

The Pilgrim's Progress.

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Little-faith.

THE continuity of the romance is here broken by an interjected tale which at this point Christian 'calls to his remembrance.' The artist in story-telling has perhaps begun to feel his narrative flagging, and the next part of the story of Christian and Faithful is indeed tedious and unpleasant. But, besides such literary purpose, it is easy to perceive a reason for this tale here. Ignorance and Turnaway are disheartening instances of failure in pilgrimage, and the failure of the latter we have already seen to be final. Perhaps this story is added to make us feel that after all a man may recover from a grievous collapse, and that no failure is necessarily irretrievable. One commentator has, with fine insight, pointed out the pathetic fact that even in Christian's time the story of Little-faith is an old story. When such adventures happen to us we are apt to think ourselves alone and singled out for misfortune. Really the long line of hard-beset and sore-pressed pilgrims stretches out behind us right to the beginning of man's story on the earth. 'There hath no temptation befallen us but such as is common to man.'

Little-faith had been emphatically a *good man*. Indeed, he had been too good, and consequently liable to the disadvantages of being good, which are many. It has been said of a prominent figure in recent history that 'if he had been a worse man he would have made a better statesman,' and there is a sense in which the cynical words have a certain truth in them. But, lest such statements may appear dangerous and even profane, let us hasten to clear them from misunderstandings. Goodness, in its rich completeness of meaning, can never, of course, be in excess. Yet, as words are used among us, goodness is often taken to mean a purely negative quality of character, which may be wanting both in energy and in experience. A man who has never had a doubt, whose temptations are feeble, and whose virtue has been but instinctive and routine, will often seem to his fellows an ideally good man. We owe much to Bunyan, but few things of more instructive suggestion than this

reminder that such goodness may be a less admirable and more dangerous character than that of men far less blameless, but more experienced in sin, repentance, and victory.

He was a good man, but a sleepy one. How persistently, in poor human nature, that *but* is certain to come in, after we have said that a man is good! The hero of Wolfram's *Parsifal* was 'a good man, but slowly wise'; and there is an unflinching sense of human sympathy and companionship in that memorable epithet. Little-faith's first apparent drawback is sleepiness. Every pilgrim must sleep, but this is no rest-house where we find him sleeping. He had dwelt in the town of Sincere, but the teaching of geography was defective in that town. Little-faith chanced to sit down upon the road and fall asleep just at the point where Dead Man's Lane enters it, leading from Broadway-gate. This is part of the danger of easy goodness and native sincerity. Little knowledge of evil comes upon it from within, and it has been too sleepy to acquire much information from without. There is nothing like temptation for keeping a man from drowsiness, and R. L. Stevenson, in his *Celestial Surgeon*, actually prays for anything, whether it be 'thy most pointed pleasure' or 'some killing sin' which will 'stab my spirit broad awake.'

By sleep, Bunyan means thoughtlessness and negligence, and there is nothing which wakens in him a keener and more persistent sense of danger. We have already seen this in the story of Simple, Sloth, and Presumption, the Arbour on the Hill Difficulty, and the grounds of Doubting Castle. No man had a more wholesome dread of the 'pestilence that walketh in darkness.' But here we have this brought into the most lurid of all its connexions by the very fearsome name of the place, which is a veritable murder-trap. Dead Man's Lane has in it the suggestion of the 'bloody forelands' of pirate stories, or the 'murdering hut creeks' of the Australian Bush. Wild times, such as those of Bunyan's England, had still much realism of this sort in their geography, and *Dead-man* haunted the imagination of the living. Readers of the *Holy War* will remember how

effectively 'Deadman's Bell' is introduced in that allegory.

It is very striking that the name of this unfortunate is not, as we might have expected it to be, Little-carefulness, or Little-sense, but Little-faith. Faith and Knowledge are in closer alliance than we often think. Faith in the invisible and eternal does not make a man unpractical, or lead him to fall into dangerous situations. On the contrary it quickens all his powers and makes the world interesting and his mind full of curiosity about its facts. Parsifal lost his life's great opportunity by failing to ask the question as to what it was that he saw when the Holy Grail passed before his eyes. But the meaning of that allegory is not merely want of curiosity: it is also want of a sufficiently quickened faith, which would have made it impossible for him to refrain from asking that question. Faith, by accustoming a man to 'walk often in heaven's friendly streets,' quickens the imagination all round; and the man of faith cannot but wrestle with the mystery of human life and conduct. It is Little-faith, as this passage truly shows, that 'has no speculation in his eyes.' Of course, Faith is here understood in a wider sense than mere intellectual assent and belief. Part III. restricts it to this, and tells us of Little-faith's son Seek-truth hearing of his father's fate in the land of Vain Opinions. Faith, however, obviously represents here the whole grasp and realization which the man has of spiritual realities, his realizing sense of eternal things. Such meagre spirituality, which is ready at any given moment to lie down upon the earth to sleep, forgetful that there is any spiritual world at all, is liable to rude and terrible awakings. We often awake in quite a different mood from that in which we lay down. Life here, and still more the life beyond, seems terrifying and alien, and a thing in which we have no part at all. To quote Bunyan's own words (cf. *Offor sub loco*, p. 147, note 4), we find that 'Believing is sure sweating work. . . . Oh, the toil of a gracious heart in this combat, if faith be weak.'

