

## JOHN BUNYAN

It is not to be wondered at that John Bunyan, the author of "Pilgrim's Progress," had a very deep inward experience of the grace of God. Without such an experience an illiterate tinker would scarcely have been able to write the book which has had a greater circulation than any other book except the Bible. Next to the Bible, "Pilgrim's Progress" is the world's most popular book. It has been translated into almost every important language, and adapted to the use of children as well as adults, and to the use of Roman Catholics as well as Protestants.

"Illustrious dreamer" that he was, John Bunyan did not dream all of his immortal allegory. "Pilgrim's Progress" is almost as much his own experience as is "Grace Abounding." The struggles and triumphs of Christian in "Pilgrim's Progress" represent the real spiritual conflicts and conquests of Bunyan himself, on his way to the Celestial City; and we will first trace the history of his spiritual experiences as recorded in "Pilgrim's Progress," and then as recorded in "Grace Abounding."

In "Pilgrim's Progress" Christian is first seized with conviction. He then leaves the City of Destruction, struggles through the Slough of Despond, endeavors to find help at Mr. Legality's, and then enters the Wicket Gate, after which his burden rolls away at the foot of the Cross. After entering the Wicket Gate he is shown by Interpreter some of the things that he will meet with on his way to the Celestial City. "Then he took him by the hand," says the narrative, "and led him into a very large parlor that was full of dust, because never swept: the which after he had reviewed a little while, the Interpreter called for a man to sweep. Now, when he began to sweep, the dust began so abundantly to fly about, that Christian had almost therewith been choked. Then said the Interpreter to a damsel that stood by, \* Bring hither water, and sprinkle the room;' the which when she had done, it was swept and cleansed with pleasure. " Then said Christian, "What meaneth this ?" "The Interpreter answered, 'This parlor is the heart of a man that was never sanctified by the sweet grace of the Gospel: the dust is the original sin, and inward corruptions, that have defiled the man. He that began to sweep at first is the Law; but she that brought water, and did sprinkle it, is the Gospel. Now, whereas thou sawest, that as soon as the first began to sweep, the dust did so fly about, that the room could not by him be cleansed, but that thou wast almost choked therewith: this, is to shew thee, that the law, instead of cleansing the heart (by its working; from sin, doth revive, put strength into, and increase it in the soul, even as it doth discover and forbid it; for it doth not give power to subdue. " Again, as thou sawest the damsel sprinkle the room with water, upon which it was cleansed with pleasure, this is to shew thee, that when the Gospel comes in the sweet and precious influences thereof to the heart, then I say, even as thou sawest the damsel lay the dust, by sprinkling the floor with water, so is sin vanquished and subdued, and the soul made clean, through the faith of it, and consequently fit for the King of Glory to inhabit. "

Again, Christian is shown by Interpreter that the fire of God's grace will "burn higher and hotter" in the human heart, no matter how much water Satan casts upon it, when the oil of grace (the Holy Spirit) is continually feeding the flame. This is shown by a fire which burns higher and hotter although a man (representing Satan) is constantly throwing water on it. The fire is next to a wall, and hidden by the wall is a man (representing the Holy Spirit) who is constantly feeding the fire with oil. When Christian leaves the house of Interpreter, the latter says, "The Comforter be always with thee, good Christian, to guide thee in the way that leads to the city !"

During his pilgrimage Christian meets with many enemies and difficulties, and with many friends and blessings. At length he reaches the Palace Beautiful, where he is much instructed in the things of God by Piety, Prudence, and Charity. He sleeps all night in the Chamber of Peace, and next morning gets a glimpse of Immanuel's Land. "When the morning was up, they had him to the top of the house, and bid him look south : so he did ; and behold, at a great distance, he saw a most pleasant mountainous country, beautified with woods, vineyards, fruits of all sorts, flowers also, with springs and fountains, very delectable to behold. Then he asked the name of the country. They said it was Immanuel's Land. 'And it is as common,' said they, 'as this hill is, to and for all Pilgrims; and when thou comest there, from thence thou mayest see to the gate of the Celestial City, as the shepherds that live there will make appear.'" Christian is very anxious to reach the beautiful land, and after they clothe him with armor he sets out upon his journey.

