

find my gospel and to preach it. And what is the point that must be settled first? Clearly it is the relation of Jesus to the Law. For there is no doubt that He came under the curse of the Law. He was driven outside its pale. And what can the Law do to Him more? Having spent itself upon Him, it has no more right or jurisdiction over Him. Jesus has returned to this earth to set up a Kingdom apart from the Law. And inasmuch as the curse He bore was not on His own account, but deliberately for the sake of others, it is manifest that every one who accepts Him as Lord, and enters His separate Kingdom, is free from the jurisdiction of the Law. No doubt the Law is still in force for those who choose to abide under it. But over those who accept the Lordship of Christ and pass within His realm, it has no control. They have been crucified with Christ; they have borne its curse in Him: and the Law has no more power over them. They are become dead to the Law through the body of Christ, that they should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead.

So then, in so far as they are concerned who accept the Lordship of Christ, the Law is repealed. It is no longer existent for them. The handwriting in ordinances that was against them is taken away, for it has been nailed to the Cross of Christ. And

if the Law is repealed, its penalties fall away with it, as a homely illustration, such as the apostle would not have spurned, will make clear. A shepherd was charged recently before a Scottish sheriff with transgression of the law which forbids the pasturing of sheep along the sides of the public roads. He pleaded that the law was no longer in existence. "I saw it in the newspapers a short while since," he pathetically urged, "that this law had been taken out of the statute book." But the sheriff had to answer, "No; there was a change made in this law, and it is that you must have seen; but the law itself is still in force." And he fined him some considerable penalty. Now there is little doubt that there were other pleas that shepherd might have urged. But if only it had been true that the law was repealed, is there any plea he could have urged that would have been so effectual? But that is the plea that the follower of Christ may urge. Standing before the Judge of all the earth on that great Day, that he may give an account of the deeds he has done in the body, what answer will he make to the serious charges that are brought against him? One answer he will make to them all. Against me, he will say, there is no Law; it has been taken out of the way; He has nailed it to His Cross. And the Judge will accept the plea and let him go free. For there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.

## The Leading Idea of the "Pilgrim's Progress."

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AN attempt to consider the *Pilgrim's Progress* from a single standpoint is a difficulty, because the references inevitably widen out upon any consideration. For the interest in it answers to that in all literary masterpieces as being not single, but manifold. It is impossible, for instance, here to separate the author from his writings, therefore the book has its personal interest. It is equally impossible and uncritical to separate this work from the times in which Bunyan lived,

for the *Pilgrim's Progress* possesses the true hallmark of a great book in being the product of an occasion, and therefore it has a special historical interest of its own.

Again, as marking an epoch in religious thought, as it certainly does in the development of our language, it possesses a literary, if not a philosophical, interest. But the climax of interest is reached in its definite theological bearing. It is when the *Pilgrim's Progress* comes to be regarded

in its doctrinal reference, and still more in the practical effect which the book has exerted, and still exerts, upon the experiences of Christian life and conduct, that its interest is indeed pre-eminent and supreme. No better test of this is supplied than by the extraordinary demand still for the book in a generation perhaps not pre-disposed in favour of its characteristic teaching.

John Bunyan's life was cast in one of the most tragic, if not the most memorable, epochs of our history. In the very year of his birth the House of Commons extorted the reluctant consent of Charles I. to the Petition of Right (1628). He died in the same year (1688) which witnessed the trial of the Seven Bishops and the flight of the luckless James II. Bunyan was twenty years junior to the great Puritan poet, and twenty-seven years junior to the sweet singer of Bemerton—George Herbert.

Those who are familiar with the period will realise its extraordinary character—the vicissitudes social, political, religious through which the national life passed.

Bunyan witnessed within his lifetime what was to him the overthrow of a grinding tyranny, he witnessed what was to him the "insolence" of its revival. Such a period had at least character enough about it to produce something lasting in literature. If the bold and free times of Elizabeth are the golden epoch of our literature, the *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Paradise Lost*, as Macaulay has pointed out, are the worthy outcome of the bitter, if less impressive struggles through which England was then passing. Certainly neither of these great works could have been produced in the comparative stillness of the eighteenth century. Bunyan's writings were the consequence of the times in which he lived—they were the result of a great occasion.

Turning from this to the personal issue, we mark the greatest divergence of opinion in regard to Bunyan's career. Was his earlier life actually immoral or not? How far does this, his greatest work, reflect his personal experiences?—how far therefore are the familiar, yet always impressive figures in his allegory real portraits, or purely and wholly of the imagination? These are standing enigmas, and their solution is in all probability never to be looked for.

