

CHAPTER II.

JOHN BUNYAN.

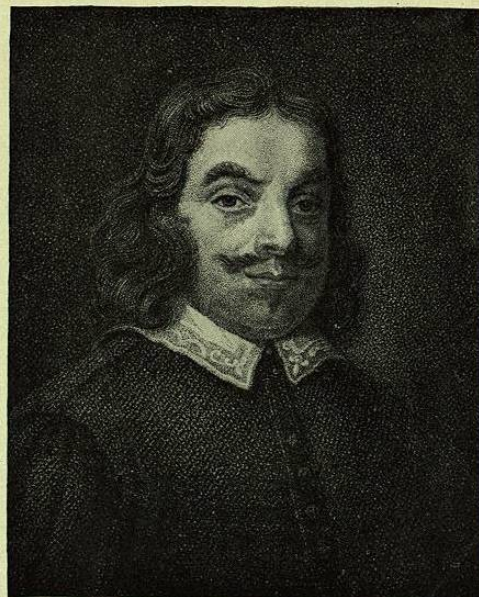
IN the previous pages I have tried to show you how the works of God's most gifted sons, —

“Our loftier brothers, but one in blood,”

may brighten our lives, enlarge our intellects, widen our sympathies, uplift us above the greed, the narrowness, the querulous discontent, the vulgar selfishness, which are the curse and bane of so many lives.

I will now speak of a great Puritan writer, from whose simple vividness and keen insight into human nature we may all learn lessons of lifelong value.

He enforced for us the great truths of



JOHN BUNYAN.

righteousness which he had himself learned in the books of experience and of Scripture, which are the eternal books of the Living God.

John Bunyan was born at Elstow, in Bedfordshire, in 1628,¹ the year in which the House of Commons forced Charles I. to consent to the Petition of Rights. Milton was a son of the middle classes; the father of Shakespeare was a respectable tradesman; but Bunyan was the son of a tinker, in days when tinkers were mostly regarded as gypsies and vagabonds. "I was," he says, "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." It was this

¹ Dates in Bunyan's life: birth, 1628; battle of Edgehill, 1642; battle of Naseby, 1645; execution of Charles I., 1649; Bunyan's marriage, 1669; baptized in the Ouse, 1643; begins to preach, 1657; sent to Bedford Gaol, 1660; released, but again imprisoned, 1666; "Grace Abounding," 1666; liberated, 1672; "Pilgrim's Progress," 1678; "Holy War," 1672; dies, Aug. 31, 1688.

working tinker in whom God kindled that light of holy genius to which we owe "The Pilgrim's Progress from Earth to Heaven."

"Not to the rich He came, nor to the ruling,
Men full of meat, whom wholly He abhors;
Not to the fools grown insolent in fooling,
Most when the lost are dying at the doors.
This is His will; He takes and He refuses,
Finds Him ambassadors whom men deny;
Wise ones, nor mighty, for his saints He chooses:—
No! such as John, or Gideon, or I."

Bunyan's childhood fell in a time of wild religious and political ferment, and in an age when men's beliefs were more concrete, less shadowy, more intensely real, than now. Born with a vivid imagination, he was, even in his childhood, so conscious of his boyish faults that he was scared and affrighted with fearful dreams and visions of devils. He fell into the sins of swearing and lying, and looked with terrified misgiving and remorse on

amusements which in themselves were perfectly innocent. He had no books except the romance of Sir Bevis of Southampton, and the Bible, of which he understood every word in the most literal sense.

Thousands of youths in England and America at this moment are leading lives ten times more vicious and godless and self-indulgent than that of this tinker's boy, without feeling one twinge of his terrible remorse. So sensitive was his conscience that at a single rebuke he gave up the habit of swearing, into which, from early years, he had unconsciously fallen.