Until he reaches the Palace Beautiful Christian has no armor or weapons, just as spiritual babes have not "put on the whole armor of God." But when he has courage enough to pass the great lions and enter the palace. Piety, Prudence, and Charity clothe him with armor from head to feet, just as they will lead other Christians to put on the full armor of God by being "filled with the Spirit." The narrative says, " The next day they took him, and had him into the Armory, where they showed him all manner of furniture, which the Lord had provided for Pilgrims, as sword, shield, helmet, breast-plate, all-prayer, and shoes that would not wear out. And there was here enough of this to harness as many men for the service of their Lord, as there be stars in heaven for multitude." Christian's departure is thus described : " Now he bethought himself of setting forward, and they were willing he should. 'But first,' said they, ' let us go again into the Armory ' so they did, and when he came there, they harnessed him from head to foot, with what was proof, lest perhaps he should meet with assaults in the way." It was well that they did so, for Christian had many conflicts awaiting him, and he would scarcely have reached the Celestial City had he not been clad in spiritual armor at the Palace Beautiful. As it was, he was almost slain in his great battle with Apolyon. After many trials and conflicts Christian arrives at Vanity Fair, through which all pilgrims must pass on their way to the Celestial City. Here the worldly people did not understand Christian and his friend Faithful. "And as they wondered at their apparel, so they did likewise at their speech; for few could understand what they said, they naturally spoke the language of Canaan, but they that kept the Fair were persons of this world."The merchants of Vanity Fair are greatly amused as well as displeased because "the Pilgrims set very light by all their wares, they cared not so much as to look upon them." This causes a mighty uproar among the people of Vanity Fair, and the Great One of the Fair has the pilgrims arrested. At their trial Christian and Faithful state that " they were pilgrims and strangers in the world, and that they were going to their own country, which was heavenly Jerusalem". The men of Vanity Fair conclude that they are insane, and shut them up in an iron cage, but their peaceable and pious behavior wins friends for them even in Vanity Fair. These friends try to stop the baser men from persecuting the pilgrims, and tell them that there are many wicked men who ought to be punished instead of these pilgrims. A quarrel ensues, and the two pilgrims are blamed for the disturbance. A second trial takes place, before Judge Hategood. Envy testifies that Faithful "doth all he can to possess all men with certain of his disloyal notions, which he, in general, calls principles of holiness. And, in particular, I heard him once myself affirm, that Christianity and the customs of our town of Vanity were diametrically opposite, and could not be reconciled." Superstition also witnesses against him; and finally Pickthank testifies, among other things, that Faithful "hath railed on our noble Prince Beelzebub, and hath spoken contemptibly of his honorable friends, whose names are the Lord Oldman, the Lord Carnal Delight, the Lord Luxurious, the Lord Desire of Vain Glory, my old Lord Letchery, Sir Having Greedy, with all the rest of the nobility."

Faithful is condemned to death by the jury, whose names are Mr. Blindman, Mr. No-good, Mr. Malice, Mr. Love-lust, Mr. Live-loose, Mr. Heady, Mr. High-mind, Mr. Enmity, Mr. Liar, Mr. Cruelty, Mr. Hate-light, and Mr. Implacable.

Christian escapes, and continuing on his way is joined by Hopeful. They are led aside by Vain-confidence, and leave the King's highway, or "the Way of Holiness," as Bunyan calls it in his description of the encounter between Christian and Apollon. Giant Despair seizes them, and throws them into the dungeon of Doubting Castle where they almost perish. But Christian finally opens the prison door with the key of Promise, and he and Hopeful find their way back to the King's highway. They continue their journey and soon reach the Delectable Mountains, where they enjoy the richest blessings of Immanuel's Land. From these mountains they obtain a glimpse of the Celestial City. They eat and drink freely of the best that the "gardens and orchards, the vineyards and fountains of water" afford. Greatly refreshed, they continue their journey.