It is therefore wiser to occupy a field of inquiry which will be more fertile, and serve to

produce some definite gain in result. And with this view let us note a chief characteristic in Bunyan. He had that which few great theologians lack,—indeed, which few great thinkers fail to possess,—a strong tendency to mysticism, in the sense which Coleridge applied to it as a habit of mind. It is this tendency which only adequately accounts indeed for that extremity of self-condemnation, passing any Puritan standard or method, with which he pursues himself. Hence, too, his idealisation and emphasis of a few points of Christian doctrine, so that they are seen in giant, even grotesque, shape, dwarfing other balancing features of the Christian faith. It was this tendency again which gives the countless romantic touches to his characters. It seems a strange conclusion at which to arrive, but students of Bunyan will, we feel, arrive at it, that the very writer who appears to make Christian doctrine turn upon the fewest, not to say the narrowest, issues should himself be, heart and soul, a mystic. Yet any view of Bunyan's writings or of his influence which made it appear that he invented the theological conceptions linked with his name would be misleading. Many of them are as old as the age of St. Augustine. Bunyan has not the merit or demerit here of a discoverer. His pre-eminent genius lies in the fact that he took up certain truths accepted, if not acceptable, and placed them in such lurid light that it became impossible to avoid observing them—impossible indeed for some minds not to be absorbed in their contemplation. Instances of such truths occur obviously to any one who recollects Bunyan's writings. Man, as he was in the past by nature; man, as he may become—as he is, by grace; the idea of conversion as a change not rarely of instantaneous operation; the exceeding sinfulness of sin; the abounding efficacy of the redemptive work of Christ; the omnipotence and justice of God, as his strongest and most eternal attributes,—such truths as these are brought forward by Bunyan into startling, almost terrific, prominence. Yet it is only a great genius who could say, as Bunyan, "You shall see these things thus." It is only a great genius who could, with entire unconsciousness, find the secret of that form in which these truths could so be presented, embraced, and felt as to become the terror or the comfort of his own generation and of generations to come.

If we are content to declare now of Bunyan's

religious instinct or attitude that he was a Puritan, we shall think of Puritanism in its leading characteristic, which is also its most favourable one. The standing merit of Puritanism was, and, so far as it survives in its best modern representatives, remains in the emphasis it lays upon the personal element in religion.

To such an emphasis a correspondent loss is inevitable, as with any other emphasis which tends to disproportion and exaggeration. To the Puritan, the individual stood in awful, solitary singleness before his God. It was as if but two beings were embodied for contemplation—the man and his Maker, the soul and the God who gave it. By contrast with this supreme and absorbing relationship, every other religious issue was as dust on the wheel. A right relation between the individual soul and God—a relation conceived as being mostly brought about in a single moment with no preventient or subsidiary causes, such was “salvation”; a false relation, if maintained, was utter and eternal ruin.

One may be glad to pause here on the extraordinary beauty—the beauty of all fine and true art—viz. the simplicity and strength of Bunyan's work. One is glad to link oneself, as a humbler witness, with the judgment of men like Coleridge, Scott, Macaulay, Froude, and a host of others, in their testimony to the lasting obligation under which the English tongue is placed by him. One is glad to re-read, and to recall passages like that at the close of the first part of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, which can be surpassed in no author for poetic charm and freshness.

Still, if the thought in Bunyan is what one desires most to reach, the underlying thought is still that awful relationship between God and the individual soul, and, as an outcome of this, a realisation of personal mercies at His hand, a still more intense realisation of personal judgment,—a concurrent apprehension therefore of the mystery as of the simplicity of the necessary truths of religion.

The form in which Bunyan's writings are mainly cast will help to illustrate this chief point. It is generally considered sufficient to describe them as allegories. But it is not, perhaps, observed with adequate attention what is their main “motif,” or how this leading idea depends again upon their single source of inspiration.

All students of Scripture are conscious of its

wealth in figures and parables relating to and illustrating the spiritual experiences of men. But there are two lines of metaphor which challenge and keep attention, not only because of the striking significance of their direction, but because they run right through from the extreme points of the record of inspiration. Other figures and metaphors of the spiritual life there are, which are, of course, highly suggestive, e.g. physical growth, or the gradual elevation and completion of a great building; and these indeed are full of serious import to the contemplative biblical student. But they neither attract nor hold attention in the same way as the great twin lines of scriptural metaphor, one of which represents the spiritual life as a warfare, the other which represents it as a journey. Two points may here be noted. The first is, that these lines of metaphor in Holy Scripture are strictly parallel; however closely they approach, they do not meet or cross.

