

Pictures from Pilgrim's Progress

Part Four



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16. The Enchanted Ground

As the spiritual guide of the flock of God along the intricate mazes of experience, it is the duty of the Gospel minister to point out every turning of the road to Heaven, to speak concerning its dangers and its privileges, and to warn any whom he may suspect to be in a position peculiarly perilous. Now, there is a portion of the road which leadeth from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, which has in it, perhaps, more dangers than any other part of the way. It doth not abound with lions; there are no dragons in it; it hath no dark woods, and no deep pit-falls; yet more seeming pilgrims have been destroyed in that portion of the road than anywhere else; and not even Doubting Castle, with all its hosts of bones, can show so many who have been slain there. It is the part of the road called The Enchanted Ground. John Bunyan thus pictured it: —

“I say them in my dream, that they went on till they came into a certain country, whose air naturally tended to make one drowsy, if he came a stranger into it. And here Hopeful began to be very dull and heavy of sleep; wherefore he said unto Christian, ‘I do now begin to grow so drowsy that I can scarcely hold up mine eyes; let us lie down here, and take one nap.’

“CHRISTIAN. By no means, said the other; lest, sleeping, we never awake more.

“HOPEFUL. *Why, my brother? Sleep is sweet to the labouring man; we may be refreshed if we take a nap.*

“CHRISTIAN. *Do you not remember that one of the Shepherds bid us beware of the Enchanted Ground? He meant by that, that we should beware of sleeping; ‘therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober’ (1 Thessalonians 5:6).*”

There are, no doubt, many of us who are passing over this plain; and I fear that this is the condition of the majority of churches in the present day. They are lying down on the settles of Lukewarmness in the Arbours of the Enchanted Ground. There is not that activity and zeal we could wish to see among them; they are not, perhaps, notably heterodox; they may not be invaded by the lion of persecution; but they are lying down to slumber, like Heedless and Too-bold in the Arbour of Sloth. God grant that His servants may be the means of arousing the Church from its lethargy, and stirring it up from its slumbers, lest haply, professors should sleep the sleep of death!

Let me picture to you the state of a sleeping Christian.

When a man is asleep, he is insensible. The world moves on, and he knows naught about it. The watchman calls out beneath his window, but he hears him not. A fire is raging in a neighbouring street, or his neighbour’s house is burned to ashes; but he is asleep, and is unaware of the calamity. Persons are sick in the house where he lives, but he is not awakened; they may die, yet he weeps not for them. A revolution may be in progress in the streets of his city; a king may be losing his crown; but he that is asleep shares not in the turmoil of politics. A volcano may burst somewhere near him, and he may be in imminent peril; but he knows no fear; he is sound asleep, he is unconscious. The winds are howling, the thunders are rolling across the sky, and the lightnings flash past his window; but he who can sleep on careth for none of these things; he is insensible to them all. The sweetest music is echoing through the street; but he sleeps, and only in dreams doth he hear the sweetness. The most terrific wailings may assail his ears; but sleep has sealed them with the

wax of slumber, and he hears not. Let the world break in sunder, and the elements go to ruin, keep him asleep, and he will not perceive it.

Slumbering Christian, behold a picture of your condition. Have you not sometimes mourned your insensibility? You wished you could feel; but all you felt was pain because you could not feel. You wished you could pray. It was not that you felt prayerless, but that you did not feel at all. You used to sigh once; you would give a world if you could sigh now. You used to groan once; a groan now would be worth a golden star if you could buy it. As for worldly songs, you can sing them, but your heart does not go with them. You go to the house of God; but when the multitude, that keep holy day, in the full tide of song send their music up to Heaven, you hear it, but your heart does not leap at the sound. Prayer goeth solemnly up to God's throne, like the smoke of the evening sacrifice; once, you could pray, too; but, now, while your body is in the house of God, your heart is elsewhere. You have become like a formalist; you feel that there is not that savour, that unction, in the preaching, that there used to be. There is no difference in your minister, you know; the change is in yourself. The hymns and the prayers are just the same, but you have fallen into a state of slumber. Once, if you thought of a man being damned, you felt as if you could weep your very soul out in tears; but, now, you could sit at the very brink of hell, and hear its wailings unmoved. Once, the thought of restoring a sinner from the error of his ways would have made you start from your bed at midnight, and you would have rushed through the cold air to help to rescue a sinner. Now, talk to you about perishing multitudes, and you hear it as an old, old tale. Tell you of thousands swept by the mighty flood of sin onwards to the precipice of destruction, you express your regret, you give your contribution, but your heart is not stirred within you. You must confess that you are insensible, — not entirely so, perhaps; but far too much so. You want to be awake, but you groan because you feel yourself to be in this state of slumber.

Again, sleep is a state of inaction. No daily bread is earned by him that sleepeth. The man who is stretched upon his couch

neither writeth books, nor tilleth the ground, nor plougheth the sea, nor doeth aught else. His pulse beateth, so he is alive; but he is practically dead as to activity. Alas, beloved! this is the state of many of you. How many Christians are inactive! Once, it was their delight to instruct the young in the Sabbath-school; but that is given up. Once, they attended the early prayer-meeting, but they do not go there now. Once, they would be hewers of woods and drawers of water; but, alas! they are asleep now. Am I talking of what may possibly happen? It is not too true almost universally? Are not the churches asleep? Where are the ministers who really preach? We have men who read essays, but is that preaching? We have men who can amuse an audience for twenty minutes, but is that preaching? Where are the men who preach their very hearts out, and put their souls into every sentence? Where are the men who make it, not a profession, but a vocation, the breath of their bodies, the marrow of their bones, the delight of their spirits? Where are the Whitefields and Wesleys now? Where are the Rowland Hills now, who preached every day, and three times a day, and were not afraid of preaching everywhere the unsearchable riches of Christ? Brethren, the church slumbers. It is not merely that the pulpit is a sentry-box with the sentinel fast asleep; but the pews are affected also. Why are the prayer-meetings almost universally neglected? Where is the spirit of prayer, where the life of devotion? Is it not almost extinct? Are not our churches "fallen, fallen, fallen, from their high estate?" God wake them up, and send them more earnest and praying men!

The man who is asleep is also in a state of insecurity. The murderer smiteth him that sleeps; the midnight robber plundereth the house of him that resteth listlessly on his pillow. Jael smiteth a sleeping Sisera. Abishai taketh away the spear from the holster of a slumbering Saul. A sleeping Eutychus falleth from the third loft, and is taken up dead. A sleeping Samson is shorn of his locks, and the Philistines are upon him. Sleeping men are ever in danger; they cannot ward off the blow of the enemy, nor strike in their own defence. Christian, if thou art sleeping, thou art in danger. Thy life, I know, can never be taken from thee, for it is hid with Christ in God. But, oh! thou mayest lose thy spear from thy

holster; thou mayest lose much of thy faith; and thy cruse of water, wherewith thou dost moisten thy lips, may be stolen by the prowling thief. Thou little knowest thy danger. Awake, thou slumberer! Start up from the place where thou now liest in thine insecurity. This is not the sleep of Jacob, in which a ladder unites Heaven and earth, and angels tread the ascending rounds; but this is the sleep in which ladders are raised from hell, and devils climb upward from the pit to seize the slumbering spirit.

Sleep Christian, let me shout in thine ears, — thou art sleeping while souls are being lost, — sleeping while men are being damned, — sleeping while hell is being peopled, — sleeping while Christ is being dishonoured, — while the devil is grinning at thy sleepy face, — sleeping while demons are dancing round thy slumbering carcass, and telling it in hell that a Christian is asleep. You will never catch the devil asleep; let not the devil catch you asleep. Watch, and be sober, that ye may be always ready to do your duty.

