

Pictures from Pilgrim's Progress

Part One



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1. Pliable Sets Out with Christian

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 to-day, 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. Then Bunyan says:

"So, I saw, in my dream, that the man began to run. Now, he had not run far from his own door, but his wife and children perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on, crying, 'Life! life! eternal life!' (Luke 14:26) So he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the plain (Genesis 19:17).

“The neighbours also came out to see him run (Jeremiah 20:10); and as he ran, some mocked, others threatened, and some cried after him to return. Now, among those that did so, there were two that were resolved to fetch him back by force; the name of the one was Obstinate, and the name of the other Pliable.”

Instead of yielding to them, Christian began at once to plead with them to go along with him. Obstinate met all his pleas with mockery and abuse, but Pliable was easily persuaded to go. He is a type of those who, apparently, set out for Heaven; but who have not the root of the matter in them, and, therefore, soon turn back. The likeness that Bunyan has drawn of him is worthy of our attentive consideration, for it is true in every line.

It is significant that, in the first instance, Pliable went with Obstinate upon the evil errand of endeavouring to bring Christian back to the City of Destruction. In like manner, some of those who have been in the habit of keeping the worst of company may, sometimes, even without the operation upon them of the grace of God, be induced to forsake their evil companions, and to cast in their lot, for a season, with the followers of Christ.

These Pliable people, who are still a very numerous family, are very dependent upon those by whom they are surrounded. If they happen to have been born in a godly household, it is probable that they will make a profession of religion. It is even possible that they will be highly esteemed, and perhaps for years will bear a most reputable Christian character. If, on the other hand, they happen to be thrown among bad companions, they will be very easily allured by them, and be made to drink, to swear, and to fall into all the vices of the stronger persons by whom they are influenced. They scarcely seem to be men. They are mere jellyfish, swept along by every turn of the tide. They lack the true element of manhood, which is firmness. This, by the way, Obstinate had in excess. If you could put an Obstinate and a Pliable together, and make them one, you might, speaking of the natural man, have something more nearly approaching true manliness than either of them would be separately. Obstinate had

all the firmness, while Pliable had none of it.

I think Pliable was a mouldable sort of creature; and, hence, Obstinate did with him as he liked until the poor feeble fellow came into the grasp of a stronger man than Obstinate, namely, Christian. After all, there is no man who is a match for a Christian in the matter of influence. There is a force about the truth, which is committed to our charge, when it is brought into fair play, that is not equalled by any form of lies. If a man's mind is really pliable, there is no doubt that an earnest Christian, who has been led by Divine grace to walk in the right road, will have wonderful control over such a person. So strong was Christian's influence that, even while Obstinate was reviling, Pliable rebuked him, and said: "My heart inclines to go with my neighbour." Christian had not said very much; he had not appeared to exercise much influence; but something had already told on Pliable. In the very presence and look of a Christian, there is a power over the heart of man. Moreover, influence grows; so it came to pass that Pliable presently went even further, and boldly declared: "I intend to go along with this good man, and to cast in my lot with him."

You perceive, however, that Pliable had no burden on his back, as Christian had. This was one of the proofs that he was not a true pilgrim. That which brings men to Christ is a sense of their need of Him. Albeit the sense of sin is not a qualification for salvation, yet it is the only motive that ever leads men to trust in Jesus; it is the impetus which Divine grace uses when it is drawing or driving men to the Saviour. Pliable did not, at first, appear to be greatly troubled when he heard that the City of Destruction was doomed; but when Christian talked so prettily about Heaven, he thought there might be something in it; indeed, he felt that there must be, when a man like Christian could leave his family and his business to go on a long pilgrimage; so he judged that, probably, he might do better himself if he went with Christian. But, all the while, there was no burden on his back; he had no sense of his need of a Saviour, and this was a very serious defect, to begin with, in one who was professing to go on pilgrimage to the Celestial City.

You will observe, too, that the only thing which tempted Pliable

to go was Christian's talk about the "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." There are some preachers who can descant so prettily upon Heaven — the blessed associations of that happy country where they

"Meet to part no more," —

that half their hearers are constrained to say, "We also will set out." These divines talk of the wall of jasper, the gates of pearl, the street of gold, the sea of glass, and the emerald rainbow round about the throne, in such a way that persons of a poetical temperament, and especially those of pliable disposition, have their emotions excited by the descriptions which give only a material view of what was intended to be understood in a spiritual sense. They really think that Heaven is, literally, what the Book of the Revelation says it is figuratively. They never get at the kernel of the inward sense; it is the husk of the outward meaning that attracts them. They are satisfied, charmed, bewitched, fascinated by that, so they resolve to set out on the journey.

To tell the whole truth about Mr. Pliable, I must say that he began exceedingly well. I have already reminded you that he defended Christian when Obstinate reviled him; and when Obstinate turned his abuse upon Pliable, and said, "What! more fools still?" he did not seem to wince under it. Some of these pliable people will even bear a great deal of persecution, and be content to be ridiculed, and laughed at; they will even suffer loss rather than turn back. If they do this really "for Christ's sake," it is well; but, often, it is only borne with a view to self-aggrandizement, and in order to obtain something better by way of recompense, so that it is selfishness still that rules them. They give up a little of the good that there is in the world — and it is not very much, after all, that they sacrifice — for the sake of the better world that is yet to be revealed. They will not give up all that they have — "house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands" — for Christ's sake, and the Gospel's, and therefore they are not Christ's true disciples. They are prepared to make some small sacrifice, but only for the sake of

winning heaven or of escaping hell.

Observe the way in which Christian treated Pliable after Obstinate left them. I daresay he had known him before and understood quite well what a soft, easy-going fellow he was, and how very readily he might be twisted either one way or another; yet he did not disdain his company, but said to him: "Come, neighbour Pliable, I am glad you are persuaded to go along with me." You and I, dear friends, are bound to invite men to come to Christ no matter who or what they may be; and we should try to encourage them all we can, even though we may have in our own heart a well-grounded fear that some of them will not hold out to the end. I do not think it is for us to say to young persons, who seem to be in earnest about spiritual matters, that we are afraid they will not persevere, and so discourage them. Our business is rather to say to each one of them: "Come, neighbour, come with me, and you shall fare as I do." It is the work of the Spirit to fill the Gospel net; it is our duty to throw it, and drag it along the bottom; and whether we catch good fish or bad, is not so much our concern as our Master's. Christian, though not yet at peace himself, had a commendable love for others. It is a beautiful trait, which I like to see in those who feel the secondary work of grace in their souls, that they want others to feel as they feel. This conduct on the part of Christian ought to be a lesson to some of you who have long had joy and peace in believing, but who do not say to others: "Come, neighbour Pliable." Seek to have in yourselves something of the zeal and compassion of this poor pilgrim with a troubled conscience, yet with a sympathetic heart.

