

What remains of the difficulties of believing in Christ? There yet remains, perhaps, the ethical demand which He makes upon us.

We have called that demand appalling. But is it more appalling than the demand of the God of Abraham? Jesus said, 'If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own . . . children.' What did the God of Abraham say? He said, 'Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.' Do we answer that the God of Abraham is not our God?

If we do, we do not mean it. All we mean is that the *form* of the sacrifice which God demands of us is not the form of the sacrifice which He demanded of Abraham. But the sacrifice itself is the same. It certainly cannot be less. For if the fellowship which He offers is perfect, it must be accepted by us whole-heartedly. No one can ever stand between us and Him. Every affection, as well as every duty, is to be offered on the altar of love to the Highest. 'I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honour more.' Shall we not say—'loved I not *Jesus* more'? It is no parody; it is the lifting of the familiar sentiment up to the final reality.

## The Pilgrim's Progress.

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### Hopeful's Story of his Soul.

It is noteworthy that in John Bunyan's experimental conversations and narratives, he does not linger upon the beginning or the end, but expands at great length the intermediate times of struggle and approach. The beginning gives its bare catalogue of sins, without any suspicion of longing or of afterthought, such as is apt to make narratives of spiritual experience dangerously suggestive. The end is brief, and in these close-packed paragraphs of spiritual victory we have the richest and most wonderful of all Bunyan's masterpieces (cf. the matchless conversation at the table in the House Beautiful, Faithful's closing sentence regarding the Valley of the Shadow, and the whole structure of *Grace Abounding*, on whose experiences all Bunyan's literary conversations are built). Here also, as in these other conversations, the bulk of the narrative is occupied with the struggles of the intermediate period. These may be divided into three parts, viz. :—

#### I. THE AWAKENING OF CONSCIENCE.

This Hopeful traces to his meeting with Christian and Faithful in Vanity Fair. There is a touch here of Bunyan's characteristic genius, in the con-

centrated significance of one sentence especially. Hopeful found by considering the things which he heard 'of beloved Faithful that was put to death for his faith . . . that the end of these things is death.' To the careless eye it would seem that the end of faith is death, judging by the fate of Faithful. But the impression made on Hopeful is precisely the opposite. It was Vanity Fair, and not its martyr, that was really under the doom. For the time being, death seized upon the immortal, and let the mortal go. But so great was the impression upon Hopeful of Faithful's hold upon immortality that he saw through the delusion and understood the secret of eternal life. Thus may death itself overreach its aim, and betray its secret of immortality; in the lives of followers of Him who has, through death, brought life and immortality to light.

In simple and graphic language, Hopeful goes on to describe his treatment of these first convictions. His Hopefulness, not yet grown wise and deep enough to deal with the facts of life, 'was not willing to know the evil of sin nor the damnation that follows,' and so he shut his eyes against the light. This is that vain optimism that refuses to face the facts, waiting as yet for its transformation into the blessed optimism that 'has faced life and is glad.'

Then follows a numbered list of the four causes of his resistance. First, he was ignorant that this sore grasp upon conscience is the method by which God's love works upon a man. The passage reminds us of the well-known lines in the first of Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*:—

Straightway I was 'ware  
So weeping, how a mystic shape did move  
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair;  
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove,—  
'Guess now who holds thee?'—'Death,' I said.  
But there,  
The silver answer rang—'Not Death, but Love.'

Second, in contrast with this strange and formidable voice of God, there came the remembrance of sins, sweet and familiar and caressing. They are the sins of the flesh, which, as we have already seen, are the besetting sins of Hopeful, as Pride and Shame, sins of the spirit, were Faithful's besetting sins. Third, came the memories of companions, dear and alluring to Hopeful's companionable spirit. At this stage Hopeful is very much in the mind of old Jupiter Carlyle (of whom it was said that he was 'too good company to have any deep tincture of religion'). Writing in his Autobiography about the clergy of a town he had visited, he divides them into 'bucks,' whom he confessed to be 'inconceivably ignorant, and sometimes indecent in their morals,' and 'prigs' who were 'ignorant of the world, narrow-minded, pedantic.' For his part he preferred the former, whom he 'held to be most tolerable, because they were unassuming, and had no other affectation but that of behaving themselves like gentlemen.' Fourth, the troublesome and heart-affrighting character of the hours of conviction. The summary of the whole mood is this, that in every way religion appears dreary and the life of the world fascinating. All the *diablerie* and glamour, all the interest and joyousness, seem to be on the side of sin, and nothing but moroseness and gloom on the side of God.