A Christian is most liable to sleep when his temporal circumstances are all right. When your nest is well feathered, you are then most likely to sleep; there is little danger of your sleeping when there is a bramble bush in the bed. When your couch is downy, then the most likely thing for you to say will be, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” Let me ask some of you, — when you were more straitened in circumstances, when you had to rely upon providence each hour, and had troubles to take to the throne of grace, were you not more wakeful than you are now? The miller, who hath his wheel turned by a constant stream, goes to sleep; but he that dependeth on the wind, which sometimes bloweth hard and sometimes gently, sleeps not, lest there should not be enough to make them go round. Easy roads tend to make us slumber. Few sleep in a storm; many sleep on a calm night. Why is the church asleep now? She would not sleep if Smithfield were filled with stakes, if St. Bartholomew’s tocsin [alarm bell] were ringing in her ears; she would not sleep if Sicilian Vespers might be sung on to-morrow’s eve; she would not sleep if massacres were common now. But what is her condition? Every man sitting under his own

vine and fig tree, none daring to make him afraid. Tread softly, she is fast asleep!

Another dangerous time is when all goes well in spiritual matters. You do not read that Christian went to sleep when lions were in the way, nor when he was passing through the river of death, nor when he was in Giant Despair's castle, nor during his fight with Apollyon. Poor creature! He almost wished he could sleep then. But when he had got half way up the Hill Difficulty, and came to a pretty little arbour, in he went, and sat down and began to read his roll. Oh, how he rested himself! How he unstrapped his sandals, and rubbed his weary feet! Very soon his mouth was open, his arms hung down, and he was fast asleep. Again, the Enchanted Ground was a very easy smooth place, and liable to send the pilgrim to sleep. You remember Bunyan's description of one of the arbours: —

“Then they came to an arbour, warm, and promising much refreshing to the Pilgrims; for it was finely wrought above head, beautified with greens, furnished with benches and settles. It also had in it a soft couch, whereon the weary might lean.... This arbour was called The Slothful's Friend, on purpose to allure, if it might be, some of the pilgrims there to take up their rest when weary.”

Depend upon it, it is in easy places that men shut their eyes, and wander into dreamy land of forgetfulness. Old Erskine said a good thing when he remarked, “I like a roaring devil better than a sleeping devil.” There is no temptation half so bad as not being tempted. The distressed soul does not sleep; it is after we get into confidence and full assurance that we are in danger of slumbering. Take care, thou who art full of gladness. There is no season in which we are so likely to fall asleep as that of high enjoyment. Take heed, joyous Christian, good frames are very dangerous; they often lull into sound slumber.

One of the most likely places for us to sleep in is when we get near our journey's end. The pilgrims' guide said to Christiana: —

“This Enchanted Ground is one of the last refuges that the enemy to pilgrims has. Wherefore it is, as you see, placed

almost at the end of the way, and so it standeth against us with the more advantage. For when, thinks the enemy, will these fools be so desirous to sit down, as when they are weary? and when so like to be weary, as when almost at their journey's end? Therefore it is, I say, that the Enchanted Ground is placed so nigh to the Land Beulah, and so near to the end of their race. Wherefore, let pilgrims look to themselves, lest it happen to them as it has done to these, that, as you see, are fallen asleep, and none can wake them."

It is quite true, that those, who have been for years in grace, are most in danger of slumbering. Somehow, we get into the routine of religious observance; it is customary for us to go to the house of God, it is usual for us to belong to the church, and that of itself tends to make people sleepy. If we are always going along the same road, we are liable to sleep. If Moab gets at ease, and is not emptied from vessel to vessel, he sleeps on, for he knows no change; and when years have worn our road with a rut of godliness, we are apt to throw the reins on our horse's neck, and sleep soundly.

What is to be done to ensure wakefulness when crossing the Enchanted Ground? One of the best plans is to keep Christian company, and talk about the ways of the Lord.

Christian said to Hopeful, "To prevent drowsiness in this place, let us fall into good discourse."

"With all my heart," said Hopeful.

"Where shall we begin?" asked Christian.

"Where God began with us," replied his companion.

There is no subject so likely to keep a godly man awake as talking of the place where God began with him. When Christian men talk together, they won't fall asleep together. Keep Christian company, and you will not be so likely to slumber. Christians, who isolate themselves, and stand alone, are very liable to lie down on the settle or the soft couch, and go to sleep; but if you talk much together, as they did in the olden time, you will find it extremely beneficial. Two Christians talking together of the ways of the Lord will go much faster to Heaven than one alone; and

when a whole church unites in speaking of the Lord's loving kindness, verily, beloved, there is no way like that of keeping themselves awake.

17. How Mr. Fearing Fared

Some of you know Mr. Fearing very well, for he has lived in your house, and perhaps he is even a very near relative of yours. When Mr. Great-heart, who represents the minister of Christ who is well taught, and strong in grace, was walking along with Father Honest, who stands for an aged, experienced, sober-minded Christian, John Bunyan tells us: —

“The guide asked the old gentleman, if he did not know one Mr. Fearing, that came on pilgrimage out of his parts.

“HONEST. Yes, very well, said he. He was a man that had the root of the matter in him; but he was one of the most troublesome pilgrims that ever I met with in all my days.”

This is an exact description of many who are on the road to Heaven. They are thoroughly sincere, nobody can doubt that; but they are “so nervous.” I think that is how they describe themselves. “So doubtful, so mistrustful, so suspicious, so overloaded with doubts and fears,” would, perhaps, be a truer verdict. What wonder, then, that they are amongst “the most troublesome pilgrims” that you can meet with? Bunyan gives us a further dialogue concerning Mr. Fearing: —

“GREAT-HEART. I perceive you knew him; for you have given a very right character of him.

“HONEST. Knew him! I was a great companion of his; I was with him most an end; when he first began to think of what would come upon us hereafter, I was with him.

“GREAT-HEART. I was his guide from my Master's house to the gates of the Celestial City.

“HONEST. Then you knew him to be a troublesome one.

“GREAT-HEART. I did so, but I could very well bear it; for men of my calling are oftentimes entrusted with the conduct of such as he was.”

The minister of Christ is not to think the most fearful to be the most troublesome; but as it is his employment to help the timid, and instrumentally, deliver them from their distress, he should be glad to find out those feeble minds, and seek to do them a good turn for the Master's sake.

“HONEST. Well then, pray let us hear a little of him, and how he managed himself under your conduct.

“GREAT-HEART. Why, he was always afraid that he should come short of whither he had a desire to go.”

This is a great fear which haunts many, — the fear lest, after all, they should be castaways, lest they should prove hypocrites, lest they should fall from grace, lest they should be tempted above what they are able to bear; lest, in some evil hour, they should be given up by God the Holy Spirit, or be deserted by the Lord Jesus, and so should fall into great sin, and ultimately perish. This is a fear which haunts tens of thousands.

“Everything frightened him that he heard anybody speak of, that had but the least appearance of opposition in it.”

We meet with some such still. You cannot speak to them about the sorrows of the Christian's life but they say, “We shall never be able to bear these.” If you refer to conflicts, they reply, “We are sure we shall never succeed in fighting our way to Heaven.” If they hear of anybody who has backslidden, they exclaim, “That is just what we shall do; we are certain that is what will happen to us.” If you have ever talked with these people, you know how difficult it is to describe them, for they are so gloomy that they seem to darken the sun even at noon-day.

“I hear that he lay roaring at the Slough of Despond for about a month together; nor durst he, for all he saw several go over before him, venture, though they, many of them, offered to lend him their hand.”

Poor soul! There he lay “roaring,” as Bunyan says; that is, sighing, crying, bemoaning himself. He could not pluck up courage to go across, but there he lay by the month together.

Others came up, and went across safely, and offered to lend him their hand, but it was no use. You may try to help these desponding ones, but you will need a wisdom superior to your own to deal with them effectually, for it must be admitted that they are wonderfully wilful although they are very weak. While they are as incapable as little children, they are also often as wilful as strong men, and they will stick to their fears, do what you will to drive them out of them. I have sometimes gone a-hunting after these people; and when I have dug them out of one hole, they have crept into another. I have thought, "Now, I shall have you; I shall make an end of your doubts this time;" but they have sprung up in quite another quarter. They seem to be most ingenious at inventing reasons for suspicion concerning themselves. When everybody else can see something that is good in them, they say, "Pray don't flatter us; don't try to deceive us!"