So Pliable, without counting the cost, or reckoning for a moment upon all the difficulties of the way, set out, in a thoughtless, light-hearted manner, upon that journey which will always prove too long for those who start on it in their own strength alone. As they went over the plain, Christian began to talk to Pliable of what he himself had felt — "the powers and terrors of what is unseen;" — but, directly he did so, Pliable changed the subject. He did not want to know anything about such matters; he had, in fact, taken the whole thing in a carnal sense; and, as for the

powers and terrors of the unseen world, he knew nothing at all about them; and, apparently, he did not want to know about them, for he harked back to that which had attracted him at the first, and said to Christian: “Tell me now further, what the things are, and how to be enjoyed, whither we are going.”

These two men, as they went along walking and talking, fell into the error of speaking a good deal about things which neither of them properly understood. It is true that Christian said: “Since you are desirous to know, I will read of them in my Book.” There was that good element in their conversation, which we can cordially commend; still, even that may not be the wisest thing for young beginners to do. It is, indeed, a wise thing to read the Bible, and to talk of what it contains; but this must be done with much prayer if it is to be of real spiritual benefit. I look in vain for any word about Pliable praying, but I do read concerning Christian, even before he started on his pilgrimage —

“He would also walk solitarily in the fields, sometimes reading, sometimes praying; and thus for some days he spent his time. Now, I saw upon a time when he was walking in the fields, that he was, as he was wont, reading in his Book, and greatly distressed in his mind; and as he read, he burst out as he had done before, crying, ‘What shall I do to be saved?’” (Acts 16:30, 31).

It was not so with Pliable. What he heard Christian read from the Book did not make him sorrowful, but enchanted and delighted him. He only thought of the Celestial Country, not of the plague of his own heart, nor of the damnable nature of his sin. These things had never come home with power to him as they had to Christian, and therefore he did not say: “Come, let us kneel together, and plead for mercy;” but he said, “Well, my good companion, glad am I to hear of these things; come on, let us mend our pace.” Yes, at first, there are none who are so enthusiastic as these empty, hollow ones. “Let us mend our pace,” said Pliable. Surely, brethren, the advice is good, but I do not like it from such lips. It is a very proper exhortation in its place, but

not when it comes from one who has never been burdened on account of sin, nor broken under the hammer of God's law, nor made to feel his own nothingness and worthlessness. You who are empty may well travel quickly; you who never felt the load of sin upon your hearts may well run swiftly. Pliable is all for pushing on, making a stir, and creating a noise. He attends revival services, and likes to have them protracted; when the fit is on him, he would be willing to be up all night, to turn his house out of the windows, and to do all manner of extraordinary things, all to show how full of zeal he is. But, in a little time, it will be all over. It is like the crackling of thorns under a pot, which burn so fiercely that they make the pot boil over, and put the fire out.

"Come," said Pliable, "let us mend our pace." Christian said, "I cannot go so fast as I would, by reason of this burden that is on my back." Then, just as they ended their talk, Bunyan tells us that "they drew near to a very miry slough that was in the midst of the plain; and they, being heedless, did both fall suddenly into the bog. The name of the slough was Despond."

2. The Two Pilgrims in the Slough.

Through their much talking, and little praying, and giving no heed to where they were going, Christian and Pliable all of a sudden found themselves floundering in the Slough of Despond. Bunyan says:

"Here, therefore, they wallowed for a time, being grievously bedaubed with the dirt; and Christian, because of the burden that was on his back, began to sink in the mire."

Even then, had they but known where to look, they might have discovered that there were, "by the direction of the Lawgiver, certain good and substantial steps, placed even through the very midst of this Slough." Had they set their feet upon these steps — in other words, had the pilgrims trusted the promises of God — they might have gone through to the other side with scarcely a stain upon their garments.

I always feel inclined to blame Evangelist for some of the

discomfort that poor Christian suffered in the Slough of Despond. **[See footnote]**. I am a great lover of John Bunyan, but I do not believe him infallible; and the other day I met with a story about him which I think a very good one. There was a young man, in Edinburgh, who wished to be a missionary. He was a wise young man; so he thought, "If I am to be a missionary, there is no need for me to transport myself far away from home; I may as well be a missionary in Edinburgh." There's a hint to some of you ladies, who give away tracts in your district, and never give your servant Mary one. Well, this young man started, and determined to speak to the first person he met. He met one of those old fishwives; those of us who have seen them can never forget them, they are extraordinary women indeed. So, stepping up to her, he said, "Here you are, coming along with your burden on your back; let me ask you if you have got another burden, a spiritual burden." "What!" she asked; "do you mean that burden in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress? Because, if you do, young man, I got rid of that many years ago, probably before you were born. But I went a better way to work than the pilgrim did. The Evangelist that John Bunyan talks about was one of your parsons that do not preach the Gospel; for he said, 'Keep that light in thine eye, and run to the Wicket-gate.' Why, man alive! that was not the place for him to run to. He should have said, 'Do you see that cross? Run there at once!' But instead of that, he sent the poor pilgrim to the Wicket-gate first; and much good he got by going there!" "But did you not," the young man asked, "go through any Slough of Despond?" "Yes, I did; but I found it a great deal easier going through with my burden off than with it on my back." **[See footnote]**.

The old woman was quite right. John Bunyan put the getting rid of the burden too far from the commencement of the pilgrimage. If he meant to show what usually happens, he was right; but if he meant to show what ought to have happened, he was wrong. We must not say to the sinner: "Now, sinner, if thou wilt be saved, go to the baptismal pool; go to the Wicket-gate; go to the church; do this or that." No, the cross should be right in front of the Wicket-gate; and we should say to the sinner: "Throw thyself down there,

and thou art safe; but thou art not safe till thou canst cast off thy burden, and lie at the foot of the cross, and find peace in Jesus.”

Now let us leave Christian for a little while, and turn our thoughts to his companion, Pliable. This experience in the Slough of Despond was the first trial he had met with since he had started on pilgrimage. It was, comparatively, a slight one. The Slough was not likely to swallow them up. It was not nearly so bad as lying in Giant Despair’s dungeon, or fighting with Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation. It was not much for anyone to endure, but it was more than Pliable could stand. Bunyan thus describes what happened to him:

“At this, Pliable began to be offended, and angrily said to his fellow, ‘Is this the happiness you have told me all this while of? If we have such ill speed at our first setting out, what may we expect betwixt this and our journey’s end? May I get out again with my life, you shall possess the brave country alone for me.’ And with that he gave a desperate struggle or two, and got out of the mire on that side of the Slough which was next to his own house. So away he went, and Christian saw him no more.”

In like fashion, it often comes to pass that, without any great outward trial, but simply through despondency of mind, a sudden damper pales the flush of early joy, and some of those who set out on the road to Heaven turn back, and so prove that they did not start aright, and never had the work of God, the Holy Ghost, truly in their souls.