It may be permitted us at this point to pause for a moment over the extreme detail and exactness of this self-analysis. When a man in describing his spiritual history can catalogue experiences with such definiteness as to number them 1, 2, 3, 4, we are apt to feel that the account is losing its reality. Within the soul there are no such numbered sequences, but a confused turmoil of emotions and experiences mingled past disentangling.

'Nothing,' as we know, 'falsifies history more than logic'; and when a spiritual biography is so minutely arranged as this, we shrink from the unreality that is so different from what we actually know of the inner life. Yet to the writers of an older day such analysis was natural. So accustomed were they to self-examination, that the whole of their inner life lay clear before their eyes, and any other style of dealing with it would have been unnatural to them. We may well envy them the sureness of their stride, even if we cannot allow that their analysis was always either accurate or wholesome. After all has been said that we may feel disposed to say in favour of a more healthy and less self-conscious way of thinking, we cannot but fall back, as Froude does in his *Bunyan*, and Masson in his *Three Devils*, on a positively envious appreciation of their strength and certainty. If these men had no sense of our doubts, it was their greatness rather than their littleness that gave them that security. They fought after the manner of giants in those days.

The first impulse of this untamed optimist was simply to throw off the sense of sin and all fears of conscience when they came, from very distaste of them. But he was in the grip of realities now, and their hold tightened. Then follows a list of things that brought his sins to his mind. All of these are everyday things, which presumably he had experienced without any impression countless times before—the meeting of a good man, a casual hearing of the Bible read, sickness in himself or a neighbour, death coming to another, and the remembrance that he himself must die, or especially that he must come to judgment.

The list shows a growing morbidness wrought by conscience in a high-strung and sensitive disposition. Yet still more we see in it a wonderful simplicity, such as is possible only to a very child-like man. The 'headache' reminds us of Monsieur Miranda in *Turf and Towers*, and his sudden fits of devotion to the Virgin. Still more forcible are the exquisite lines of *Bishop Blougram's Apology*:—

Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,  
A fancy from a flower-bell, someone's death,  
A chorus-ending from Euripides—  
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears  
As old and new at once as nature's self  
To rap and knock and enter in our soul.

The tolling of the bell is peculiarly touching,

coming from the pen of the bell-ringer of Elstow. Bunyan was fond of bell-ringing, and, to modern judgment, spent much unnecessary waste of conscience upon it. But if he denied himself the old pastime, he never ceased to hear the music, turned often to grave uses now. No reader of *The Holy War* will forget the sound of the Alarm Bell, and of Deadman's Bell there. And we can well imagine that Hopeful derived this terror at least from many an experience of Bunyan himself. Yet in such sounds there was surely more than the terrifying remembrance of death. Was there not also the hearing of those Bells of Is, the buried city beneath the sea, which Breton fishermen heard on quiet evenings? And would not Bunyan and Hopeful too have known what Renan meant when he said, 'I often fancy that I have at the bottom of my heart a city of Is, with its bells calling to prayer a recalcitrant congregation. At times I halt to listen to these gentle vibrations which seem as if they came from immeasurable depths, like voices from another world.'

## 2. THE ATTEMPT AT REFORMATION.

The next phase is that of reformation. The conscience of his sins is in such hot chase after him that he can no longer evade it by the old light-hearted optimism that 'was not willing to know the evil of sin.' Every casual sound and sight increased the terror and misery, and now there was nothing left for him but to amend. The amendment was pretty drastic, on both its negative and positive sides, and for a time it seemed to meet the situation satisfactorily. But a sudden end came to all this happier mood when 'at the last my trouble came tumbling upon me again, and that over the neck of all my reformations.' The figure is very distinctly conceived and vivid. His Reformation is a sort of captive giant who is to act as porter to him, bearing all his sins. Each trouble as it arises is passed back to Reformation, whose burden grows heavier day by day. So they travel on, Hopeful, light-hearted, going before, and Reformation stumbling along behind him under the increasing burden, until at last the overtaxed slave can go no longer; and as he falls the burden tumbles over his neck on to the hapless Hopeful, whose plight is worse than ever. With this may be compared Nathaniel Hawthorne's clever conceit in *The Celestial Railroad*, where the pilgrims' burdens are deposited in the van, so that they

travel light. But at the end of the journey, the burdens will be delivered to them again. It is but another version of Christian's terrible experience when he turned aside to make for the Town of Morality.