After traveling for some time in the highway, they are again led aside, and snared in the net of Flatterer. A Shining One delivers them, and leads them back to the narrow way. Journeying on their way they enter Beulah-land, in which country they continue to the end of their pilgrimage. Bunyan describes the Beulah-land experience in the following words : " Now I saw in my dream, that by this time the Pilgrims were got over the Enchanted Ground, and entering into the country of Beulah (Isa. 62:4), whose air was very sweet and pleasant, the way lying directly through it, they solaced themselves there for a season ; yea, here they heard continually the singing of the birds, and saw every day the flowers appear in the earth, and heard the voice of the turtle in the land (Cant. 2: 12). In this country the sun shineth night and day ; wherefore this was beyond the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and also out of the reach of Giant Despair; neither could they from this place so much as see Doubting castle. Here they were within sight of the City they were going to; also here they met some of the inhabitants thereof; for in this land the Shining Ones commonly walked, because it was on the borders of Heaven. In this land also the contract between the bride, and the bridegroom was renewed; yea, here, ' as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so doth their God rejoice over them ' (Isa. 62: 5). Here they had no want of com and wine; for in this place they met with abundance of what they had sought for in all their pilgrimage (Isa. 62:8, 9). Here they heard voices from out of the city; loud voices, saying, ' Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold thy salvation cometh, behold his reward is with him (Isa. 62:11, 12). Here all the inhabitants of the country called them "the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord; sought out,' etc. " Now as they walked in this land they had more rejoicing than in parts more remote from the kingdom to which they were bound; and drawing near the City they had yet a more perfect view thereof. It was builded of pearls and precious stones, also the streets thereof were paved with gold; so that, by reason of the natural glory of the city, and the reflection of the sun-beams upon it, Christian with desire fell sick. Hopeful also had a fit or two of the same disease; wherefore here they lay by it a while, crying out, because of their pangs, ' If you see my beloved, tell him that I am sick of love.' "But being a little strengthened, and better able to bear their sickness, they walked on their way, and came yet nearer and nearer, where were orchards, vineyards, and gardens, and their gates opened into the highway. Now, as they came up to these places, behold the Gardener stood in the way; to whom the Pilgrims said, 'Whose goodly vineyards and gardens are these?' He answered, 'They are the King's, and are planted here for His own delight, and also for the solace of Pilgrims.' So the Gardener had them into the vineyards, and bid them refresh themselves with the dainties (Deut. 23:24), he also showed them there the King's walks and the arbours where He delighted to be ; and there they tarried and slept " Now I beheld in my dream that they talked more in their sleep at this time, than ever they did in all their journey; and being in a muse thereabout, the Gardener said even to me, 'Wherefore musest thou at the matter? It is the nature of the fruit of the grapes of these vineyards to go down so sweetly, as to cause the lips of them that are asleep to speak

(Cant. 7:9). "So I saw that, when they awoke, they addressed themselves to go up to the City. But, as I said, the reflection of the sun upon the city (for the City was pure gold, Rev. 21:28) was so extremely glorious, that they could not, as yet, with open face, behold it, but through an instrument made for the purpose (2 Cor. 3:18). So I saw that, as they went on, there met them two men in raiment that shone like gold, also their faces shone as the light. These angels accompanied the Pilgrims (because of their faith) until they reached the river of Death and crossed it to the Celestial City."

Having traced the deeper spiritual experiences of Bunyan in allegory, as related in "Pilgrim's Progress," we will briefly state in plain words how his burden rolled away at the foot of the cross, and how he reached a Beulah-land experience.

He was born in the village of Elstow, England, in 1628; "of a low inconsiderable generation," to use his own words. He probably refers to the fact that he was born and bred to the profession of a tinker, or mender of pots and kettles, as was his father before him. This profession, in those days, was carried on principally by Gypsies, and for that reason some have supposed that Bunyan was of Gypsy descent. He received some schooling when a boy, but claims to have forgotten most of it before his conversion. He served his apprenticeship and learned his trade in Bedford. His parents seem to have given him religious counsel and advice, but he was a very wicked boy. He says, "I had but few equals, (especially considering my years, which were tender, being few) both for cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the name of God. "Yea, so settled and rooted was I in these things, that they became a second nature to me. The which, as I also have with soberness considered since, 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. For often after I had spent this and the other day in sin I have in my bed been greatly afflicted while asleep, with the 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." Thoughts about hell and the judgment day also greatly troubled him. "These things," he says, "when I was but a child, but nine or ten years old, did so distress my soul, that then in the midst of my many sports and childish vanities, amidst my vain companions, I was often much cast down and afflicted in my mind therewith, yet could I not let go sins."