Some of you, dear friends, when you are attending the services here, or meeting with your companions in one or other of our many Bible-classes, get very warm, and excited, and enthusiastic; and then, perhaps, you have to go away to live in the country, which is like going out of a hothouse into an icewell, and straightway you forget all about the happy experiences that you enjoyed amongst us. Or it may be that, instead of your hearing a comforting and soothing sermon, some Sunday morning, I preach an arousing, heart-searching one, and you are offended, or

frightened, and give up all desire to tread the pilgrim pathway.

*“The fearful soul that tires and faints,
And walks the ways of God no more,
Is but esteem’d almost a saint,
And makes his own destruction sure.”*

Beware, I pray you, of any religion that merely springs from the carnal desire of enjoyment of Heaven. Both the terrors of hell and the joys of Heaven are insufficient to make the soul seek the Saviour truly. There must be a sense of sin and a desire after holiness, because, after all, the essence of hell is sin, and the essence of Heaven is holiness, and you are not likely to go to God merely because of the external hell or Heaven. You will only be led to trust in Jesus Christ through the essence of the two external things, namely, sin pressing upon you, and your soul crying out after purity, and holiness, and likeness to God.

May God grant that we may not have any Pliables in our church! Alas! We do get them sometimes, and they go a great deal further on the pilgrim’s road than Mr. Bunyan describes. They go right by the Interpreter’s House; they climb up the Hill Difficulty; they even pass the cross; but, of course, they never feel their burden roll off their backs. They are not conscious that there is a burden there. When Christians sing, they also sing because they think they are to have the same inheritance by-and-by. They generally go through the Valley of Humiliation in broad daylight. Apollyon never fights with them, and they wonder how it is that he does not assail them. They think what good people they are, and what bad people they must be who have those stirrings and smitings of conscience of which they hear us speak. They cannot understand why we talk about Christians having such fierce conflicts within; but if they really knew the Lord, they would soon understand all about it; and until they do know Him, much of our preaching must remain a mystery to them. Pliable was an utter stranger to vital godliness. He had converted himself; or, rather, Christian had converted him by his talk about Heaven; and, perhaps, if it had not been for the Slough of Despond, he would

have gone, as Ignorance did, right to the river side, and been ferried over by Vain-hope, only to be refused admission at the gate, and to be carried by the two Shining Ones, bound hand and foot, and to be cast into hell by the back door, for there is a back door to hell as well as a front one; and some professors, who have, apparently, gone very far on the road to Heaven, will ultimately go to hell by this door unless they repent of their sin, and believe in our Lord Jesus Christ.

But what became of Pliable after he struggled out of the Slough of Despond? Bunyan says:

“Now, I saw in my dream, that by this time Pliable was got home to his house again; so that his neighbours came to visit him, and some of them called him wise man for coming back; and some called him fool for hazarding himself with Christian; others again did mock at his cowardliness; saying, ‘Surely, since you began to venture, I would not have been so base as to have given out for a few difficulties.’ So Pliable sat sneaking among them.”

There is one thing about the world that I have often admired. We sometimes say, “Give the devil his due,” and I will give the world its due. I mean that, when a man goes a little way in religion, and then turns back, mere worldlings generally despise him. I believe that the wicked world has a genuine respect for a true Christian. It hates him, and that is the only homage it is able to pay him. The reason why the men of our Saviour’s day hated and mocked Him, was because they had what I may call an awful respect for Him, and did not know how otherwise to express it. They hated and loathed what they could not rightly appreciate; and thus they showed, by their mockery and scorn, how far they were from comprehending the excellence of the Saviour. You must expect similar treatment from the ungodly if you are like your Lord.

But when a pretended pilgrim turns back, they despise him; they call him a “turn-coat,” and they could not very well hit upon a more correct name for him. “Oh!” say they, “a little while ago,

you were with the earnest people, and you were, apparently, as earnest as they were; but what are you now?" Then, when the man is seen walking into the alehouse, you know how they greet him. "Ah, Mr. Sobersides! so you've come back, have you?" When they track him to the theatre, they say to him, "How long is it since you were at the Tabernacle?" or make some coarse joke about him. They know how to handle the whip of scorn, and I thank them for using it, and hope they will always lay on their blows right heavily.

But, mark you, the little scorn which Pliable finds it so hard to bear in this life is but a very slight foretaste of what he will have to bear in hell. You remember that remarkable description which is given by the prophet Isaiah of the king of Babylon, when he went down to hell, and all the kings whom he had destroyed, and whose countries he had ravaged, were lying on their beds of fire; and as they saw their great conqueror enter, instead of trembling, they hissed out, "Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!"

If any of you turn back, as Pliable did, this will be the worst element in your everlasting torment, that you did, after a fashion, set out on the road to Heaven, that you did pretend to be a Christian, that you said you had enlisted under the banner of the cross, that you talked a good deal about your experience, that you went to the prayer-meeting, and perhaps even prayed audibly, that you gave away tracts, and yet that you were, after all, only a hypocrite, and therefore found yourself, at the last, amid the flames of hell. If I must perish, let it be as a sinner who has never professed to be a saint, rather than as a Pliable, who started for the Celestial City, and then returned to his home in the City of Destruction. It would have been better for those, who have had the taste of heavenly things in their mouths, and yet have not "tasted that the Lord is gracious," if they had never known anything at all about the way of righteousness.

Some of you, dear friends, must be either Pliables or Christians;

you have, naturally, such a disposition that you cannot help being easily influenced by your associates; and unless the grace of God shall make you a child of God, you will be led astray from Him. You cannot be Obstinate; you are too good — as we use the word “good” in a common way — you are too kind, too affectionate, and altogether too tender-hearted to act as that man did towards Christian. You could not bring yourself down to drink or swear; your mother’s influence and your father’s example have too much power over you for you to become an Obstinate. You cannot sin as others can; you cannot sin in ignorance. I was almost going to say, I wish you could. If you are to be lost, if you do not mean to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, if you are determined to perish, it were far better for you to perish as Tyre and Sidon, than as Bethsaida, or Chorazin, or Capernaum.

I believe that, when some of you get into this Tabernacle, you feel that you must be Pliable. There are a few, in this congregation, whom I happen to know personally, who cannot help coming to hear me, though they remain unsaved. I preach at them, and they know I do, and respect me for it, and even thank me for it, and sometimes say that they hope they will be converted one day; but they are so pliable that they will weep under a sermon, and, after a fashion, pray; but when they get away from here, there is a stronger hand than mine that lays hold of them. Some companion says to them, “Come along; never mind what Spurgeon says, come along with me;” and they cannot say “No.” They have not the moral courage to say they will not go where the ungodly lead them. Whenever they are tempted to sin, they yield. They wish there were no tempters, and that they could get into a world where goodness was in the ascendant. They are like a sailing-vessel, which depends on every wind, and is blown hither and thither by every breeze. They have no inward force to enable them to resist. This is not the way to get to Heaven. You need, as it were, a Divine engine mightily at work, with all its heaving, panting energy, that you may make headway against winds and waves, and keep straight on, at the same rate, always steadily advancing towards the far-off port.