This experience is further analyzed into two distinct convictions: 1. Even the amended life is not really free from sin—'I have committed sin enough in one duty to send me to hell.' 2. The debts incurred before the amendment began are still unpaid. The second of these convictions is the more obvious of the two. To the unsophisticated conscience of the writer, life was a running account for sins with God, and nothing could be more characteristic than the crisp metaphor of the shop-keeper in whose book the old debt is still uncrossed. The former conviction shows a far deeper insight and a far more thorough dealing with conscience. It was a familiar thought of Bunyan's. In another of his writings he says: 'For there is not a day nor a duty; not a day that thou livest nor a duty that thou dost, but will need that Mercy should come after to take away thy iniquity.' Really, the first conviction is the sequel to the second. The sins of the past are not only standing, a dead weight of fact, that must somehow be reckoned with. They are living things that have laid hold upon the soul and continue to work in it, polluting its springs and deadening its powers. They attack our virtues, and not only enfeeble the present and the future actions, but have power to check the effects of the best efforts of the past. Rossetti never wrote more terrible words than these, from his *Vain Virtues*:

What is the sorriest thing that enters hell?  
None of the sins, but this and that fair deed  
Which a soul's sin at length could supersede.

## 3. THE DAWN OF LIGHT.

At this point of the story the dawn begins to break. One cannot but admire the thoroughness of the treatment, its unbroken sequence, its completeness, and its grasp. The point at which he has arrived is a view of the tainted and therefore worthless quality of any righteousness to which he can attain. Yet nothing but righteousness—perfect righteousness—will serve his turn. There can be no patching up now, no compromise. But where is such righteousness to be found? Evidently not in himself at his best, or in any other of his acquaintance. And so we see the hungry eyes of a guilty, conscience-stricken man, looking

everywhere with an almost envious eagerness, for innocence, to 'obtain the righteousness of a man that never had sinned.' There is little understanding as yet how, even if such a man were found, one might obtain his righteousness. At the present point we have only the passionate desire for righteousness, possible only to one who is sick of sin and fearfully entangled and tainted with it.

Then came the assurance that 'there was such a man,' and that is the next point in this wonderful progress of exposition, whose compression and completeness probably render it unique among all religious writings. It is this assurance that 'there was such a man, who had never sinned,' that goes down the ages triumphing over the sin of the world. Here and there a Renan, or a J. H. Newman, attempts the futile task of criticizing Jesus and finding some stain on His pure righteousness, or an H. G. Wells may go to the other extreme, and tell us that 'The Christian's Christ is too fine for me, not incarnate enough, not flesh enough, not earth enough.' But the conscience of sin-stricken humanity knows purity when it sees it better than they, and knows its need of purity, and flings them off on its way to Christ. He has put Himself at the head of all the ideals of all the ages, and He is still there, though obvious only to the clear eyes of fleeing sinners.

But here the human passes into the divine. 'A man that never had sinned' would be useless to Hopeful, if he were not more than that. So Bunyan next sets this righteousness on the throne of God. 'Go,' he says, in one of those immortal sentences of his, 'and thou shalt find Him upon a mercy-seat, where He sits all the year long, to give pardon and forgiveness to them that come.' This brings us back again to the heart of Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, where he tells us that 'One day, as I was passing into the field, and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, "Thy righteousness is in heaven," and methought withal, I saw with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand; there, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, "He wants my righteousness"; for that was just before Him.'

One thing more was needed to complete the discovery. It was the assurance that He 'did what He did, and died the death also, not for

Himself but for me.' This brings us back to that great passage in the discourse at the supper-table of the House Beautiful, and beyond that to Bunyan's discovery of Luther's book on the Galatians, which *Grace Abounding* so graphically describes. It is when the great truths come home to the one soul that cries for them, when the infinite mercy of the Eternal God, revealed in Jesus Christ, bends over ME, as if there were no other than myself in all the universe, that the time of salvation has come at last. Then the soul, disgusted and terrified at the vision of himself as he is, finds his true self in God—sinless as Jesus Christ Himself, and assured in Him. This poor man has been out seeking his life, and he has found his life at last, 'hid with Christ in God.'