Later, he says: "A while after these terrible dreams did leave me, which also I soon forgot; for my pleasures did quickly cut off the remembrance of them, as if they had never been. Wherefore with more greediness, according to the strength of nature, I did set loose the reins to my lust, and delighted in all transgression against the law of God; so that, until I came to the state of marriage, I was the very ringleader of all the youth that kept me company, in all manner of vice and ungodliness." Describing this period of his life, he also says, " In these days, the thoughts of religion were grievous to me. I could neither endure it myself, nor that any other should." But he did not like to see professed Christians sin. "Yet this I well remember," says he, " that though I could myself sin with the greatest delight and ease, and also take pleasure in the vileness of my companions ; yet, even then, if I have at any time seen wicked things by those who professed godliness, it would make my spirit tremble."

Twice he barely escaped drowning, once he came very nearly being bit by a poison adder, and a man who took his place in the army was killed while on sentinel duty; but God mercifully preserved Bunyan's life. "Here," says he, "were judgments and mercy, but neither of them did awaken my soul to righteousness; wherefore I sinned still, and grew more and more rebellious against God, and careless of mine own salvation. " Presently after this (when he was about twenty years of age), I changed my condition into a married state; and my mercy was to light upon a wife, whose father was counted godly. This woman and I, though we came together as poor as poor might be (not having so much household stuff as a dish or a spoon betwixt us both), yet this she had for her part. The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven, and The Practice of Piety, which her father had left her when he died. In these books I should

sometimes read with her, wherein I also found some things that were somewhat pleasing to me; (but all this while I met with no conviction). She also would be often telling of me, what a godly man her father was, etc. Wherefore these books with this relation, though they did not reach my heart to awaken it about my soul and sinful state, yet they did beget within me some desires to religion ; so that, because I knew no better, I fell in very eagerly with the religion of the times ; to wit, to go to church twice a day, and that too with the foremost ; and there should very devoutly say and sing as others did, yet retaining my wicked life” At this time he had great reverence for the clergy, their vestments, the Liturgy, and all that belonged to the worship of the Church of England. "But all this while," says he, "I was not sensible of the danger and evil of sin. I was kept from considering that sin would damn me, what religion soever I followed, unless I was found in Christ."

Finally, his pastor preached a sermon against the popular sins and vices with their fearful consequences, which awakened Bunyan's conscience for the first time to the evil nature of sin. But, on returning home, he soon forgot the sermon. "I shook the sermon out of my mind," says he, "and to my old custom of sports and gaming I returned with great delight." The same Sunday, however, while he was playing a game of cat, the conviction returned with such power that he stood still for a while before all the players, none of whom knew what was passing in his mind. After a few minutes spent in silent thought, he concluded that he had gone too far in sin to ever find salvation, and he determined to get what comfort he could out of sin. He says, "Now therefore I went on in sin with great greediness of mind, still grudging that I could not be satisfied with it as I would. But one day, as I was standing in a neighbour's shop-window, and there cursing and swearing, and playing the madman, after my wonted manner, there sat within the woman of the house and heard me; who 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; and told me further, That I was the ungodliest fellow for swearing that ever she heard in all her life; and that I, by thus doing, was able to spoil all the youth in a whole town, if they came in my company". This well-merited rebuke had a sobering influence on Bunyan. He left off swearing, and a friend's conversation led him to read the Bible. This led to some outward reformation, and then he imagined that he " pleased God as well as any man in England." Even his dancing was given up, and for about a year he continued to live a better outward life, to the great surprise of his neighbors; but he had not yet found peace and rest and joy through faith in Christ. "But upon a day the good providence of God did cast me to Bedford, to work upon my calling;" says he, "and in one of the streets of that town, I came where there were three or four poor women sitting at a door in the sun, and talking about the things of God." These three women are described in "Pilgrim's Progress" under the allegory of the three princesses at the Palace Beautiful. Bunyan's conversations with them opened his eyes to see that he had been trusting in his own outward works for salvation instead of in the Lord Jesus Christ. He saw that these poor women were basking in the sun on the mountain top of Christian experience, while he was "shivering and shrinking in the cold, afflicted with frost, snow and dark clouds." He now tried to look to Christ for salvation, but like Lorenzo Dow and many others was plunged into fearful despondency and despair by the thought that he might not be one of God's elect. He imagined that God had reprobated him to be lost; and for weeks and months he was in so great agony that he could scarcely endure it. The three Christian women he had met introduced him to Mr. Gifford, the Baptist minister in the place. Mr. Gifford took a great interest in him, but probably never dreamed that Bunyan would be his successor. Mr. Gifford, no doubt, is the Evangelist of "Pilgrim's Progress," who points Christian to the wicket gate; but Bunyan was for a whole year in the Slough of Despond before he finally reached the wicket gate, and before his burden rolled away at the foot of the cross. During that time, although he was in awful despair, his conscience was so tender with regard to sin that he "must not take a pin, or a stick, though but so big as a straw," or do the least thing that he considered wrong. But the thought that he was reprobated to be lost made him wish that he had never been born.