The Assault.

The three enemies are Faint-heart, Mistrust, and Guilt. One of them we have met before, Mistrust, fleeing back with Timorous from the fancied danger of the lions at the Palace Beautiful. Here he is in other company, and has now joined a gang of highwaymen who rob those pilgrims who are

weaker than himself. It is ever true that cowards are apt to become also bullies, and this second dangerous and aggressive aspect of cowardice is brilliant with genius and true to experience.

The graphic picture of highwaymen, with their bullying superiority of numbers and their entire lack of any sense of decency or honour in combat, was no doubt suggested by the condition of England in those days, when the romance of the road was a matter not of fiction but of fact, or at least of very actual possibility, for every traveller. But it may be permissible, without pressing the allegory too far, to see in the detailed account of the attack a very definite sequence of spiritual experiences. Faint-heart speaks, Mistrust robs, Guilt strikes down. *Faint-heart* obviously stands for certain words which every one of us has heard in our own souls—words spoken by no human voice, but somehow borne upon the air in our direction—vague fears, and nervous tremors that seemed somehow to be connected with conscience, though they could certainly not be called in any definite sense conviction of sin. Yet all the more because of their vagueness they shook our resolution and, rendering us spiritless and unnerved, left us afraid of life. *Mistrust* stands for a more definite stage of the assault, in which the pilgrim loses certain positive and distinct possessions. Whatever hold he may have had on truth, and especially any secure and restful sense of his spiritual heritage, together with the joy and interest that these imparted to his journey—all such gains are gone. The two together—Faint-heart and Mistrust—may be taken to represent that state of *Accidie* to which we have already referred in connection with Bishop Paget's brilliant introductory chapter to his *Spirit of Discipline*. It is an ancient sorrow and a modern one as well, and all those who are liable to fits of discouragement, following upon times of unguarded and self-indulgent slackness, should read that great and wholesome chapter.

Yet worse is to follow. Mingling with the indefinite wretchedness of his spirit there has all along been an uneasy sense of moral failure, conscience muttering in the background like a distant thundercloud. But now the storm draws near, and the lightnings are in full play. Sin after sin flashes out into new and condemning vividness, and the good easy man of little faith finds himself a criminal. Conscience, that 'makes cowards of us all,' is a fell

adversary even for a man of much faith. When our crimson and scarlet sins are flaming out upon us in their blood-red colours, it will tax the reserves of faith, even of a great believer, to say to his soul that God will make him white as snow. But Little-faith has no defence against the club of Guilt. His despair is as thorough as his carelessness was before, and he lies 'felled flat to the ground, and bleeding as one that would bleed to death.' This use of faith, to protect the soul from the blows of Guilt, is a piece of far insight on the part of Bunyan, and its suggestiveness will lead us far in among the mysteries alike of human nature and of divine grace.

Thus we see once again how true it is that 'from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.' It is a principle wide as human life, and every department of secular interests confirms it. But in religion it is peculiarly and often tragically true. Faith, in small quantities, is a precarious possession. Like fire, it is easily extinguished when the flame is low; and the only course for a would-be believer is to lay hold with all his might upon eternal life and to commit himself whole-heartedly to the doing of 'this one thing.' The result of playing with faith is seen, in this poor spectacle of a man on the right way indeed, but prostrate on it, a good man, but a spiritual pauper.

Great-grace to the Rescue.

The ancient antidote to *Accidie* was *Fortitudo*, and Bishop Paget has some memorable passages regarding that virtue. It is a bracing and challenging doctrine that the victim of *Accidie* must find the remedy within himself, and it has changed many a Little-faith into Great-faith. Tennyson expresses another aspect of the same truth in his famous lines—

If e'er when faith had fall'n asleep
I heard a voice, 'Believe no more,'
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled in the Godless deep;

A warmth within the breast would melt
The freezing reason's colder part,
And, like a man in wrath, the heart
Stood up and answered, 'I have felt.'