"As I was standing at a neighbor's shop-window, and there cursing and swearing after my wonted manner, there sat within the woman of the house, who heard me; and though she was a very loose and ungodly wretch, yet protested that I swore and cursed at that most fearful rate that she was made to tremble to hear me. At this reproof I was silenced and put to secret shame before the God of

Heaven; wherefore, while I stood there, hanging down my head, I wished that I might be a little child again, that my father might learn me to speak without this wicked way of swearing."

He was twice saved from drowning, and once from the bite of an adder; and it is said that once, when he had enlisted in the Puritan army, a sentinel who had asked to take his place was shot through the heart. This deepened his conviction of a Divine Providence over him, and made his conscience still more acutely sensitive, though he was entirely free from all the more flagrant and debasing forms of vice. At nineteen he married an orphan girl, and worked steadily and skilfully as a tinker. His wife was a good Christian; and he derived benefit from the two books—"The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven" and "The Practice of Piety"—which were her only dower. But Bunyan was living in an age when men had seen the hollowness of a functional religion, and

had realized that their souls had to do with the living and eternal God, who will tolerate no shams. He became convinced of the necessity for a new birth, and conscious that he had not attained to it. So terribly was he in earnest that he was even morbidly conscientious.

"I durst not take 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 now tell how to speak my words, for fear I should misplace them. Oh, how gingerly did I then go in all I did or said! I found myself as on a miry bog that shook if I did but stir; and was as those left both of God and Christ, the spirit, and all good things."

This unhealthy self-introspection drove him to the very verge of madness. He became sorry that God had made him a man. He blessed the condition of the birds, beasts, and fishes; he envied even the dog or the toad, for they had not a sinful nature; they were not obnoxious to the

wrath of God. He felt himself haunted by devils. An old copy of "Luther's Commentary on the Galatians" brought him comfort for a time; but then, as a bird shot from a tree, he fell into despair, until voices from heaven seemed to comfort him, and at last the clouds and thick darkness which had so long enshrouded him broke, and were scattered, and thenceforth he enjoyed in his inmost soul the sunlight of God's peace. After this he became so happy that he felt inclined to go out and tell even the crows on the ploughed fields of his great joy.

We need not further follow the story of his life. While still a young man he was called to the ministry among the Baptists in 1657, and at the Restoration was imprisoned in Bedford jail, because he would not promise not to preach among his fellow-believers. For twelve years he continued in prison, for conscience' sake, supporting himself and his wife and children

by making tags for bootlaces. The parting from his loved ones, he says, "was often as the pulling of his flesh from his bones." He thought that he was leaving them to wants, hardships, and miseries,

"especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides. 'Poor child,' thought I, 'what sorrow art thou like to have for thy portion in this world! Thou must be beaten, suffer hunger, cold, nakedness, and a thousand calamities, though I cannot now endure the winds to blow on thee. But yet,' thought I, 'I must venture all with God, though it goes to the quick to leave thee.'"

Thus, as sincerity had triumphed in his conversion, so conscience triumphed over the severest temptations, in making him ready to give up everything rather than duty.

How ample God repays, how infinitely He rewards, those who sacrifice everything for Him! If they have persecutions, they have also the hundredfold recompense here on earth, and, in the world to come, life

everlasting. It is to Bunyan's imprisonment that he owes his immortality, and what was infinitely dearer to him, the beatitude of conferring untold benefits upon the children of God.

For it was in prison that he wrote his "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners," which is his spiritual autobiography; and also the immortal "Pilgrim's Progress from Earth to Heaven." When I was young it was rare to find a child, that could read at all, who had not read "The Pilgrim's Progress;" but in these days I find many who know little or nothing of this immortal book. Should this be the case with any who read this paper, I trust that they will at once repair the loss, and learn some of the most sacred and serious of all human lessons clothed in a story full of charm, which they may each purchase for themselves for a few pence, and which they will value, thereafter, as a lifelong possession. The story opens:—

"As I walked through the wilderness of the world, I lighted on a certain place where there was a den [Bedford jail], and I laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold a man, clothed in rags, standing with his face from his own home, with a book in his hand, and a great burden on his back."