"He would not go back again neither."

Ah, that is the best of it! Mr. Fearing will not go back. There are some boastful ones, who set out boldly enough, but they turn their backs in the day of battle. Mr. Fearing goes very slowly, but he is very sure. He will not go back; he knows there is no hope for him there, so he will even go on a little further, though he is half-afraid to venture.

"'The Celestial City,' he said, 'he should die if he came not to it;' and yet was dejected at every difficulty, and stumbled at every straw that anybody cast in his way. Well, after he had lain at the Slough of Despond a great while, as I have told you, one sunshine morning, I do not know how, he ventured, and so got over; but when he was over, he would scarce believe it."

Just like him! It may be a very bright "sunshine morning" when some sweet promise enlightens his soul, when the Spirit of God comes to him like a dove, bearing comfort on His wings. Then the good man begins to feel unusually and extraordinarily strong for him, so he makes a dash, and gets through his trouble; but he can hardly believe that he has really got over it. He is quite sure that

he shall sink now. When Mr. Fearing got out of the Slough, he could not understand how it was that he had done it. It must be amazing grace that had brought such a poor sinner as he was out of it, but he felt so unworthy that he was persuaded he would be cast away even then. He could scarcely believe in his heart that it was true. It was said of Peter, when the iron gate of the prison opened of its own accord, and he found himself in the street, "He wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision." Just so, when Mr. Fearing does get a gleam of comfort, he thinks that it is too good to be true.

"He had, I think, a Slough of Despond in his mind; a slough that he carried everywhere with him, or else he could never have been as he was. So he came up to the gate, you know what I mean, that stands at the head of the way; and there also he stood a good while before he would adventure to knock."

He would not venture to pray. He was overcome with fear at the very first stage of spiritual life. He had it in his heart to knock at mercy's gate, to use the means of grace, to inquire after Christ, but apprehension stayed his hand, and sealed his lips.

"When the gate was opened, he would give back, and give place to others and say that he was not worthy."

Others might go in, others might succeed, but he was quite unworthy. The poor soul was perfectly right. He was by no means worthy; but, then, no one is. We do not knock at the gate because we are worthy. When we give away alms, we like to bestow them on worthy persons; but our Lord Jesus Christ never found one yet who was worthy of His mercy, and therefore He takes care to give it to those unworthy ones who are ready to confess their need.

"For, for all he got before some to the gate, yet many of them went in before him. There the poor man would stand, shaking and shrinking. I dare say, it would have pitied one's heart to have seen him; nor would he go back again."

He was still afraid to pray, and could not think that God would

hear him; but he would groan and cry, if he could not pray. Moreover, he would not go back again. He could not refrain from using the means of grace, though he could not think there was any comfort in them for him. Still, he would not neglect them. No matter though the prayer-meeting did not cheer him, he would be present; and though the sermon, he thought, could not be meant for such as he was, yet still he would hear it. Oh! these are strange drawings which the Lord puts into the heart of poor, melancholy, feeble-minded ones, so that He draws them even against their own wills, and draws them with a kind of despairing hope — or hopeful despair — right away from themselves to Christ.

“At last, he took the hammer that hanged on the gate in his hand, and gave a small rap or two.”

He dared not do more. It was only “a small rap or two,” — something like this, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” or, “Lord, save me!”

“Then one opened to him.”

You see, the Lord does not make us all knock alike. The strong ones may have to knock long before the door is opened; but to the weak ones the door springs open at the first tap. Master Bunyan tells us, in his “Solomon’s Temple Spiritualized,” that the posts on which the doors of the temple hung “were of the olive-tree, that fat and oil tree,” so that the hinges would be kept well oiled; and when any poor soul came to enter the doors, they would swing open at once.

“Then one opened to him, but he shrank back as before. He that opened stepped out after him, and said, ‘Thou trembling one, what wantest thou?’ With that he fell down to the ground. He that spoke to him wondered to see him so faint. So he said to him, ‘Peace be to thee; up, for I have set open the door to thee. Come in, for thou art blessed.’ With that he got up, and went in trembling; and when he was in, he was ashamed to show his face.”

Just such are these trembling ones. When they do get some kind

of comfort and enjoyment, they are ashamed to show their faces. They are glad to get into the dark, and to sit in any quiet corner where nobody can observe them.

18. How Mr. Fearing Fared (Concluded)

“Well, after he had been entertained there a while, as you know how the manner is, he was bid go on his way, and also told the way he should take. So he came till he came to our house. But as he behaved himself at the gate, so he did at my Master the Interpreter’s door. He lay thereabout in the cold a good while, before he would adventure to call; yet he would not go back; and the nights were long and cold then.”

This is still further advance. He was still seeking Christ, but now he had had some of the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and was beginning to understand something of the Gospel. Notice how that good word always comes in, “He would not go back.” He was afraid even to receive the truths of God’s Word as his own, and to take one gleam of comfort from them; yet he would not go back. He would linger at the door even if not admitted. Oh, the tenacity of grip which there is in the poor seeking sinner when he once gets some hold of the precious promises of Christ!

“Nay, he had a note of necessity in his bosom to my Master, to receive him, and grant him the comfort of His house, and also to allow him a stout and valiant conductor, because he was himself so chicken-hearted a man; and yet for all that, he was afraid to call at the door.”

Bunyan here means that this poor man had a special and particular claim upon the Spirit of God for some full-grown Christian to help him on the road to Heaven. But for all that, he dared not speak to the minister. He was afraid of him. He felt himself quite unworthy to look at the good man.

“So he lay up and down thereabouts, till, poor man! he was almost starved. Yea, so great was his dejection, that though he saw several others, for knocking, get in, yet he was afraid to venture. At last, I think, I looked out of the window, and

perceiving a man to be up and down about the door, I went out to him, and asked what he was; but, poor man! the water stood in his eyes; so I perceived what he wanted."

So you, who love Christ, and have some ability in instructing converts, should look after those that are too timid to look after you. You will often see these people going up and down. You will see them here, on Sunday, at the classes and the services. They sometimes want to be spoken to; and if the Holy Spirit has enlightened you, you should look out for them.

"I went, therefore, in, and told it in the house, and we shewed the thing to our Lord."

That is the way. If you cannot help them yourselves, go and tell the Lord about them. Go and pray to Him about these desponding ones, who will not avail themselves of the comforts which He has provided for them.

"So He sent me out again, to entreat him to come in; but, I dare say, I had hard work to do it. At last he came in; and I will say that for my Lord, He carried it wonderfully lovingly to him. There were but a few good bits at the table, but some of it was laid upon his trencher [plate]. Then he presented the note, and my Lord looked thereon, and said his desire should be granted."

Ah! when the poor soul does get to see what real comfort there is for it, it seems then as if the best things in the Word of God were meant for the feeblest saints, and as if the Lord had laid Himself out in a way of mercy to write the most precious conceivable words for those who are of a tender spirit, and go with broken bones.

"So when he had been there a good while, he seemed to get some heart, and to be a little more comfortable; for my Master, you must know, is one of the very tender bowels, especially to them that are afraid; wherefore He carried it so towards him as might tend most to his encouragement. Well, when he had had a sight of the things of the place, and was

ready to take his journey to go to the city, my Lord, as He did to Christian before, gave him a bottle of spirits, and some comfortable things to eat. Thus we set forward, and I went before him; but the man was but of few words, only he would sigh aloud."

This was a delicate task for Mr. Great-heart, but it is the task of many an advanced Christian. He must not shrink from it; and if he gets no instruction from the poor man, he must recollect that we are not always to be getting, but that sometimes we are to be giving as well.

"When we were come to where the three fellows were hanged, he said that he doubted that that would be his end also."

Of course, he could not look upon such a sight as that without fearing that, one day, he would be in a similar position. There never is a case of church examination or church censure but poor Mr. Fearing says, "Ah! I shall come to that some day;" and when he reads of Judas and Demas, he says, "Ah! that will surely be my fate."