May God, by His grace, bring you to this blessed condition! I should have liked to have spoken to you so effectively that you could not have forgotten what I said, but would have gone home to think about it, and to pray about it, and to believe it. I should like you even to wish that you had never been born, because then I should hope that you would wish to be born again. There is no hope for you else. You have been born once; there is no possibility of your getting over the fact that you have your being. Ask the Lord that you may have your being in Christ Jesus. You are a creature, and the only hope for you is to be made “a new creature in Christ Jesus.” May the Holy Spirit bring you to this point! Ask Him to do so. The best place to get a sense of sin is at the foot of the cross. May my blessed Master meet you there, and draw you to Himself, and so may you be saved, and not be found amongst the Pliables at the last! Amen.

3. The Man Whose Name was Help.

“Wherefore Christian was left to stumble in the Slough of Despond alone; but still he endeavoured to struggle to that side of the Slough that was still further from his own house, and next to the Wicket-gate; the which he did, but could not get out, because of the burden that was upon his back. But I beheld, in my dream, that a man came to him, whose name was Help, and asked him what he did there.

“CHRISTIAN. ‘Sir,’ said Christian, ‘I was bid go this way by a man called Evangelist, who directed me also to yonder gate, that I might escape the wrath to come; and as I was going thither, I fell in here.’

“HELP. ‘But why did you not look for the steps?’

“CHRISTIAN. ‘Fear followed me so hard, that I fled the next way and fell in.’

“Then said he, ‘Give me thy hand.’ So he gave him his hand, and he drew him out, and set him upon sound ground, and bid him go on his way (Psalm 40:2).”

According to the diversity of gifts which proceeded from the self-same Spirit of God, those who laboured in guiding wayfarers

to the Celestial City, in the early ages of Christianity, fulfilled different offices, and were known by different names. Paul tells us, in his first Letter to the Corinthians Pilgrims (1 Corinthians 12:28), "God hath set some in the Church, first apostles." These were to go from place to place, founding churches, and ordaining ministers. There were, "secondarily, prophets;" some of whom uttered prophecies, while others were gifted in explaining them. Then came, "thirdly, teachers;" who were, probably, either pastors settled over divers churches, guiding pilgrims along the heavenward road, as Greatheart did, or men like Evangelist, journeying about to warn and direct such as they met.

"After that, miracles; then, gifts of healings;" and the apostle does not forget to mention another class of persons, called "HELPS." Who these people precisely were, it would be very difficult, at this period of time, if not quite impossible, to tell. Some, who are learned in the pilgrim records, have thought that they were assistant ministers, who occasionally aided settled pastors, both in the pastoral work of visiting, and also in preaching the Word. Others have supposed that they were assistant deacons, and perhaps even deaconesses, an office which was recognized in the apostolic churches. Others, again, have imagined these "helps" to have been the attendants in the sanctuary, who took care that strangers were properly accommodated, and managed those details, in connection with the gatherings of persons for united worship, which always must be superintended by somebody. Whoever they were, or whatever may have been their functions, they appear to have been a useful body of people, worthy to be mentioned in the same list as apostles, and prophets; and teachers, and even to be named with miracle-workers, and those who had the gifts of healing. It is very probable that they had no official standing, but were only moved by the natural impulse of the Divine life within them to do anything and everything which would assist either teacher, pastor, or deacon in the work of the Lord. They were of that class of brethren who are useful anywhere, who can always stop a gap, and who are only too glad when they find that they can make themselves serviceable to the

Church of God in any capacity, however lowly. The Church in this age rejoices in a goodly brigade of “helps,” but perhaps a word to two may stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance.

John Bunyan, whom we shall see to be the master of Christian experience as well as of holy allegory has, in the passage at the head of this chapter, described a part of the work of these “helps” which is most valuable, and most required. “The man whose name was Help” came to Christian when he was floundering in the foul morass of despondency. Just when the poor man was likely to have been choked, having missed his footing in the Slough, and when, with all his struggling, he was only sinking deeper and deeper into the mire, there suddenly came to him a person — of whom Bunyan says nothing more throughout his whole allegory, and here only tells us his name — who put out his hand, and speaking some words of encouragement to him, pulled him out of the mire, set him on the King’s highway, and then went about his business — a man unknown to fame on earth, but enrolled in the annals of the skies as wise to win souls.

There are periods, in the Divine life, when the help of judicious Christian brethren is invaluable. Most of us, who are now rejoicing in a well-assured hope, have known quite as much as we wish to know about that awful Slough of Despond. I myself floundered in it for five years, or thereabouts, and am therefore well acquainted with its terrible geography. In some places, it is deeper than in others, and more nauseous; such as the spot where David was when he cried, “I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing;” but, believe me, a man may reckon himself thrice happy when he gets out of it; for, even at its best, when he is fairly in it, it threatens to swallow him up alive. Dear, very dear to us, must ever be the hand that helped us out of the horrible pit; and while we ascribe all the glory to God of grace, we cannot but love most affectionately the instrument whom He sent to be the means of our deliverance.

On the summit of some of the Swiss passes, the Canton, for the preservation and accommodation of travellers, maintains a small body of men, who live in a little house on the mountain, and

whose business it is to help travellers on their way. It was very pleasant, when we were toiling up the steep ascent of the Col D'Obbia, in Northern Italy, to see, some three or four miles from the top, a man coming down, who saluted us as though he had known us for years, and had been awaiting our arrival. He carried a spade in his hand; and though we did not know what was ahead of us, he evidently knew all about it, and was forearmed and prepared for every emergency. By-and-by, we came to deep snow, and our kind pioneer immediately went to work with his spade to clear a footway, along which he carried the weaker ones of the party upon his back. It was his business to care for travellers; and, ere long, he was joined by another, who brought with him refreshments for the weary ones. These men were "helps," who spent their lives on that part of the road where it was known that their services would frequently be in requisition. They would have been worth little in the plains; their attentions might even have been considered intrusive had they met us in any other place; but they were exceedingly valuable, because they presented themselves just where they were required, having, as it were, waylaid us with kindness.

"Helps" are of little use to a man when he can help himself; but when he is hopelessly slipping amid the slime of the Slough of Despond, then a man of affectionate heart becomes more precious than the gold of Ophir.