The man is Christian, or, in other words, Bunyan himself; the book is the Bible; the burden is the load of his sins. The history of his wanderings, perils, and compensations is more or less the history of every human soul which is not content with the base devotion to worthless things. The adventures of Christian, after his soul had once been awakened, are those which may befall each one of us on our journey from earth to that which comes hereafter. But with what beautiful, simple touches are these experiences described by Bunyan in such passages as these:—

Christian reads his roll, and looking upon Evangelist very carefully, said, "Whither

must I fly?" Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide field, "Do you see yonder wicket-gate?" The man said, "No." Then said the other, "Do you see yonder shining light?" He said, "I think I do." Then said Evangelist, "Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto; so shalt thou see the gate, at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do." So I saw in my dream that the man began to run, he looked not behind him, but fled toward the middle of the plain. Now over the gate there was written, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." He knocked therefore more than once or twice. At last there came a grave person to the gate, named Good Will, who asked who was there? and whence he came? and what he would have? "Here is a poor burdened sinner," said Christian. "I come from the City of Destruction, but am going to the Mount Zion. I would know, sir, if you are willing to let

me in?" — "I am willing with all my heart," said he; and with that he opened the gate. Then Christian is shown the warning scenes in the House of the Interpreter; and comes to the cross, at the foot of which his burden is loosed from off his back. After this, the Shining Ones meet him with the words, "Peace be with thee."

Then we are introduced to the various persons whom he encounters upon his pilgrimage, — Sloth, and Formalist, and Hypocrite, and Mistrust, and Talkative, but also Faithful and Hopeful. He falls asleep on the Hill Difficulty, and loses his roll; he comes to the House Beautiful, where dwell Prudence, Piety, and Charity, and where he rests in the large upper chamber, whose window opened toward the sunrising; and the name of the chamber was Peace. There he is clad in the armor of God; and meets the fiend Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation. When he is on the point of being crushed, seizing his

sword, he gives Apollyon a deadly wound, so that he spreads forth his dragon wings and speeds him away, that Christian for a season sees him no more. The fiends whisper evil thoughts in his ears in the Valley of the Shadow of Death; but he passes through it safely and meets Faithful, who is martyred in Vanity Fair. Then, after rest in the Meadow of Lilies, he tries a by-path, and is seized by Giant Despair, and nearly killed in Doubting Castle; but he is welcomed by the shepherds on the Delectable Mountains, and so at last reaches the land of Beulah. In that land, whose air was very sweet and pleasant, they hear continually the singing of birds, and see every day the flowers, and hear the voice of doves, and are in sight of the gates of pearl, while there the Shining Ones commonly walk, because it is upon the borders of Heaven. And so, at last, they pass the Dark River, and all the trumpets sound for them on the other side.

Scarcely less beautiful and edifying is the second part, — the pilgrimage of Christiana and her boys, — with which I have no space to deal.

Let me point out one or two characteristics of Bunyan's beautiful and helpful books.

1. Notice, first, the many pointed sentences in which they abound, such as these: —

“Prayer will make a man cease from sin, or sin will entice a man to cease from prayer.”

“One leak will sink a ship, and one sin will destroy a sinner.”

“‘When your garments are white,’ says Jesus, ‘the world will count you mine.’”

“Nothing can harm me but sin; nothing can grieve me but sin; nothing can make me base before my foes but sin.”

“Is it little in thine eyes that our King doth offer thee mercy?”

“The bitter goes before the sweet. Yea, and forasmuch as it doth, it makes the sweet the sweeter.”