"Only he seemed glad when he saw the Cross and the Sepulchre. There, I confess, he desired to stay a little to look; and he seemed, for a while after, to be a little cheery."

Well, if he was not happy there, where would he be? If the good man could not pluck up his courage sitting at the foot of the cross, where would he be of good cheer? It is delightful to notice how Bunyan picks out the comforting influence of the cross of Christ upon the most desponding spirit.

***"Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,
Which before the cross I spend."***

"When we came at the Hill Difficulty, he made no stick at that, nor did he much fear the lions; for you must know that his trouble was not about such things as those; his fear was about his acceptance at last."

It is wonderful that these timid ones are often not afraid of the things which frighten others. Hardships do not trouble them. They could almost bear to be burned in the flames. They are not afraid of martyrdom, but they are afraid of sin and self, — a very healthy fear, but it must be coupled with a healthy faith in Christ, or else it becomes a very wretched thing.

“I got him in at the House Beautiful, I think, before he was willing.”

That is, into the Christian church. Mr. Great-heart cheered him on, and got him to see the church officers, and to unite with the church almost before he knew what he was at.

“Also, when he was in, I brought him acquainted with the damsels that were of the place; but he was ashamed to make himself much for company. He desired much to be alone, yet he always loved good talk, and often would get behind the screen to hear it.”

This is just the state of mind in which many believers are after they have joined the church. They are bashful; they would not like to push themselves forward. They would rather lose many things than be thought to be at all impertinent or pushing.

“He also loved much to see ancient things, and to be pondering them in his mind.”

I know he loved the precious doctrine of eternal love.

“He told me afterwards that he loved to be in those two houses from which he came last, to wit, at the gate, and that of the Interpreter, but that he durst not be so bold to ask.

“When we went also from the House Beautiful, down the Hill, into the Valley of Humiliation, he went down as well as ever I saw a man in my life; for he cared not how mean he was, so he might be happy at last. Yea, I think, there was a kind of sympathy betwixt that valley and him, for I never saw him better in all his pilgrimage than when he was in that valley. Here he would lie down, embrace the ground, and kiss the

very flowers that grew in this valley (Lamentations 3:27-29). He would now be up every morning by break of day, tracing and walking to and fro in this valley.”

Humility just suited him. He was a plant that could grow in the shade. You could not humble him too much, for that was just his element. He loved to feel his nothingness, and to be brought low, for then he felt himself safe. You see, Mr. Fearing has his quiet, peaceful, happy times. He can sing, “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

That is a very happy state to be in, naturally fearful, but yet brought so low that you do not fear at all; so sensible of your own weakness that you look wholly to superior strength, and therefore have no cause for fear.

“But when he was come to the entrance of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I thought I should have lost my man; not for that he had any inclination to go back; that he always abhorred; but he was ready to die for fear. ‘Oh! the hobgoblins will have me! the hobgoblins will have me!’ cried he; and I could not beat him out on it. He made such a noise, and such an outcry here, that, had they but heard him, it was enough to encourage them to come and fall upon us.

“But this I took very great notice of, that this valley was as quiet while he went through it, as ever I knew it before or since. I suppose these enemies here had now a special check from our Lord, and a command not to meddle until Mr. Fearing was passed over it.”

Bunyan here very wittily and pithily depicts the absurd fears of Mr. Fearing when there was no ground for fear. He makes “the hobgoblins” in his own imagination, and then cries out, “They will have me!” He thinks he will fall in this, or be cast away for that, or that God will forsake him. Oh! it is foolish to indulge such fears; yet many men are weak that, all their lives long, they cannot escape from them.

“It would be too tedious to tell you of all. We will, therefore,

only mention a passage or two more. When he was come at Vanity Fair, I thought he would have fought with all the men at the fair. I feared there we should both have been knocked on the head, so hot was he against their fooleries.”

Mr. Fearing was only afraid that he should not be safe at the last, but he was a bold fellow when he came to deal with the enemies of the cross of Christ. It is singular, this combination of bravery and trembling. He trembles lest he should not be saved at last, but he strikes out at his enemies right and left. You know what the “fooleries” were. There was the foolery of old Rome, and Mr. Fearing could not stand that, but would like to smash it all up.

“Upon the Enchanted Ground, he was also very wakeful.”

Strong faith sometimes goes almost to sleep there. We are apt to get presumptuous. We, who have many comforts, get to think that it is all right with us. May we, however, be kept awake! I would rather you should go to Heaven doubting your interest in Christ than that you should go to hell presuming that you are safe when really you are not. It is a sad and sinful thing to be always doubting; but, still, it is infinitely better than to have a name to live while you are dead.

“But when he was come at the river where was no bridge, there again he was in a heavy case. Now, now, he said, he should be drowned for ever, and so never see that face with comfort that he had come so many miles to behold.

“And here, also, I took notice of what was very remarkable; the water of that river was lower at this time than ever I saw it in all my life. So he went over at last, not much above wet-shod. When he was going up to the gate, I began to take my leave of him, and to wish him a good reception above. So he said, ‘I shall, I shall.’ Then parted we asunder, and I saw him no more.”

He was afraid to die, poor man, not because he was afraid of death, but lest he should not see the face of Him whom he loved

so much, but who, he almost feared, would reject him. Here, again, we see the abundant mercy of God, for Mr. Fearing did not sink in the deep waters, but he died easily and went over the river “not much above wet-shod,” and his last words were, “I shall, I shall.” Yes, and so you will, poor Mr. Fearing. You sometimes say that you shall not, but that is your unbelief. You shall; you shall; for the Master has said, “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.”

19. Mr. Feeble-Mind and Mr. Ready-To-Halt

While at the house of Gaius with the pilgrims, Mr. Great-heart and his companions went forth to the haunt of Giant Slay-good.

“When they came to the place where he was, they found him with one Feeble-mind in his hands, whom his servants had brought unto him, having taken him in the way. Now the giant was rifling him, with a purpose, after that, to pick his bones; for he was of the nature of flesh-eaters.”

Out of the giant’s hands Mr. Feeble-mind was delivered, and the giant himself was slain. Poor Mr. Feeble-mind! Let us read what he says about himself: —

“I am a sickly man, as you see; and, because death did usually once a day knock at my door, I thought I should never be well at home; so I betook myself to a pilgrim’s life, and have travelled hither from the town of Uncertain, where I and my father were born. I am a man of no strength at all of body, nor yet of mind; but would, if I could, though I can but crawl, spend my life in the pilgrim’s way. When I came at the gate that is at the head of the way, the Lord of that place did entertain me freely; neither objected He against my weakly looks, nor against my feeble mind; but gave me such things as were necessary for my journey, and bid me hope to the end. When I came to the house of the Interpreter, I received much kindness there; and because the Hill Difficulty was judged too hard for me, I was carried up that by one of His servants. Indeed I have found much relief from pilgrims,

though none were willing to go so softly as I am forced to do; yet still, as they came on, they bid me be of good cheer, and said that it was the will of their Lord that comfort should be given to the feeble-minded, and so went on their own pace. (1 Thessalonians 5:14). When I was come up to Assault Lane, then this giant met with me, and bid me prepare for an encounter; but, alas! feeble one that I was, I had more need of a cordial. So he came up and took me. I conceited he should not kill me. Also, when he had got me into his den, since I went not with him willingly, I believe I should come out alive again; for I have heard, that not any pilgrim that is taken captive by violent hands, if he keeps heart-whole towards his Master, is, by the laws of Providence, to die by the hand of the enemy. Robbed I looked to be, and robbed to be sure I am; but I am, as you see, escaped with life; for the which I thank my King as author, and you as the means. Other brunts [attacks] I also look for: but this I have resolved on, to wit, to run when I can, to go when I cannot run, and to creep when I cannot go. As to the main, I thank Him that loves me, I am fixed. My way is before me, my mind is beyond the river that has no bridge, though I am, as you see, but of feeble mind.”