He found peace and joy in Christ one evening as he sat by the fireside, musing on his miserable condition. The Lord brought Hebrews 2: 14, 15 vividly to his mind. "I thought," says he, "that the glory of these words was then so weighty on me that I was, both once and twice, ready to swoon away; yet not with grief and trouble, but with solid joy and peace." Later on he says, "But, oh! Now, how was my soul led from truth to truth by God! Even from the birth and cradle of the Son of God to His ascension and second coming from heaven to judge the world." His love for Christ now seemed to burn as "hot as fire." After continuing for some time to enjoy peace and rest of soul, he had a great conflict, represented by the fight with Apollyon in Pilgrim's Progress. Temptations to sell Christ for trifles came into his mind, and he imagined that he had actually yielded to them, and that Christ had forsaken him. "Nothing now for two years together would abide with me but damnation and an expectation of damnation," says he. He felt that he had committed a worse sin than David, or Judas, or Peter, and that he had sinned against the Holy Ghost. So great was his despair, he found it hard to pray. "Then I was struck into a very great trembling," says he, "insomuch that at sometimes I could, for whole days together, feel my very body, as well as my mind, to shake and totter under the sense of the dreadful judgment of God, that should fall on those who have sinned that most fearful and unpardonable sin. I felt such a clogging and heat at my stomach, by reason of this my terror, that I was especially at some times, as if my breast bone would have split asunder." But with "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," he at last gave Satan such a deadly thrust that he left him. Like Job, Paul, Madam Guyon, and others, Bunyan went through fiery trials; and then the Scriptures, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin," and "My grace is sufficient for thee," brought sweet peace to his soul.

Bunyan's complete deliverance from his dreadful doubts and despair came one day while he was passing through a field. Suddenly the sentence fell upon his soul, "Thy righteousness is in heaven". By the eye of faith he seemed to see Jesus, his righteousness, at God's right hand. He says, "Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed; I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away; so that, from that time, those dreadful Scriptures of God left off to trouble me! Now went I also home rejoicing, for the grace and love of God." On reaching home he tried to find the text, "Thy righteousness is in heaven," and was somewhat discouraged to find that it was not in the Scriptures. But his joy was restored and deepened when he found the similar text, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (1 Cor1:30).

Bunyan still had many conflicts and trials, but after the above experience he seems to have been passing through Beulah Land. Sometimes he was so overwhelmed with the sense of God's grace and power that he could hardly bear up under it. He soon began to preach in little meetings, and people were deeply convicted of sin and wept tears of penitence. The Lord gave him "an awakening word," and so many were brought to Christ under his preaching that he was astonished that the Lord should thus use him. He became very famous as a preacher, but his plain speaking roused much opposition. The story of his twelve years' imprisonment for holding meetings separate from the Established Church of England, and of the writing of his famous books while in prison, does not belong to a narrative of this kind. He had only the Bible and Fox's "Book of Martyrs" with him in prison when he wrote "Pilgrim's Progress." He was frequently allowed his liberty, and sometimes used it in preaching the Gospel. After his release he traveled and preached in many places, and was so popular that he was nicknamed "Bishop Bunyan." King Charles was surprised that the learned Dr. Owen would go to hear "an illiterate tinker" preach. "I would gladly give up all my learning for that tinker's power of preaching," said Dr. Owen. Being told once that he had preached a grand sermon, Bunyan replied, "Aye, you have no need to tell me that; for the devil whispered it to me before I was well out of the pulpit." He became one of England's most famous men; but in the midst of his religious activity he was smitten with a fever while on an errand of

mercy, and died August 31, 1688. He was buried in Bunhill Fields, London's famous Non-Conformist cemetery, where tens of thousands of people have visited his grave.