2. Notice, next, the great beauty of many special passages: —

(a) Here is one. After telling how Apollyon straddled over the whole breadth of the way in front of Christian, and pressed on him, throwing darts as thick as hail, and wounded him in his head, his hand, and his foot, he adds:—

“In this combat, no man can imagine, unless he had seen and heard, as I did, what yelling and hideous roaring Apollyon made all the time of the fight. He spake like a dragon; and, on the other side, what sighs and groans burst forth from Christian’s heart. I never saw him all the while give so much as one pleasant look, till he perceived he had wounded Apollyon with his two-edged sword; then, indeed, he did smile and look upward; but ’twas the dreadfullest sight that ever I saw.”

(b) Or take this scene. Interpreter leads Christiana and her boys

“into a room where was a man who could look no way but downward, with a muck-rake in his hand. There stood also one over his head, with a celestial crown in his hand, and proffered him that crown for his muck-rake; but the man did neither look

up nor regard, but raked to himself the straws, the small sticks, and dust of the floor.”

It is an image of a man of this world, devoted exclusively to earthly things.

“Then said Christiana, ‘Oh, deliver me from this muck-rake!’—‘That prayer,’ said the Interpreter, ‘has lain by till it is almost rusty; “Give me not riches” is scarce the prayer of one of ten thousand. Straws and sticks and dust, with most, are the great things now looked after.’”

(c) Take one more lovely passage:—

“Now as they were going along and talking, they espied a boy feeding his father’s sheep. The boy was in very mean clothes, but of a fresh and well-favored countenance; and as he sat by himself he sang. ‘Hark!’ said Mr. Greatheart, ‘to what the shepherd-boy saith.’ So they hearkened, and he said:—

‘He that is down needs fear no fall,
He that is low no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.

I am content with what I have,
 Little be it or much ;
 And, Lord ! contentment still I crave,
 Because thou savest such.'

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Then said the guide, 'Do you hear him? I will dare to say this boy lives a merrier life, and wears more of that herb called heart's-ease in his bosom, than he that is clad in silk and velvet.'

3. Notice, thirdly, the wonderful vividness and reality of Bunyan's impersonations. "They are not," it has been said, "shadowy abstractions, but men and women of our own every-day world." We are not unacquainted with Mr. By-ends of the town of Fair Speech, who always has the luck to jump in his judgment with the way of the times, and to get thereby, and who always walks with Religion when he goes in his silver slippers. His kindred and surroundings are only too familiar to us; his uncle, Mr. Twotongues, the parson; his wife, that very virtuous woman, my

Lady Feigning's daughter, and his grandfather, "who was a waterman, looking one way and rowing another." Mr. Facing-both-ways, Mr. Anything, and the rest are familiar people. Nor is his schoolmaster, one Mr. Gripeman, of the market-town of Love-gain, in the county of Coveting, a stranger to us. Obstinate with his dogged determination, and Pliable with his shallow impressionableness, are among our acquaintances. We have before now come across "the brisk lad, Ignorance, from the town of Conceit;" and "the man, Temporary, who lived in a house two miles off from Honesty, next door to one Turn-back." Short-round and Sleepy-head and Linger-after-lust and Sir Having Greedy, we know them all. Where is the town which does not contain Mrs. Timorous, and her coterie of gossips, Mrs. Bat's-eyes, Mrs. Light-mind, and Mrs. Know-nothing, all as merry as the maids; and Madam Bubble, speaking very smoothly,

with a smile at the end of each sentence? Nor are we entirely unacquainted with "the young woman whose name was Dull." "The mind of Bunyan," says Lord Macaulay, "was so imaginative that personifications, when he dealt with them, became men."

How marvellously picturesque again is the description of the city of Vanity Fair, with its fools, knaves, and rogues, their hatred of true Christians, and their railing accusations; and as for the evidence sworn against good men by Envy, Superstition, and Pickthank, before the brutal judge, Lord Hate-good, why, we hear it every day.

