and Christ, and Scripture should be but "a think so" too.' St. Paul spoke positively. Bunyan saw shrewdly that on St. Paul the weight of the whole Christian theory really rested. But 'how could he tell but that St. Paul, being a subtle and cunning man, might give himself up to deceive with strong delusions?' 'He was carried away by such thoughts as by a whirlwind.'

His belief in the active agency of the Devil in human affairs, of which he supposed that he had witnessed instances, was no doubt a great help to him. If he could have imagined that his doubts or misgivings had been suggested by a desire for truth, they would have been harder to bear. More than ever he was convinced that he was possessed by the devil. He 'compared himself to a child carried off by a gipsy.' 'Kick sometimes I did,' he says, 'and scream, and cry, but yet I was as bound in the wings of temptation, and the wind would bear me away.' 'I blessed the dog and toad, and counted the condition of everything that God had made far better than this dreadful state of mine. The dog or horse had no soul to perish under the everlasting weight of hell for sin, as mine was like to do.'

Doubts about revelation and the truth of Scripture were more easy to encounter then than they are at present. Bunyan was protected by want of learning, and by a powerful predisposition to find the objections against the credibility of the Gospel history to be groundless. Critical investigation had not as yet analysed the historical construction of the sacred books, and scepticism, as he saw it in people round him, did actually come from the devil, that is from a desire to escape the moral restraints of religion. The wisest, noblest, best instructed men in England, at that time regarded the Bible as an authentic communication from God, and as the only foundation for law and civil society. The masculine sense and strong modest intellect of Bunyan ensured his acquiescence in an opinion so powerfully supported. Fits of uncertainty recurred even to the end of his life; it must be so with men who are honestly in earnest; but his doubts were of course only intermittent, and his judgment was in the main satisfied that the Bible was, as he had been taught, the Word of God. This, however, helped him little; for in the Bible he read his own condemnation. The weight which pressed him down was the sense of his unworthiness. What was he that God should care for him? He fancied that he heard God saying to the angels, 'This poor, simple wretch doth hanker after me, as if I had nothing to do with my mercy but to bestow it on such as he. Poor fool, how art thou deceived! It is not for such as thee to have favour with the Highest.'

Miserable as he was, he clung to his misery as the one link which connected him with the object of his longings. If he had no hope of heaven, he was at least distracted that he must lose it. He was afraid of dying, yet he was still more afraid of continuing to live; lest the impression should wear away through time, and occupation and other interests should turn his heart away to the world, and thus his wounds might cease to pain him.

Readers of the 'Pilgrim's Progress' sometimes ask with wonder, why, after Christian had been received into the narrow gate, and had been set forward upon his way, so many trials and dangers still lay before him. The answer is simply that Christian was a pilgrim, that the journey of life still lay before him, and at every step temptations would meet him in new, unexpected shapes. St. Anthony in his hermitage was beset by as many fiends as had ever troubled him when in the world. Man's spiritual existence is like the flight of a bird in the air; he is sustained only by effort, and when he ceases to exert himself he falls. There are intervals, however, of comparative calm, and to one of these the storm-tossed Bunyan was now approaching. He had passed through the Slough of Despond. He had gone astray after Mr. Legality, and the rocks had almost overwhelmed him. Evangelist now found him and put him right again, and he was to be allowed a breathing space at the Interpreter's house. As he was at his ordinary daily work his mind was restlessly busy. Verses of Scripture came into his head, sweet while present, but like Peter's sheet caught up again into heaven. We may have heard all our lives of Christ. Words and ideas with which we have been familiar from childhood are trodden into paths as barren as sand. Suddenly, we know not how, the meaning flashes upon us. The seed has found its way into some corner of our minds where it can germinate. The shell breaks, the cotyledons open, and the plant of faith is alive. So it was now to be with Bunyan.

'One day,' he says, 'as I was travelling into the country, musing on the wickedness of my heart, and considering the enmity that was in me to God, the Scripture came into my mind, "He hath made peace through the blood of His cross." I saw that the justice of God and my sinful soul could embrace and kiss each other. I was ready to swoon, not with grief and trouble, but with solid joy and peace.' Everything became clear: the Gospel history, the birth, the life, the death of the Saviour; how gently he gave himself to be nailed on the cross for his (Bunyan's) sins. 'I saw Him in the spirit,' he goes on, 'a Man on the right hand of the Father, pleading for me, and have seen the manner of His coming from Heaven to judge the world with glory.'

The sense of guilt which had so oppressed him was now a key to the mystery. 'God,' he says, 'suffered me to be afflicted with temptations concerning these things, and then revealed them to me.' He was crushed to the ground by the thought of his wickedness; 'the Lord showed him the death of Christ, and lifted the weight away.'

Now he thought he had a personal evidence from Heaven that he was really saved. Before this, he had lain trembling at the mouth of hell; now he was so far away from it that he could scarce tell where it was. He fell in at this time with a copy of Luther's commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, 'so old that it was like to fall to pieces.' Bunyan found in it the exact counterpart of his own experience: 'of all the books that he had ever met with, it seemed to him the most fit for a wounded conscience.'

Everything was supernatural with him: when a bad thought came into his mind, it was the devil that put it there. These breathings of peace he regarded as the immediate voice of his Saviour. Alas! the respite was but short. He had hoped that his troubles were over, when the tempter came back upon him in the most extraordinary form which he had yet assumed, Bunyan had himself left the door open; the evil spirits could only enter 'Mansoul' through the owner's negligence, but once in, they could work their own wicked will. How it happened will be told afterwards. The temptation itself must be described first. Never was a nature more perversely ingenious in torturing itself.

He had gained Christ, as he called it. He was now tempted 'to sell and part with this most blessed Christ, to exchange Him for the things of this life – for anything.' If there had been any real prospect of worldly advantage before Bunyan, which he could have gained by abandoning his religious profession, the words would have had a meaning; but there is no hint or trace of any prospect of the kind; nor in Bunyan's position could there have been. The temptation, as he called it, was a freak of fancy: fancy resenting the minuteness with which he watched his own emotions. And yet he says, 'It lay upon me for a year, and did follow me so continually that I was not rid of it one day in a month, sometimes not an hour in many days together, unless when I was asleep. I could neither eat my food, stoop for a pin, chop a stick, or cast my eye to look on this or that, but still the temptation would come, "Sell Christ for this, sell Him for that! Sell Him! Sell Him!"'

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