Poor soul! We know some just like him. It is not necessary to explain his condition, or to dwell on his adventure. We pass on to his later experiences.

The pilgrims tarried awhile at the house of Gaius, and Feeble-mind got fattened up a bit; they had a glorious special meeting, and then Mr. Great-heart said it was time for the pilgrims to go on their journey again.

“Now Mr. Feeble-mind, when they were going out of the door, made as if he intended to linger; the which when Mr. Great-heart espied, he said, ‘Come, Mr. Feeble-mind, pray do you go along with us, I will be your conductor, and you shall fare as the rest.’”

Mr. Great-heart, who is, of course, the minister, insisted that

Mr. Feeble-mind should not leave the band of pilgrims. He wanted to go to Heaven without joining the church; and that the teacher could not sanction. But feeble as he was, he was a man of very choice mind. Sterner people can bear a little laughing, and they do not take so much notice of how silly people dress, and they can even bear a debate over the question; but poor Feeble-mind said: —

“Alas! I want a suitable companion; you are all lusty and strong; but I, as you see, am weak; I choose, therefore, rather to come behind, lest, by reason of my many infirmities, I should be both a burden to myself and to you. I am, as I said, a man of weak and feeble mind, and shall be offended and made weak at that which others can bear. I shall like no laughing; I shall like no gay attire; I shall like no unprofitable questions. Nay, I am so weak a man, as to be offended with that which others have a liberty to do. I do not yet know all the truth; I am a very ignorant Christian man; sometimes, if I hear any rejoice in the Lord, it troubles me, because I cannot do so too. It is with me, as it is with a weak man among the strong, or as with a sick man among the healthy, or as a lamp despised. “He that is ready to slip with his feet, is a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease,” (Job 12:5), so that I know not what to do.’

“‘But brother,’ said Mr. Great-heart, ‘I have it in commission to “comfort the feeble-minded,” and to “support the weak.” (1 Thessalonians 5:14). You must needs go along with us; we will wait for you; we will lend you our help (Romans 14:1); we will deny ourselves of some things, both opinionative and practical, for your sake (1 Corinthians 8); we will not enter into doubtful disputations before you; we will be made all things to you, rather than you shall be left behind. (1 Corinthians 9:22).’”

I want you to notice that the duty of the weak to join the church is here enjoined, and also that those with whom they join are to be gentle with them.

Here is a pretty piece of Mr. Bunyan's writing: —

“Now all this while they were at Gaius's door; and behold, as they were thus in the heat of their discourse, Mr. Ready-to-halt came by, with his crutches in his hand (Psalm 38:17); and he also was going on pilgrimage.

“Then said Mr. Feeble-mind to him, ‘Man how camest thou hither? I was but just now complaining, that I had not a suitable companion, but thou art according to my wish. Welcome, welcome, good Mr. Ready-to-halt, I hope thou and I may be some help.’

“‘I shall be glad of thy company,’ said the other; ‘and, good Mr. Feeble-mind, rather than we will part, since we are thus happily met, I will lend thee one of my crutches.’

“‘Nay,’ said he, ‘though I thank thee for thy good will, I am not inclined to halt before I am lame.’”

See how he perks up at the very idea of it.

“Howbeit, I think, when occasion is, it may help me against a dog.”

So, you see, he found congenial company in the church. The first thing for us to note is, that there are some poor feeble-minded saints who really are not nice company, but who must not be slighted. They are not very cheerful; they may not be even amiable; they have feeble minds; you will not learn much from them; they are, as Bunyan says, “very ignorant Christian men;” but we ought not, as a church, to hesitate to have these added to us, we should be glad that they have come amongst us. I heard a person say, “Look what a number of very poor people are coming into the church,” I am glad of it, they are the very people who need church-fellowship, and spiritual privileges. Besides, many of the poor of the earth are the excellent of the earth. Feeble-mind was a man of a very gracious and tender spirit. When he heard other people joking and making fun, it grated on his ear; he saw others dressed out, it might not have been to any great excess, but he judged it out of harmony with the Christian simplicity enjoined by the apostle Peter; and that grieved him. This and that, which a

stronger saint could do and bear without any harm, hurt his sensitive disposition. He did not wish to be always picking holes in other people's coats; he thought, therefore, that he would walk to Heaven as best as he could alone.

Now, I like Mr. Great-heart's pressing him to come into the church. Mr. Great-heart was a strong man, with a sword and shield; and if anybody needed such a protector, it was surely Mr. Feeble-mind, who could not defend himself. We want the feeble in mind in this church — I know they are not very desirable from one point of view; but, then, we are not very desirable ourselves, yet Christ came to seek and to save us. It is a desirable thing that we should be able to put up with these poor Feeble-minds. Do you not think we often get most out of those people who try us most? When a man tries our temper, and lets us know how bad it is, it is beneficial to us. If you have an invalid child, or a sick friend, you do not make a great noise, you learn to be quiet and considerate. Gentleness and tenderness are learned in this school. It is a good thing to have a weakly saint about, for it helps to make others tender. It is well for the church to have Feeble-minds in it, and there can be no doubt that it is good for the Feeble-minds to be in the church.

But do you see what Mr. Great-heart says to this feeble companion. He says, in effect, "We will wait for you; if you cannot run as we do, we will walk at your pace. We will not overdrive you." I know how it is with some Christians; they have grown in grace so wonderfully, that they want everybody to be up to their height, and not three-quarters of an inch below it. They hear some dear child of God groaning over his corruptions, and his trials in the Christian life, and they look at him as if he were one of the very worst of sinners, whereas it is a thousand to one that the tried believer is a better saint than he who is hectoring [overbearing and blustering] and boasting. The boaster is like a rough boy who has a sweet, little, delicate sister, who is worth ten of him; she cannot run as he does, but he says to her, "You ought to do it; you should not be in bed; why are you always ill?" He forgets that she cannot help it. The fat cattle are not to push the lean cattle with horn and with shoulder, lest they trample the

weak ones under their feet. No, the Lord would have Mr. Great-heart say to Mr. Feeble-mind, "We will wait for you, if you cannot walk so fast as we do; and" — notice that, — "we will deny ourselves even that which would be lawful for us for your sake; there are some things which would lead you into sin, we will not do them lest you should be injured; they might not hurt us, but we will not do them lest in any way you should be made to suffer." All things are lawful to me, all the common actions of life are lawful for me, but there are times when they are not expedient.

"We will not enter into doubtful disputations before you," said the great but gracious leader. We will not tax you with sermons upon very high doctrines that would only trouble you. Questions that would not minister to your growth in grace shall be left for a while; we will discuss difficult subjects in your absence. We will say to one another, "We have a tough point to settle, but we will leave it till he is gone down to the prayer-meeting or when he is stopping at home because his head aches; we will not talk about such matters till all the weak saints are out of the way." If father and mother have anything that is nasty to say to one another, they must not let anyone else hear it. "Pray do not let the children know anything about it," they say to each other. Whenever you and I who are the strong members of the church, have certain thorny matters to consider, we must not do it before the new-born converts. Let us say, "We must get all the children away before talk about these things;" and as we are sure, I hope, to have newborn souls always among us, we had better endeavour to keep clear of these doubtful disputations altogether.