The men of this brigade of "helps," if I understand Bunyan aright, are stationed all around the borders of the great dismal Swamp of Despond; and it is their business to keep watch, and listen along the brink of the Slough for the cries of any poor benighted travellers who may be staggering in the mire. Just as the Royal Humane Society keeps its men along the borders of the lakes in the parks in wintertime, and when the ice is forming, bids them to be on the watch, and take care of any who may venture upon it, so, a little knot of Christian people, both men and women, should always be ready, in every church, to listen for cries of distress, and to watch for broken hearts and cast-down spirits. Such are the "helps" whom we need; and such, perhaps, were the

ancient “helps” mentioned by Paul.

It may be well to give a few directions to these “helps” as to how they may assist seeking sinners out of the Slough of Despond.

From my own pastoral experience, I am led to recommend a careful imitation of “the man whose name was Help” as he is described by Bunyan. So, first, when you meet with one who is despairing, get him to state his own case. When Help assisted Christian, he did not at once put out his hand to him; but he asked him what he did there, and why he did not look for the steps. It does men much good to make them unveil their spiritual griefs to their comforters. Confession to a priest is an abomination, but the communication of our spiritual difficulties to a fellow-Christian will often be a sweet relief and a helpful exercise. You, who seek to aid the awakened, will be wise, like the angels at the tomb, to inquire of the weeping Mary, “Woman, why weepest thou?” Their answers will direct the helper’s line of action, and assist in the application of the necessary consolation. The patient who understands the malady will the more cheerfully yield to the treatment of a wise physician. I have occasionally found that the mere act of stating a difficulty has been the means of at once removing it. Some of the most distressing doubts, like hideous screech-owls, will not bear the light of day. There are many spiritual difficulties which, if a man did but look them fully and fairly in the face long enough to be able to describe them, would vanish during the investigation. “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” is our Lord’s way of setting reason in battle array against unbelief. Let the mourner state his case, by all means; and do you patiently listen to it. Get that young man alone, dear brother; ask him to sit down quietly with you, and then inquire of him, “What is the point that puzzles you? What cannot you understand? What is it that makes you so dejected and dispirited?” Wisely did good Help induce Christian to unbosom his griefs; do thou likewise.

Next to this, enter, as much as lieth in you, into the case before you. Help came to the brink of the Slough, and stooped down to his poor friend. This may seem to you, perhaps, as unimportant

direction; but, depend upon it, you will be able to give very little help, if any, if you do not follow it. Sympathy is the mainspring of our ability to comfort others. If you cannot enter into a soul's distress, you will be no "Son of Consolation" to that soul. So, seek to bring yourselves down to "weep with them that weep," that you may uplift them to the platform of your joy. Do not sneer at a difficulty because it seems small to you; recollect that it may be very great to the person who is troubled by it. Do not begin to scold, and tell the anxious inquirer that he ought not to feel as he does feel, or to be distressed as he is. As God puts His everlasting arms underneath us, when we are weak, so you must put the outstretched arms of your sympathy underneath your younger and weaker brethren, that you may lift them up. If you see a brother in the mire, put your arms right down into the mud that, by the grace of God, you may lift him bodily out of it. Recollect that you were once just where that desponding sister of yours is now; and try, if you can, to bring back your own feelings when you were in her condition. It may be, as you say, that the stripling or damsel is very foolish. Yes, but you were yourself foolish once; and, then, you abhorred all manner of meat, and your soul drew near to the gates of death. You must, to use Paul's language, "become a fool for their sakes." You must put yourselves into the condition of these simple-minded ones. If you cannot do this, you need training to teach you how to be a help; as yet, you do not know the way.

Your next step may be, to comfort these poor brethren with the promises of God. Help asked Christian why he did not look for the steps; for there were good and substantial stepping-stones placed through the very midst of the Slough; but Christian said he had missed them through excessive fear. We should point sinking souls to the many precious promises of God's Word. Brethren, mind that you are yourselves well acquainted with the consoling declarations of Scripture; have them on the tip of your tongue, ready for use at any time that they are required. I have heard of a certain scholar, who used to carry miniature copies of the classic authors about with him, so that he seemed to have almost a Bodleian Library in his pocket. Oh, that you would carry

miniature Bibles about with you; or, better still, that you had the whole Word of God hidden in your hearts, so that, like your Lord, you “should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary!” “A word spoken in due season, how good it is!” Whenever you come across a distressed soul, what a blessed thing it is for you to be able to say to him: “Yes, you are a sinner, it is true; but Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners!” Possibly, he will tell you that he cannot do anything; but you may answer that he is not told to do anything, for it is written, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” He will, perhaps, reply that he cannot believe; but you can remind him of the promise, “Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Some texts in the Bible are like those constellations in the heavens which are so conspicuous that, when the mariner once sees them, he knows in what direction he is steering. Certain brilliant passages of Scripture appear to be set in the firmament of Revelation as guiding stars to bewildered souls. Point to these. Quote them often. Rivet the sinner’s eyes upon them. Thus shall you aid him most efficiently.

If a despairing soul should read these pages, let me quote to him these exceeding great and precious promises of our gracious God: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” “He retaineth not His anger forever, because He delighteth in mercy.” “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” These three texts are specimens of the “steps” which “the Lord of the way” has caused to be placed where they can beset assist sinking sinners.

After quoting the promise, try to instruct those who may need your help more fully in the plan of salvation. The Gospel is preached, every Sabbath day, in thousands of pulpits, yet there is nothing that is so little known or rightly understood as the truth as it is in Jesus. The preacher cannot, even with all his attempts, make the simple Gospel plain to some of his hearers; but you, who

are no preachers, may be able to do it, because your state of mind and education may happen just to suit the comprehension of the person concerned. God is my witness how earnestly I always endeavour to make clear and plain whatever I say, but yet my peculiar modes of thought and expression may not be suitable to the cases of certain persons in my audiences. You, by holy tact and perseverance, may be able to cheer those hearts which gather not a gleam of light from me. If my brethren and sisters, the “helps,” will be constantly and intelligently active, they may, by homely language, often explain where theologians only confuse; that which may not have been understood, in the form of scholastic divinity, may reach the heart when uttered in the language of daily life. We need parlour and kitchen and workshop preachers, who can talk the natural speech of men; Universities and Colleges often obscure the truth by their modes of speech. If you, our friends who mingle with the world, will only put the same thing in another shape, the sinner will say, “Ah! I see it now; I could not comprehend it from the pastor’s language, but I can understand it from your plain talk.” Do, if you would help souls, point them to the Saviour. Do not trouble them with irrelevant matters, but direct them at once to “the precious blood of Jesus,” for that is the one source of pardon and cleansing. Tell the sinner that whosoever trusts in Jesus shall be saved. Do not point to the Wicket-gate, as Evangelist did; for that is not the truest way, but bid the sinner go straightway to the Cross. Poor Christian need not have wallowed in the Slough of Despond if he had met with a fully-instructed believer to direct him at the first. Do not scold the mistaken Evangelist, but seek, always pointing the sinner to Calvary, to undo the mischief he wrought to the pilgrim. [see footnote].