It may, indeed, be some such inward impulse of will or heart that Great-grace represents in this passage. Yet it rather seems to indicate a friend coming from without. Great-grace has been well-

described as 'an informal Christian combatant'—a sort of knight-errant or champion, whose work is to right the wrong wherever he may find it. He is not a supernatural being, but a strictly human character, like Help at the Slough of Despond. He is not necessarily an official helper even, and it is more likely that Bunyan was thinking of a layman than of one in clerical orders. He stands for one of those strong and brave spirits whose courage is infectious. Theirs is the habit of victory, and in their presence it is easier to be strong and to believe, to hope and to be good. The characteristic feature of him is that he is a soul habitually confident, living in the town of Good Confidence. Of such servants of the Lord, Thomas à Kempis has happily said that they are 'equal to the angels, pleasing to God, *terrible to devils*, and worthy to be commended of all the faithful.' It is a fine point in this story that Great-grace is never seen, but only what the robbers take to be the sound of him is heard, and yet that is enough to make them flee away. In many heartening books we meet with such men. Shakespeare's Henry v. on the night before Agincourt, Browning's Herakles in 'Balaustion's Adventure,' are perhaps as fine examples as one could find. Browning and R. L. Stevenson are full of them and their spirit, and they have indeed been terrible to the devils of those latter days, chasing far away the fears and misgivings that beset weak souls. There is a delightful exhilaration in this Gospel of the Healthy Mind, which has heard the champion Great-grace 'come sounding through the town' which others were calling the City of Dreadful Night.

The Future of Little-faith.

His pocket-money was gone, but he had managed to keep his jewels—the sort of adventure which often meets us in romances of the road. The jewels may mean, like Shakespeare's 'eternal jewel,' the soul of the man. He had not lost his soul. This would be quite characteristic of the Calvinism of Bunyan, who was a tried but firm believer in the perseverance of the saints. That this is, in effect, the meaning intended, is proved by the well-known passage in *Grace Abounding*, which follows the narrative of that great deliverance which came to Bunyan when 'suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, "Thy righteousness is in heaven."' The passage is: 'All those graces of God that were now green on me were yet but like

those cracked groats and fourpence-halfpennies¹ that rich men carry in their purses when their gold is in their trunks at home. Oh, I saw my gold was in my trunk at home! In Christ, my Lord and Saviour. Now, Christ was all; all my *righteousness*, all my *sanctification*, and all my *redemption*.

His jewels were safe. His redeemed soul was still his own, for it was kept in God's safe keeping. But his pocket-money was gone—that spending money of minor graces which make the spiritual life easy and pleasant, beyond the bare question of the spirit being alive and not dead. This man just managed to make shift to *scabble* on his way. (The word is not scramble, but *scabble*, a much more expressive word, used by Bunyan when he thought of his possibly being hanged for his non-conformity, and 'dreaded lest he should make but a *scabbling* shift to clamber up the ladder.' Cf. *Offor*, p. 147, note 4.) He had nothing to spare—neither hope, faith, character, strength, nor joy—but was always on the edge of being hard up or bankrupt.

Consequently he has to *beg his way* onward. He has no self-reliance, no self-dependence, but has to depend on others for all his spiritual help. He is the opposite extreme of the type of character so strongly drawn in Emerson's essay on 'Self-reliance,' or Matthew Arnold's poem on 'Self-dependence.' Like the foolish virgins, he is for ever borrowing his faith from books or speech of others, and has not manhood enough in him to find or to work out a faith that is indeed his own. Like Tomlinson, 'Oh, this he has read and this he has heard, and that was told to him,' and he supports his pilgrimage by the scraps of faith and hope thrown to him by other pilgrims.

As to the keeping of the jewels, it was a wonder he had skill to hide them or anything else. Like other shallow natures, he has no reticence, nor has he learned to recognize and to trust a great fact in his own experience, and to distinguish it from

¹ *Offor* explains in a footnote that these coins were 'Irish sixpences,' which, in the dearth of silver coin in England, were made current at fourpence-halfpenny.

small and unimportant facts. We can see this want of skill in the statement that 'he scattered almost all the rest of the way with nothing but doleful and bitter complaints, telling also to all that overtook him, or that he overtook in the way as he went,' all that had befallen him.

This is lifelike and graphic. There are some who can suffer and be silent, and there are others who can only suffer and tell, and they are a poor race. Trouble does not bless this man, but works in him a change only for the worse. He does not take his trouble rightly in any way. He blames not himself, but his fortune. He becomes self-centred, bitter, and morbid; and all who allow themselves for want of resolute will to fall into such darkness, and to talk about it, are simply taking the liberty of becoming public nuisances. Like those doleful people who victimize all whom they may meet with a narrative of their diseases, so this pitiful creature has nothing better to tell his fellow-pilgrims than the story of his own carelessness, and cowardice, and weakness. The deep selfishness of such a pilgrim is manifest. He cared not how many he discouraged, or how many more he wearied. There is a subtle pleasure for such diseased natures as his in dwelling on their own misfortunes, and his loquacity was but a form of self-indulgence.

And, after all, it is but his pocket-money he has lost. He sets too high store upon the minor graces and emotions of the Christian life. No doubt, these are very valuable; but he who so exaggerates their value as to let the loss of them drive the priceless jewel of his salvation out of mind, is but one of those whose treasure is on the earth. Too much may be made of minor spiritual losses. We all have to fight our way through many misadventures; and if some early virtues of the gentler and more tender sort are lost, yet to the brave spirit these may be replaced by a robustness which will more than compensate for what is gone. The knight, when his combat is over and he takes off his visor, need not be surprised at the rust that begrimes his face. The main thing is that he should win his battle.