The very sweet point in the story is where Mr. Ready-to-halt comes up on his crutches. Now, Mr. Ready-to-halt, and Mr. Feeble-mind, you will be at home; there are two of you. You poor weak saints, who need all the help you can get, it is quite right that you should come in, because there are some more just like you in the church, and you can help each other. How delightful it was when Mr. Ready-to-halt said he would lend Mr. Feeble-mind one of his crutches. But I do like the way that Feeble-mind firmly declined the loan. If he was feeble-minded, he was not lame; and,

therefore, he said, "I am not inclined to halt before I am lame." I suppose that this good man, Ready-to-halt, had been accustomed to use a form of prayer. Feeble-mind, on the other hand, could say, "My prayers are very poor, brother; still, they are my own words, and they are the expression of my inmost feelings." He did not blame Ready-to-halt for having crutches, but he would not use them himself. Some people say to me, "We wish you would write us a book of prayers, as you have given us two volumes of Readings and 'The Interpreter;'" but I reply, "I cannot make prayers for you, I cannot conscientiously set up for a crutch-maker. Still, you had better go on crutches, and read a prayer in the family, than not pray at all." I like to hear Mr. Feeble-mind as he draws himself up, and says, as it were, "No, no, no, I have not come to need crutches yet, though they might be useful against a dog. They are of some use, perhaps, and you manage, somehow, to get along on them." Still, it shows the good heart there was in Ready-to-halt that he was willing to lend Mr. Feeble-mind one of his crutches. Many saints have crutches of one sort or another, they cannot trust their feet, and they have found them to be some help to them, and they are generally willing to lend their crutches to others. It is quite right that it should be so. Now, come in, friend Ready-to-halt, with your crutches; come in, Mr. Feeble-mind with all your weakness and fears, you two will then take counsel together about the things of God. We will wait for you, and will not mind what we do so long as we can get to the same end together by-and-by.

A little further on, we find that Ready-to-halt, after Giant Despair was killed, danced with one of his crutches in his hand in a very wonderful manner; and, just ere they passed over the river, poor Feeble-mind left his feeble mind to be buried by Mr. Valiant in a dunghill, and Mr. Ready-to halt bequeathed his crutches to his son, for he did not need such things in Heaven.

One day, I was sitting under the olives at Mentone, and saw a sheep that had evidently strayed away from the rest of the flock, and lost itself. It was bleating because it was all alone, and did not know its way back. Presently, a whistle was blown, and the sheep was off immediately in the direction from which the sound came.

The Lord says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." They know His call even when He whistles to them; and I do believe, dear brethren, that you would sooner hear the Gospel whistle than you would hear the new doctrines preached in the best possible manner; for there is, somehow or other, a ring in the true Gospel which you cannot mistake. If it is real Gospel, you will know the voice of it, you will say, "That is my way, and I am off in response to the gracious call."

You should get to the Shepherd, and you should get among the sheep, and be not long a lone sheep. There are some brethren who will be glad to see you. The elders will be glad to see you. I am not lame, yet I would buy a pair of crutches to go with you if you cannot go by any other means; but I will lend you both of them, for I shall not require them myself. One is glad to be able to rejoice in the Lord, and go forward, running in the way of His salvation; but our joy is doubled if we can encourage Mr. Feeble-mind and Mr. Ready-to-halt.

20. Christiana at the Gate and the River

WHEN Christiana, the wife of Christian, went on pilgrimage, she, of course, went through the same gate as her husband. Thus the story runs: —

"Wherefore, methought I saw Christiana and Mercy, and the boys, go all of them up to the gate; to which, when they were come, they betook themselves to a short debate about how they must manage their calling at the gate, and what should be said to Him that did open to them. So it was concluded, since Christiana was the eldest, that she should knock for entrance, and that she should speak to Him that did open, for the rest. So Christiana began to knock; and, as her poor husband did, she knocked, and knocked again. But, instead of any that answered, they all thought that they heard as if a dog came barking upon them; a dog, and a great one too, and this made the women and children afraid; nor durst they, for a while, to knock any more, for fear the mastiff should fly upon them. Now, therefore, they were greatly

tumbled up and down in their minds, and knew not what to do: knock they durst not, for fear of the dog; go back they durst not, for fear the Keeper of that gate should espy them as they so went, and should be offended with them. At last, they thought of knocking again, and knocked more vehemently than they did at the first. Then said the Keeper of the gate, 'Who is there?' So the dog left off to bark, and He opened unto them."

When Bunyan is talking of a strong man's experiences, he represents arrows as being shot at him. When he speaks of women and children, he represents them as being barked at by a dog. Some timid souls are as alarmed at the baying of a dog as stouter hearts at the flight of flaming darts.

God does not allow the feeble to be tempted to the same extent as the strong. They are not shot at with fiery arrows; a savage dog barks at them instead. When I am describing the sore temptations of certain Christians, some of you say within yourselves, "But we have never felt anything like that." Now, do not be vexed with yourselves because you have not had so trying an experience, but be thankful for it. Rejoice that you got in, like Christiana and Mercy, with only a dog to bark at you. The arrows are not to be desired. If, when you came to the Lord Jesus Christ, all the opposition that you met with was nothing more than the mere barking of a dog that could not even bite you, be grateful that you came so easily, and that Satan was held in check so that he was unable to molest you.

Everything, in all the world, that would keep a sinner from coming to Christ, is nothing better than a dog's bark. There is not much cause for alarm in the barking of a dog at a distance. If, when I was coming to this Tabernacle, I heard a dog barking, I do not know that I should take much notice of it. If I were in my house at night, and heard a barking dog, it might disturb my sleep, but it would not alarm me very much. If a man were going upon some important mission, and some little whipper-snapper of a cur came yelping at his heels, he would not trouble to notice it. All that devils, or men, can ever say against a soul that comes to

Christ, and trusts in Him, is not a whit more to be feared than a dog's bark. Therefore, I pray you, vex not your heart because of it. Say in your soul, "Christ bids me come, and I will not be kept back by a dog's bark. Christ calls me; I hear God's voice; I accept Heaven's invitation; let the dogs bark till they are weary, if they will; such sweet music is sounding in my ear as drowns their howlings."

*"I'll go to Jesus, though my sin
Hath like a mountain rose;
I know His courts, I'll enter in,
Whatever may oppose."*

I ask you now to listen to what happened when the pilgrims got inside. They all entered save Mercy, and she was left without, trembling and crying, as some do after their companions have found peace. However, Mercy knocked again; and, after a while the Keeper of the gate opened it, and she was admitted, and all were welcome and forgiven by the Lord of the way.

"So He left them a while, in a summer parlour below, where they entered into talk by themselves; and thus Christiana began: 'O Lord, how glad am I that we are got in hither!'

"MERCY. So you well may; but I of all have cause to leap for joy.

"CHRISTIANA. I thought one time, as I stood at the gate (because I had knocked, and none did answer), that all our labour had been lost, especially when that ugly cur made such a heavy barking against us.

"MERCY. But my worst fear was after I saw that you were taken into His favour, and that I was left behind. Now, though I, it is fulfilled which is written, 'Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.' (Matthew 14:41). I had much ado to forbear crying out, 'Undone! Undone!' And afraid I was to knock any more; but when I looked up to what was written over the gate, I took courage. I also thought that I must either knock again, or die; so I knocked, but I cannot tell how, for my spirit now struggled betwixt life and death.

“CHRISTIANA. *Can you not tell how you knocked? I am sure your knocks were so earnest, that the very sound of them made me start; I thought I never heard such knocking in all my life; I thought you would have come in by violent hands, or have taken the Kingdom by storm. (Matthew 11:12).*

“MERCY. *Alas! to be in my case, who that so was could but have done so? You saw that the door was shut upon me, and that there was a most cruel dog thereabout. Who, I say, that was so faint-hearted as I, that would not have knocked with all their might? But, pray, what said my Lord to my rudeness? Was He not angry with me?*

“CHRISTIANA. *When He heard your lumbering [rumbling] noise, He gave a wonderful innocent smile; I believe what you did pleased Him well enough, for He showed no sign to the contrary. But I marvel in my heart why He keeps such a dog; had I known that before, I fear I should not have had heart enough to have ventured myself in this manner. But now we are in, we are in; and I am glad with all my heart.*

“MERCY. *I will ask, if you please, next time He comes down, why He keeps such a filthy cur in His yard. I hope He will not take it amiss.*

“*‘Ay, do,’ said the children, ‘and persuade Him to hang him; for we are afraid he will bite us when we go hence.’*”

You see the children wanted the dog hanged, like the negro who said, “If God is so much stronger than de debil, why doesn’t he kill de debil?” I have often wished the same, but it does not so please the Master.