Would you supplement this? Then, tell the troubled one your own experience. Many have been aided to escape from the Slough of Despond in this way. “What!” exclaims the young friend to whom we are speaking, “did you ever feel as I do?” I have often been amused, when I have been talking with inquirers, to see them open their eyes with amazement to think that I had ever felt as

they did, whereas I should have opened mine with far greater astonishment if I had not. We tell our patients all their symptoms, and then they think we must have read their hearts; whilst the fact is, that our hearts are just like theirs, and, in reading ourselves, we read them. We have gone along the same road as they have, and it would be a very hard thing if we could not describe what we have ourselves undergone. Even advanced Christians often derive great comfort from reading and hearing the experience of others, if it is anything like their own; and to young people, it is a most blessed means of grace to hear others tell what they have gone through before them. I wish our elder brethren would be more frequently “helps” in this matter; and that, when they see others in trouble, they would tell them that they have passed through the very same difficulties, instead, as some do, of blaming the young people for not knowing what they cannot know, and upbraiding them because they have not “old heads on young shoulders,” where, by the way, they would be singularly out of place.

Once more, you will very much help the young inquirer by praying with him. Oh, the power of prayer! When you cannot tell the sinner what you want to say, you can sometimes tell it to God in the sinner’s hearing. There is a way of saying, in prayer with a person, what you cannot say direct to his face; and it is well, sometimes, when praying with another, to put the case very plainly and earnestly — something in this way, “Lord, Thou knowest that this poor woman, now kneeling before Thee, is very much troubled; but it is her own fault. She will not believe in Thy love, because she says she feels no evidence of it. Thou hast given evidence enough in the gift of Thy dear Son; but she will persist in wanting to see something of her own upon which she may rest, some good frames or feelings. She has been told, many times, that all her hope lies in Christ, and not at all in herself; yet she will continue to seek fire in the midst of water, and life in the graves of death. Open her eyes, Lord; turn her face in the right direction, and lead her to look to Christ, and not to self!”

Praying in this way puts the case very plainly, and may be in itself useful. Moreover, there is a real power in prayer; the Lord

assuredly hears the cry of His people still. As certainly as the electric fluid bears the message from one place to another, as certainly as the laws of gravitation control the spheres, so certainly is prayer a mysterious but a very real power. God does answer prayer. We are as sure of this as we are that we breathe: we have tried it, and proved it. It is not occasionally that God has heard us, but it has become as regular a thing with us to ask and have as it is for our children to ask us for food, and to receive it at our hands. I should hardly think of attempting to prove that God hears my prayer; I have no more doubt about it than I have of the fact that the law of gravitation affects me in walking, in sitting still, in rising up, and in lying down. Exercise, then, this power of prayer; and you shall often find that, when nothing else will help a soul out of its difficulty, supplication will do it. There are no limits, dear friends, if God be with you, to your ability to help others through the power of prayer.

These directions — and they are not very many — you should keep in your memories, as you would the directions of the Royal Humane Society, with reference to people who have been in danger of drowning.

4. “Helps.”

Having spoken about the best way of helping souls out of despondency and distress, I shall now proceed to describe those who may truly be called *helps* — for it is not everybody, and not even every professing Christian, who is qualified to perform this most needful work.

The first essential for a true “help” is, that *he should have a tender heart*. Some brethren are, by Divine grace, specially prepared and fitted to become soul-winners. I know an earnest brother, whom I have often called my hunting dog, for he is always on the watch for those who have been wounded by the Word. No sooner does he see that there are souls that appear to be anxious than he is on the alert; and whenever he hears of a meeting of converts, he is all astir. He may have appeared dull and heavy before, but, at such times, his eyes flash, his heart beats

more quickly, his whole soul is moved to action, and he becomes like a new man. In other company, he might not feel at home; but, among converts and inquirers, he is all alive and happy. Where they are to be found, his heart takes fire directly; for, amidst the diversities of gifts that proceed from the one Spirit, his gift evidently is that of helping souls out of spiritual trouble. Such a man was Timothy, of whom Paul wrote to the Philippians, "I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state."

You know that, in ordinary life, some people are born nurses, while others cannot nurse at all. If you were ill, you would not care to have them near you, even if they would come for nothing, or pay you for having them. Probably, they mean well; but, somehow or other, they have not the gentleness and tenderness which are essential in a good nurse. They stamp across the room so heavily that they wake up their poor patient; and if there be any medicine to be taken at night, it tastes all the worse if they administer it to you. But, on the other hand, you have known a real nurse perhaps your own wife — you never heard her walk across the room when you were ill, for she steps so softly that you might almost as soon hear her heart beat as hear her footfall. Then, too, she understands your taste, your likes and dislikes, and always knows exactly what to bring you to tempt your feeble appetite. Whoever heard of a nurse more fit for her work than Miss Nightingale? She seems as if God had sent her into the world on purpose, not only that she might herself be a nurse, but that she might teach others to nurse. It is even thus in spiritual things. I have used a homely illustration to show you what I mean. There are some people who, if they try to comfort the distressed, go to work so awkwardly that they are pretty sure to cause a great deal more trouble than they remove; to console the mourner is, evidently, not their forte. The true "help" to souls in trouble is one who, though his head may not be filled with classic lore, has a large and warm heart; he is, in fact, all heart. It was said of the beloved apostle John, that he was a pillar of fire from head to foot. This is the kind of man that a soul wants when it is shivering in the cold winter of despondency and distress. We know such men;

may God train many more, and give to all of us more of the gentleness that was in Christ; for, unless we are, in this way, fitted for the work, we shall never be able to do it properly.

A true “help” wants, not only a large and loving heart, but a very quick eye and ear. There is a way of getting the eye and ear sensitively acute with regard to sinners. I know some brethren and sisters who, when they are sitting in their pews, can almost tell how the Word is operating upon those who are near them. Trained and experienced “help” knows just what they ought to say to their neighbours when the sermon is over; they understand how to say it, and whether they ought to say it in the pew, or going down the stairs, or outside the building, or whether they ought to wait till later in the week. They have a kind of sacred instinct; or, rather, an unction from the Holy Spirit which tells them just what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. It is a blessed thing when God thus sets His watchmen along the borders of the Slough of Despond. Then, with quick ears, they listen to every sound; and, by-and-by, when they hear a splash in any part of the mire, though it may be very dark and misty, they hasten to the rescue. Possibly, nobody else hears the cry of the soul in distress but those who lay themselves out to listen for it.

We also want, for this work, men who are swift of foot, to run to the relief of the distressed. Some professors never speak to their neighbours about their souls; but we thank God that there are others, who will not let a stranger go away without an earnest word concerning Christ. I pray such “helps” to persevere in the good habit, and I am sure that the Lord will bless them in it; for, while there is much that can be done by the preacher who faithfully delivers his Master’s message, there is often even more that can be done by those who are able, in personal conversation, to get at the hearer’s conscience, and, with the Holy Spirit’s aid, to enlighten his soul.