"Then went the Jury out, and first among themselves, Mr. Blindman, the foreman, said, 'I see clearly that the man is a heretic.' Then said Mr. No-good, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth.' 'Ay,' said Mr. Malice, 'for I hate the very looks of him.' Then said Mr. Love-lust, 'I could never endure him.' 'Nor I,' said Mr. Live-loose, 'for he would always be condemning my way.' 'Hang him! hang him!' said Mr. Heady. 'A sorry scrub!'

said Mr. High-mind. 'My heart riseth against him,' said Mr. Enmity. 'He is a rogue,' said Mr. Liar. 'Hanging is too good for him,' said Mr. Cruelty. 'Let us despatch him out of the way,' said Mr. Hate-light. Then said Mr. Implacable, 'Might I have all the world given me, I could not be reconciled to him, therefore let us forthwith bring him in guilty of death.' And so they did."

They scourged Faithful, they buffeted him, they lanced his flesh with knives, they stoned him with stones; last of all, they burned him to ashes at the stake. Thus came Faithful to his end.

I have no space to speak of Bunyan's other works. His "Grace Abounding" is the spiritual autobiography of his early years, before he found peace and happiness in the conviction of assured forgiveness and of the love of God. His "History of Mr. Badman" is hardly an allegory. It is a page torn out of the volume of Bunyan's daily experience. Mr. Badman is simply an ordinary, vulgar, typical Eng-

lish scoundrel. Even as a child he lies and pilfers and swears. Apprenticed to a good man, he robs him and runs away. Apprenticed to a wicked man, he neglects his work, robs the till, and exercises an evil influence on the family. He is started in business. Being tall and fair, he marries a lady with money, runs into debt, spends her dower, cheats, lies, and, by base shrewdness, prospers. His wife dies of a broken heart. But no man can escape the consequences of his misdeeds. In a drunken fit Mr. Badman breaks his legs and becomes seriously ill; while half intoxicated he is tricked into a second marriage with a low woman who squanders his ill-got "hatfuls of money," and he dies worthless and impenitent, suffering no Nemesis but that of his own brutal and selfish habits; "travelling along the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire, with such pleasures as a brute may find in them;" and yet leaving us with the conviction that, if there were

no bonfire, we should still prefer to be with Christian, even among his severest hardships.

Bunyan's "Holy War," the story of how the armies of the great king recovered the lost town of Mansoul, and how it was again partially recaptured, is another fine allegory, well worth the reading. In his later years, Bunyan acquired great fame as a preacher; nor can we wonder at this, for he himself says: "What I preached I did myself feel, yea, I did smartingly feel."

When Charles II. expressed his surprise to Dr. Owen that a man of his learning "could sit and hear an illiterate tinker prate," "May it please your Majesty," answered Dr. Owen, "could I possess that tinker's ability for preaching, I would most gladly relinquish all my learning."

Amid these works, at the age of sixty, death came upon him, and in a way which all might envy; for it was in consequence of a deed of mercy. A youth, a neighbor

of Bunyan's, happening to fall into the displeasure of his father, and being much troubled in mind upon that account, as also for that his father proposed to disinherit him, asked Bunyan to act as his intercessor. Bunyan, always ready for any good office, undertook the task, and used such pressing arguments against anger and passion, as also for love and reconciliation, that the heart of the father yearned toward his returning son. After this good deed he had to ride from Reading to London, forty miles, through the drenching rain. Wet to the skin, and very tired, he was seized with a fever, and "with a constant and Christian patience, with holy words of peace and hope, resigned his soul into the hands of his most merciful Redeemer."

It was a life good and true; and the books which were its outcome were written by Bunyan as with his heart's blood. If any reader will honestly and carefully study them, they may do him more good

than many sermons. When we are struggling along through the Slough of Despond, or running towards the Wicket Gate, or shut up in Doubting Castle, or fighting Apollyon in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, or engaged in our business in Vanity Fair, we may learn many a lesson of wisdom and courage from the poor imprisoned tinker of Bedford who died more than two hundred years ago.