“*So at last He came down to them again, and Mercy fell to the ground on her face before Him, and worshipped, and said, ‘Let my Lord accept of the sacrifice of praise which I now offer unto Him with the calves of my lips.’*

“*So He said unto her, ‘Peace be to thee: stand up.’ But she continued upon her face, and said, ‘Righteous art Thou, O Lord, when I plead with Thee; yet let me talk with Thee of Thy judgments.’ (Jeremiah 12:1). ‘Wherefore dost Thou keep so cruel a dog in Thy yard, at the sight of which, such women*

and children as we, are ready to fly from Thy gate for fear?’
“*He answered and said, ‘That dog has another owner, he also is kept close in another man’s ground, only My pilgrims hear his barking; he belongs to the castle which you see there at a distance, but can come up to the walls of this place. He has frightened many an honest pilgrim from worse to better, by the great voice of his roaring. Indeed, he that owneth him doth not keep him out of any goodwill to Me or Mine, but with intent to keep the pilgrims from coming to Me, and that they may be afraid to knock at this gate for entrance. Sometimes also he has broken out, and has worried some that I loved; but I take all at present patiently. I also give My pilgrims timely help, so they are not delivered to his power, to do to them what his doggish nature would prompt him to. But what! my purchased one, I trow, hadst thou known never so much beforehand, thou wouldst not have been afraid of a dog. The beggars that go from door to door will, rather than they will lose a supposed alms, run the hazard of the bawling, barking, and biting, too, of a dog; and shall a dog — a dog in another man’s yard, a dog whose barking I turn to the profit of pilgrims, — keep any from coming to Me? I deliver them from the lions, my darling from the power of the dog.’”*”

So, the temptations of poor seeking souls do not come from the Holy Spirit. They come from the devil. Note that the Lord said, “I take all at present patiently.” God shows His great longsuffering, I think, in bearing even with the devil himself. Moreover, He added that He turned the barking of the dog to the profit of the pilgrims. Some of them would come up to the gate half asleep; but when the dog barked, it caused them to be in earnest. It has been well said that a roaring devil is to be preferred to a sleeping devil. It is better to be full of fear and trembling than it is to be asleep. So the Lord overrules the temptations of Satan for the good of poor coming sinners. Well then, do not hang the dog, but let him be turned to good account. Only, poor sinner, fear him not. Come to Jesus, trembler. May the Holy Spirit enable thee to come and take him to be thine for ever and ever, and then let the dogs bark as loudly as they please.

Now let us pass to the end of the wonderful dream, and see Christiana and her friends at the river's brink.

How, think you, did the pilgrims, who dwelt in the Land of Beulah, regard death? It was by no means a subject for sorrow. Here is the charming description of the joys of Heaven's borderland: —

“After this, I beheld until they were come unto the Land of Beulah, where the sun shineth night and day. Here, because they are weary, they betook themselves a while to rest; and, because this country was common for pilgrims, and because the orchard and vineyards that were here belonged to the King of the Celestial country, therefore they were licensed to make bold with any of His things. But a little while soon refreshed them here; for the bells did so ring, and the trumpets continually sound so melodiously, that they could not sleep; and yet they received as much refreshing as if they had slept their sleep ever so soundly. Here also the noise of them that walked in the streets, was, ‘More pilgrims are come to town.’ And another would answer, saying, ‘And so many went over the water, and were let in at the golden gates to-day.’ They would cry again, ‘There is now a legion of Shining Ones just come to town, by which we know that there are more pilgrims upon the road; for here they come to wait for them, and to comfort them after all their sorrow.’ Then the Pilgrims go up and walked to and fro; but how were their ears now filled with heavenly noises, and their eyes delighted with celestial visions! In this land they heard nothing, saw nothing, felt nothing, smelt nothing, tasted nothing, that was offensive to their stomach or mind; only when they tasted of the water of the river over which they were to go, they thought that tasted a little bitterish to the palate, but it proved sweet when it was down.”

Their great joy was that other pilgrims were arriving where they were, and that some were crossing the river every day. The saints who have reached Beulah Land ought to be rejoicing as they hear of pilgrims crossing the river. If we have full faith, we shall think

with great joy of the dear ones who have gone in to see the King in His beauty; and instead of saying mournfully, "They are dead," we shall exclaim triumphantly, "They are now beyond the reach of death!" Instead of supposing that we have lost them, we shall realize that they have only preceded us a little while; we are on the road, and shall soon reach home, and blessed shall be the day when we rejoin them in glory.

"Now while they lay here, and waited for the good hour, there was a noise in the town, that there was a post come from the Celestial City, with matter of great importance to one Christiana, the wife of Christian the Pilgrim. So inquiry was made for her, and the house was found where she was; so the post presented her with a letter; the contents whereof were, 'Hail, good woman! I bring thee tidings that the Master calleth for thee, and expecteth that thou shouldst stand in His presence, in clothes of immortality, within these ten days.'

"When he had read the letter to her, he gave her therewith a sure token that he was a true messenger, and was come to bid her make haste to be gone. The token was, an arrow with a point sharpened with love, let easily into her heart, which by degrees wrought so effectually with her, that at the time appointed she must be gone."

Well, so it is with pilgrims still; they have their arrows sharpened with love, a month, or a year, or more before the time appointed for them to be gone. They receive notice that the Master expects them soon; and they ripen, and mellow in spirit.

"When Christiana saw that her time was come, and that she was the first of this company that was to go over, she called for Mr. Great-heart, her guide, and told him how matters were. So he told he was heartily glad of the news, and could have been glad had the post come for him. Then she bid that he should give advice how all things should be prepared for her journey. So he told her, saying, 'Thus and thus it must be; and we that survive will accompany you to the river side.'

"Then she called for her children, and gave them her blessing and told them, that she yet read with comfort the

mark that was set in their foreheads, and was glad to see them with her there, and that they had kept their garments so white. Lastly, she bequeathed to the poor that little she had, and commanded her sons and her daughters to be ready against the messenger should come for them.”

As soon as Christiana received her token, she did what most Christian people do, she sent for her minister, whose name was Mr. Great-heart, for he had helped her and her family on pilgrimage till they had come to the river; and what, think you, did Mr. Great-heart say, when she told him that an arrow had entered into her heart? Did he sit down and cry with her? No, “he told her he was heartily glad of the news, and could have been glad had the post come for him.” And, though I am not Mr. Great-heart, I can truly say the same. You and I should not dread the message, but may even long for it, envying those who precede us into the presence of the Well-beloved, and get the first chance of leaning their heads upon that bosom whence they shall never wish to lift them again, for therein they find joy and bliss for ever.

Christiana did not look upon her departure with any regret; she took loving adieux of her children and all her friends and fellow-pilgrims. Neither do our dear friends, who are summoned from our side, look forward to death with any kind of apprehension. When we sit and talk with them about the world to come, our conversation is that of those who would rejoice when any one of us entered into rest, and would be confident of meeting again on the other side of the river.

“Now the day drew on, that Christiana must be gone. So the road was full of people to see her take her journey. But, behold, all the banks beyond the river were full of horses and chariots, which were come down from above to accompany her to the city gate. So she came forth, and entered the river, with a beckon of farewell to those that followed her to the river side. The last words that she was heard to say here, were, ‘I come, Lord, to be with Thee, and bless Thee.’

“So her children and friends returned to their place, for those that waited for Christiana had carried her out of their sight.

So she went and called, and entered in at the gate with all the ceremonies of joy that her husband Christian had done before her. At her departure her children wept. But Mr. Great-heart and Mr. Valiant played upon the well-tuned cymbal and harp for joy."

What do you think they say in Heaven about our dear ones who fall asleep in Jesus? Why, the angels shall come to meet them! Lazarus died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom, and that is what happens to all the saints. Yes, the angels come to meet the saints, and to escort them to their eternal seats. They do not mourn when the sons of God come to glory. They stretch out their glittering hands, and say, "Welcome, brother; welcome, sister! You have long been pilgrims; now you shall rest for ever. Welcome to your eternal home!"