For a thoroughly efficient “help,” give us, also, a man with a loving face. We do not make our own faces; but no brother, who is habitually grim, will do much with anxious inquirers. Cheerfulness commends itself, especially to a troubled heart. We

do not want levity in this holy service, but there is a great difference between cheerfulness and levity. I know that I can always tell what I feel to a man who looks kindly at me, but I could not communicate anything to one who, in a cold official way, talked at me from a great elevation, as though it were his business to inquire into my private concerns with the view of finding me out, and sending me right-about. Engage in this difficult work softly, gently, affectionately; let your cheerful countenance tell that the religion you have is worth having, that it cheers and comforts you; for, in that way, the poor soul in the Slough of Despond will be more likely to hope that it will cheer and comfort him.

Earnestly, too, let me recommend you to have a firm footing if you mean to be a “help” to others. If you have to pull a brother out of the Slough, you must yourself stand fast; or, otherwise, while you are trying to lift him out, he may pull you into the mire. Recollect that, listening to the doubts of others may give rise to similar doubts in your own mind unless you are firmly established as to your own personal interest in Christ Jesus. If you would be useful in your Lord’s service, you must not always be doubting and fearing. Full assurance is not necessary to salvation, but it is necessary to your success as a helper of others. I remember, when I first taught in a Sunday-school, that I was trying to point one of the boys in the class to the Saviour. He seemed troubled about his spiritual state, and he said to me, “Teacher, are you saved?” I replied, “Yes.” “But are you sure you are?” he asked; and though I did not answer him just then, I felt that I could not very well assure him that there certainly was salvation in Jesus Christ, unless I had trusted Him myself, and proved His power to save. Endeavour to get a sure foothold yourself; for, then, you will be more useful around the edge of the Slough of Despond than those who are constantly slipping on its slimy banks.

As you want to help those who are struggling in the Slough, try to know it well; find out its worst parts, ascertain where it is deepest. You will not have to go far to learn this; you have probably been yourself, and therefore remember something about

it; and you can easily gather from one and another whereabouts it is worst. Seek, if you can, to understand the mental philosophy of despondency of spirit; — I do not mean by studying Dugald Stewart and other writers on mental philosophy; but by real, heartfelt experience, seek to become practically acquainted with the doubts and fears which agitate awakened souls.

When you have done this, may the Lord give you — for you will need it if you are to become very helpful — a strong hand, in order that you may firmly grip the sinner whom you want to rescue! Our Lord Jesus Christ did not heal the lepers without touching them, and we cannot do good to our fellow-men if we always remain at a distance from them. The preacher is sometimes able to lay hold of his hearers; he can feel that he has them in his grasp, and that he can do almost anything he likes with them; and if you are to be a “help” to others, you will have to learn the blessed art of laying hold of the conscience, the heart, the judgment, the whole man. When you once get a grip of troubled heart, never let it go till you land it in peace. Have a hand like a vice, that will never let the sinner go when once you have hold of him. Shall a servant of God ever let a sinner fall back into the Slough when once he has taken him by the hand, and begun to pull him out? No; not while the rock, on which he stands, remains firm and steadfast, and he can hold the sinner by the hands of faith and prayer. May God teach you to clasp men by love, by spiritual sympathy, by that sacred passion for souls which will not let them go till they are saved!

Once more, if you would help others out of the Slough of Despond, you must have a bending back. You cannot draw them out if you stand bolt upright; you must go right down to where the poor creatures are sinking in the mire. They are almost gone; the mud and the slime are well-nigh over their heads; so you must roll up your sleeves, and go to work with a will if you mean to rescue them. “But they cannot speak correct English!” says someone. Never mind; do not speak superfine English to them, for they would not understand it; speak bad English which they can understand. It is said that many of the sermons of Augustine are

full of shockingly bad Latin, not because Augustine was a poor Latin scholar, but because the dog-Latin of the day was better suited to the popular ear than more classically correct language would have been; and we shall have to speak in similar style if we want to get hold of men. There is a certain prudery about ministers which disqualifies them for some kinds of work; they cannot bring their mouth to utter the truth in such plain speech as fisher-women would understand, but happy is that man whose mouth is able to declare the truth in such a way that the persons to whom he is speaking will receive it. "But remember the dignity of the pulpit," says one. Yes, so I do; but what is that? The "dignity" of a war-chariot consists in the number of captives that are chained to its wheels, and "the dignity of the pulpit" consists in the souls converted to God through the Gospel proclaimed in it. Do not give your hearers any sublime jargon, Johnsonian sentences, and rolling periods; there is no "dignity" in any of these things if they go over the heads of your hearers. You must, as Paul wrote to the Romans, "condescend to men of low estate;" and, sometimes, you will meet with men and women whom you must address in a style which does not commend itself to your own fastidious taste, but which your judgment and your heart will command and compel you use. Learn to stoop. Do not, for instance, go into a cottage like a fine lady who lets everybody see what a great thing it is for her to condescend to visit poor people; go and sit down on a broken chair, if there is no other in the room; sit on the edge, if the rushes are gone; sit close to the good woman, even if she is not as clean as she might be; and talk to her, not as her superior, but as her equal. If there is a boy playing marbles, and you want to talk to him, you must not call him away from his play, not look down upon him from a great elevation, as his schoolmaster might; but begin with a few playful expressions, and then drop a more serious sentence into his ear. If you would do people good, you must go down to them where they are. It is of no use to preach oratorical sermons to drowning men; you must go to the edge of the pool, stretch out your arms, and try to lay hold of them.

These, then, are some of the qualifications of a true "help."

Now I close by endeavouring to incite those of our brethren and sisters, who have been “helps” in the past, to go on yet more earnestly with that work in the future, and to stir up those who have not tried it, to begin at once.

Perhaps somebody asks, “Why should I help others?” My answer to that question is, — because souls need help; is not that enough? The cry of misery is a sufficient argument for the display of mercy. Souls are dying, perishing; therefore, help them. A few weeks ago, there was a story, in the papers, of a man being found dead in a ditch; and it was afterwards ascertained that he must have been lying there for six weeks. It was said that somebody had heard the cry, “Lost! Lost!” but it was dark, and he did not go out to see who it was! “Shocking! Shocking!” you say; and yet you may have acted in the very same way towards immortal souls. Among your neighbours, there are many who may not cry, “Lost!” because they do not feel that they are lost, yet they are; and will you let them die in the ditch of ignorance without going to their relief? There are others who are crying, “Lost!” and who need a word of comfort and direction; will you let them perish in despair for the want of it? Brethren and sisters in Christ, let the needs of humanity provoke you to activity on behalf of the many lost ones all around you.