It is a strange feature of the story that Hopeful, generally so true to his name, is here so diffident. All sorts of questions arise, as to God's willingness to save, the limits within which the Atonement operates, the mystery of election, and so forth, just as they arose for Bunyan and are recorded in the long struggles of *Grace Abounding*. He receives the book, the same which makes Christian, from the first page of his narrative, distinctively 'the man with a book.' He prays the Father to reveal Christ to him, grasping here the double truth of revelation—Christ reveals the Father, and the Father reveals Christ. He goes so far as to cry with the boldness of simplicity, 'Lord, take this opportunity, and magnify Thy grace.' Yet the battle swings to and fro for a long time, betwixt hope and despair. The silence of God baffles him, but he continues crying to God—'Oh, friends!' says Bunyan, in *Grace Abounding*, 'cry to God to reveal Jesus Christ unto you; there is none that teacheth like Him.' He continues, for 'thought I with myself, If I leave off I die, and I can but die at the throne of grace.' Again we are in *Grace Abounding*—'Yet, my case being desperate, I thought with myself I can but die; and if it must be so it shall once be said, "that such an one died at the foot of Christ in prayer."'

#### 4. DAYBREAK AT LAST.

But now, at length, we are to witness the full daybreak of light upon this tortured soul. He sees Christ at last 'with the eyes of his understanding.' It is not a vision, or an access of emotion, or an ecstasy of any kind. It is a man's

intellect applied to the promises of God. A flood of texts is poured upon him, but most of all those words, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' Yet again *Grace Abounding* gives the key—'These words did with great power suddenly break in upon me: "My grace is sufficient for thee, my grace is sufficient for thee, my grace is sufficient for thee," three times together. And oh! methought that every word was a mighty word unto me; as "my," and "grace," and "sufficient," and "for thee;" they were then, and sometimes are still, far bigger than others be.' But indeed the whole of *Grace Abounding* moves from text to text of Scripture, and no more instinctive exercise could be found than the collecting of these texts in their order. On to the end, in that memorable last paragraph of the conversation in which we see the beginning of sanctification in the change of mood and taste, Bunyan continues to write his own spiritual

autobiography. The last sentence is almost word for word with this from *Grace Abounding*—'Had I a thousand gallons of blood within my veins, I could freely then have spilt it all at the command and feet of this my Lord and Saviour.' It may not be amiss, although the passage is so familiar, to put side by side with this great account of a soul's progress, Cowper's lines:—

Since that dear hour that brought me to Thy foot,  
And plucked up all my follies by the root,  
I never trusted in an arm but Thine,  
Nor hoped but in Thy righteousness divine.  
My prayers and alms, imperfect and defiled,  
Were but the feeble efforts of a child.  
Howe'er performed, it was their brightest part,  
That they proceeded from a grateful heart.  
Cleansed in Thine own all-purifying blood,  
Forgive their evil, and accept their good.  
I cast them at Thy feet—my only plea  
Is what it was—dependence upon Thee.

## The Great Text Commentary.

### THE GREAT TEXTS OF REVELATION.

#### REVELATION VII. 9, 10.

'After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands; and they cry with a great voice, saying, Salvation unto our God which sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb.'—R. V.

#### THE SITUATION.

The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia end with the third chapter of the Apocalypse. The fourth and fifth chapters describe two great acts of worship. In the fourth chapter God is worshipped as the Creator. The four Cherubim or Living Creatures, representing all created life, are seen in perpetual adoration of their Maker. The four-and-twenty Elders—the patriarchs of the Old Covenant and the apostles of the New—fall down before the throne and worship God, saying, 'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power, for thou hast created all things.'

The fifth chapter introduces the great work of Redemption. The Lamb appears in the midst of the throne, typical of the eternal Son, the Redeemer of the world. As He takes the Book of Doom from His Father's hands, the four Living Creatures and the four-and-twenty Elders fall down before Him and sing a new song, the song of the redeemed. The angel chorus pours forth its chant of thanksgiving to the Lamb, and every creature in heaven and earth and sea joins in the act of adoration.

Then at the ninth verse of the seventh chapter this second great act of worship enters on a new stage. The congregation, which hitherto has been drawn from the twelve tribes of Israel, is now seen to be a great multitude which no man can number, and it is taken from every nation upon the earth.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE SERMON.

The redeemed are at worship. Where are they? They are in heaven, no doubt. But heaven is not to be identified with the world to come.

<sup>1</sup> See E. C. Paget, *Silence*, p. 208.