And how do you suppose the saints in light regard the arrival of those who come a little later? Doubtless, they welcome them with gladsome acclamations; and all through the golden streets they run crying, "More pilgrims are come to town! More pilgrims are come to town! More redeemed ones have come home!" And the Lord Jesus Christ smiles, and says, "Father, I thank Thee because those whom Thou hast given Me are with Me where I am." He welcomes them. And God the Father, too, is glad to greet them in glory. Are you not all glad when your children come home? Lives there a man among you who does not rejoice to see his boys and girls come back to him even for the brief holidays? We like to hear their sweet voices, though they do trouble us sometimes; but then they are our own children, our own offspring, and somehow, to our ears, there is no voice so sweet as theirs; and to God there is no music like the voices of His children. He is glad to get them home to Himself, to go no more out for ever. And the blessed Spirit, too, let us not forget Him — He delights to see the holy souls He formed anew, those with whom He strove, with whom He wrought so many years. As a workman rejoices over his perfected workmanship, so does the Spirit of God rejoice over those whom He has made to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

Bunyan puts it beautifully, —

“But glorious it was to see how the upper region was filled with horses and chariots, with trumpeters and pipers, with singers and players on stringed instruments, to welcome the Pilgrims as they went up, and followed one another in at the beautiful gate of the city.”

Brothers and sisters, if you are in Christ, do not be afraid to die, for dying grace shall be given to you for your dying moments.

Remember how these pilgrims crossed the river. Mr. Stand-fast said, “The waters, indeed, are to the palate bitter, and to the stomach cold; yet the thoughts of what I am going to, and of the convoy that waits for me on the other side, lie as a glowing coal at my heart.” He also said, “This river has been a terror to many; yea, the thoughts of it have also often frightened me. Now, methinks, I stand easy, my foot is fixed upon that on which the feet of the priests that bare the ark of the covenant stood, while Israel went over this Jordan.”

Remember how poor Mr. Ready-to-halt left his crutches behind him. Are you not glad of that, dear friend, you who have been ready-to-halt for years? There was dear old Mr. Feeble-mind, who said to Valiant-for-truth, “As for my feeble mind, that I will leave behind me, for that I have no need of it in the place whither I go. Nor is it worth bestowing upon the poorest pilgrim; wherefore, when I am gone, I desire that you, Mr. Valiant, would bury it in a dung-hill.” And then there was poor Mr. Despondency, with his daughter Much-afraid, who crossed the stream together. “The last words of Mr. Despondency were, ‘Farewell night, welcome day.’” As for Miss Much-afraid, she went through the river singing, but nobody could make out quite what the words were, she seemed to be beyond the power of expressing her delight.

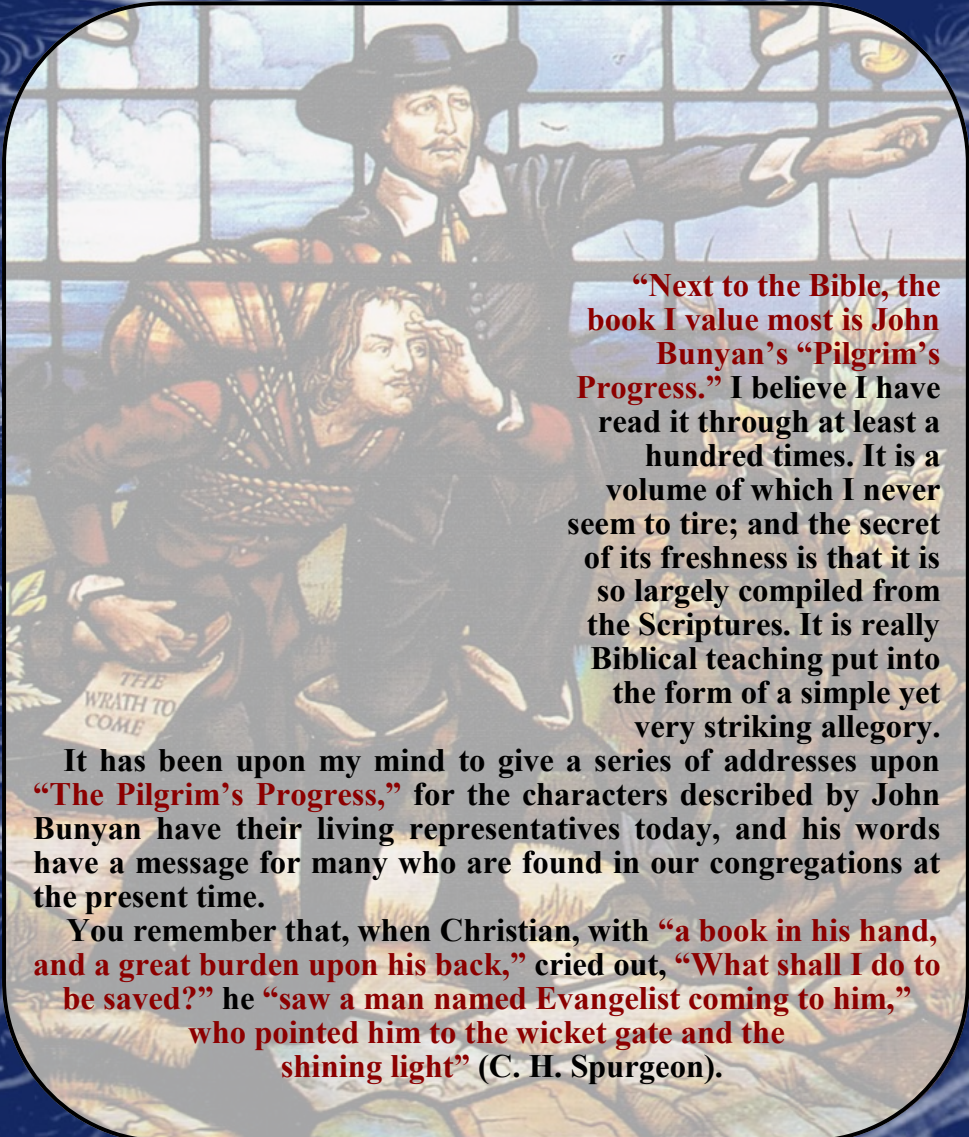
Oh, it is wonderful how these pilgrims do when they come to die! They may tremble while they live; but they do not tremble when they die. The weakest of them become the strongest then. I have helped many pilgrims on the way, and among them some Mr. Feeble-minds and Mr. Fearings, and a very great worry have they been to me while on the road; but, at the last, either the river

has been empty, or they have gone over dry-shod, or else, when they have come to the very depths of it, they have played the man so well, that I have been astounded. I never imagined that they could have been so brave. They have stumbled at a straw before; but in death they have climbed mountains. They have been the most weak, timid, sparrow-like people that you could meet with; and now they take to themselves eagle's wings wherewith to fly away.

Wherefore I counsel you, go to the graves of your loved ones with songs of gladness. Stand there, and if you drop a tear let the smile of your gratitude to God light it up, and transform it into a gem; and then go home, each one of you, and wait trustfully until your own change comes. As for myself, as I have often reminded you at the close of our joyous Sabbath services in the great congregation at the Tabernacle, so would I say again, —

***“All that remains for me
Is but to love and sing,
And wait until the angels come
To bear me to their King.”***

The fourth of four booklets.



“Next to the Bible, the book I value most is John Bunyan’s “Pilgrim’s Progress.” I believe I have read it through at least a hundred times. It is a volume of which I never seem to tire; and the secret of its freshness is that it is so largely compiled from the Scriptures. It is really Biblical teaching put into the form of a simple yet very striking allegory.

It has been upon my mind to give a series of addresses upon **“The Pilgrim’s Progress,”** for the characters described by John Bunyan have their living representatives today, and his words have a message for many who are found in our congregations at the present time.

You remember that, when Christian, with **“a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back,”** cried out, **“What shall I do to be saved?”** he **“saw a man named Evangelist coming to him,”** who pointed him to the wicket gate and the **“shining light”** (C. H. Spurgeon).