Now, here Bunyan's genius, commanding as it is, is imitative, but it is the imitation of the method traceable in the written revelation. Bunyan followed the first line of metaphor, and the *Holy War* was produced. He followed the second great line, and the *Pilgrim's Progress* is its consequence.

A second point emerges upon more careful observation of these lines. The former metaphor, that of warfare, is more frequent in the New Testament, it is written larger there, and is more characteristic of that revelation. The latter metaphor, that of a journey, belongs in origin, and by persistent emphasis, to the Old Testament. What student of Bunyan doubts that it was none the less congenial to him from this peculiar association? But further, the former conception of the spiritual life as a warfare, nobly illustrated as it is by Bunyan, and receiving magnificent illumination afterwards from his great contemporary, stands perpetually apart, as has been already indicated, from the leading idea of the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

The *Holy War* should have been conceived with the full and characteristic sympathy of one who realised, as Bunyan scarcely did, a Church militant here upon earth. To him the advance of the kingdom of God below lay in the persistent conversion and conquest of individual souls. The city of God for Bunyan was the heart of each Christian. So far, the conception was and must remain inadequate. But in the allegory of

the *Pilgrim's Progress* he could pursue a metaphor all his own with heart and soul. There lay the great journey of life. The individual stood upon its path—the City of Destruction at his back—the Holy City, his distant, longed for goal—Apollyon his chief foe, God his ever-present defence. The conception is weakened the moment the eye is taken off this solitary traveller, and so the second part of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, despite passages of unique beauty and tenderness, is less characteristic of the writer, and therefore less forcible than the first part. But the persistency of the line of metaphor is traceable throughout, and the metaphor is wholly drawn from Scripture, in its origin, wholly from the Old Testament. It is not needful to inquire whether other writers did not anticipate Bunyan's greatest allegory, still less to regard the obvious imitations of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. If Bunyan's work was an imitation, he had nothing from which to copy but an inspiration. In every other way his genius was purely original. The sources from which he drew are still open to any devout mind, but none have drawn from them as he. The Book of Exodus—the language and sentiment of annalist and chronicler, of poet and psalmist, of prophet and seer; the history of the Captivity and of the Return; or again, if more faintly, the gospel narrative, the Book of the Acts, as records of missionary work, and so of “journeyings often,”—all these are brought into the great allegory with the same underlying intention. Was ever any figure in Scripture made so luminous? The national deliverances of Israel, the crises of Egypt and of Babylon, the Psalmist's prophetic longings for restoration and return, the apostles' bitter experiences—the very name by which the first efforts after the Christian life and in Christian experience were described as “The Way”; the summary of all in the person of Christ as the Way,—all of this is woven into this marvellous framework of Bunyan's story; and while it appeals to all, appeals most strongly to those who, knowing the *Pilgrim's Progress* from childhood, have known also the Holy Scriptures.

And thus, and here, we light upon the “leading idea,” if one may borrow Professor Mozley's phrase, of the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Bunyan's genius fastened upon the most persistent figure of the spiritual life—a figure standing out clearly in the literature of both Testaments. He perceived how this figure was not a matter merely of phrase or language—had it indeed been so, Bunyan would not have been its fitting interpreter, but rather he found it linked with the imperishable memories of a nation's experience; and Israel was for Bunyan but the individual soul “writ large,” whose sufferings and triumphs were still lessons to “learn by.” Thus it came about that Bunyan's mother wit brought this great and standing illustration of the Scripture home to men's hearts; he brought it to bear upon those personal and individual experiences which he chiefly regarded as the sphere and scene of the religious life.

To praise Bunyan or Bunyan's work is more than superfluous, but one may make the regretful inquiry why it is that he is so much less read now in childhood. There may be in many cases a fear on the part of parents that the *Pilgrim's Progress* should give their children a doctrinal bias from which they themselves shrink. If the danger is indeed a possible one, it is safely counterbalanced. Children are not taught nowadays so clearly about the exceeding sinfulness of sin, its eternal issues, the responsibility of themselves, and of all that they are, and have and do, to God, as to make it desirable to omit the *Pilgrim's Progress* from the school library.

But Bunyan does not leave us or our children merely with the terrors of the law. True it is that with him the soul seems to seek and find its rest in the cloudy and dark day, yet there is the light beyond; and none can grasp the leading idea of the *Pilgrim's Progress* without some strong and consoling thought of what God has prepared for them that love Him, and walk with Him, even here, in the way everlasting.