Remember, also, how you were yourselves helped when you were in a similar condition to theirs. Some of us will never forget that dear Sunday-school teacher, that tender mother, that gracious woman, that kind young man, that excellent elder of the Church, who once did so much for us when we were in trouble of soul. We shall ever recollect their bright attention and assistance; they seemed to us like visions of bright angels when we were in the thick fog and darkness of despair. Then, repay the debt you owe to them, discharge the obligation by helping others as you were yourselves helped in your time of trouble.

Moreover, Christ deserves it. There is a lost lamb, out there in the darkness; it is His lamb, so will you not care for it for His sake? If there was a strange child at our door, asking for a night’s shelter, common humanity might prompt us to take in the poor

little creature out of the snow and wind; but if it were the child of our own brother, or of some dear friend, the sympathy of kinship would constrain us to protect it. That sinner is, in any case, your brother in the one great human family; so, by his relationship to you, though he may not discern it at present, a moral obligation rests upon you to give him all the help that is in your power.

Beloved, you would not want any other argument, did you know how blessed the work is in itself. Would you gain experience? Then, help others. Would you grow in grace? Then, help others. Would you shake off your own despondency? Then, help others. This work quickens the pulse, it clears the vision, it steels the soul to holy courage; it confers a thousand blessings on your own souls, to help others on the road to Heaven. Shut up your heart's floods, and they will become stagnant, noisome, putrid, foul; let them flow, and they shall be fresh and sweet, and shall well up continually. Live for others, and you will live a hundred lives in one. For true blessedness, divorce me from idleness, and unite me to industry.

If that is not sufficient reason, remember that you are called to this work. Your Master has hired you, so it is not your place to pick and choose what you will do. He has lent you your talents, so that you must do with them as he bids you. Determine that you will at once do some practical service for your Master, for He has called you to it. If you do not, you will probably soon feel the rod of correction. If you do not help others, God will treat you as men do their stewards who make no right use of the goods entrusted to them; your talent will be taken from you. Sickness may come upon you, because you were not active while you were in health; you may be reduced to poverty, because you did not make a right use of your riches; you may be brought into deep despair, because you have not helped despairing souls. Pharaoh's dream has often been fulfilled since his day. He dreamed that seven fat kine came up out of the river, and that there came up seven lean ones after them, and ate up the fat kine. Sometimes, when you are full of joy and peace, you are lazy and idle, and do no good to others; and when this is the case, you may well fear lest the seven lean kine

should eat up the seven fat ones; and you may rest assured that lean days, in which you do nothing for your Master, lean Sundays, lean prayers, and so on, will eat up your fat Sabbaths, your fat graces, your fat joys, and then where will you be?

Besides all this, remember that, every hour we live, we are getting nearer Heaven, and sinners are getting nearer hell. The time in which we can serve Christ by winning souls is constantly waxing shorter. Our days are very few, so let us use them all for God. Let us not forget the reward which He will give to His faithful servants. Happy spirit, who shall hear others say, as he enters the celestial regions, "My father, I welcome thee!" Childless souls, in glory, who were never made a blessing to others on earth, must surely miss the very Heaven of Heaven; but they who have brought many to Christ shall have, in addition to their own bliss, the joy of sympathy with other spirits whom they were the means of leading to the Saviour. I wish I could put my Master's message into words that would burn their way into your hearts. I desire that every church-member may be a worker for Christ. We want no drones in this hive; and we want all bees, and no wasps. The most useless persons are generally the most quarrelsome; and those who are the most happy and peaceable, are usually those who are doing most for Christ. We are not saved by working, but by grace; but, because we are saved, we desire to be the instruments of bringing others to Jesus. I would stir you all up to help in this good work; old men, young men, brethren and sisters, according to your gifts and experience, help. I wish that each one of you would feel, "I cannot do much, but I can help; I cannot preach, but I can help; I cannot pray in public, but I can help; I cannot give much money away, but I can help; I cannot officiate as an elder or deacon, but I can help; I cannot shine as a 'bright particular star,' but I can help; I cannot stand alone to serve my Master, but I can help." An old Puritan once preached a very singular sermon; there were only two words in the text, and they were, "and Bartholomew." The reason he took the text was, that, in the Gospel, Bartholomew's name is never mentioned alone; he is always associated with one of the other apostles. He is never the

principal actor, but always second. Let this be your feeling; that, if you cannot do all yourself, you will help to do what you can.

When I gather my congregation together, I look upon the assembly as a meeting of council, to present degrees to such disciples as, through many sessions of labour, have merited them; and then I feel that we may confer upon those who have used the opportunities well, the sacred title of “HELPS.” Some of you have long earned this honourable name. Others of you shall have it when you deserve it; so make haste and win it. God grant that it may be your joy to enter Heaven, praising Him, that by His grace, He helped you to be a helper of others!

5. Christian and the Arrows of Beelzebub.

“When Christian was stepping in at the Wicket-Gate, Good-will gave him a pull. Then said Christian, ‘What means that?’ Good-will said to him, ‘A little distance from this gate there is erected a strong castle, of which Beelzebub is the captain; from thence both he and them that are with him shoot arrows at those that come up to the gate, if haply they may die before they enter in.’

“Then said Christian, ‘I rejoice and tremble.’”

In this passage, Bunyan alludes to the fact that, when souls are just upon the verge of salvation, they are usually assailed by the most violent temptations. I may be addressing some who are just now in that condition. They are seeking the Saviour; they have begun to pray; they are anxious to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; yet they are meeting with difficulties such as they never knew before, and they are almost at their wits’ end. It may help them if we describe some of the arrows which were shot at us when we came to the gate, for it may be that the darts which are being shot at them are of a similar sort.

The most common one is this, *the fiery arrow of the remembrance of our sins*. “Ah!” saith the arch-enemy, “it is not possible that such sins as yours can be blotted out. Think of the number of your transgressions; how you have gone astray from your birth; how you have persevered in sin; how you have sinned

against light and knowledge, against the most gracious invitations and the most terrible threatenings. You have done despite to the Spirit of Grace; you have trampled upon the blood of Christ; how can there be forgiveness for you?"

The stricken soul, crushed under a sense of sin, naturally endorses these insinuations. "It is true," says he, "though it is Satan who says it; I am just such a sinner as he describes." Then the poor soul fears whether pardon can be possible for such an offender; and, probably, he thinks of some gross sin that he has committed, — the blasphemer recollects his profanity, the unchaste man remembers his lasciviousness, and Satan whispers in his ear, "If thou hadst not committed that particular sin, there might have been hope for thee, but that transgression has carried thee over the verge of hope. Thou art now like the man in the iron cage; despair has laid hold of thee, and for thee there is now no deliverance." Poor heart! There are many passages of Scripture that ought to be sufficient to break or blunt all these fiery darts of the wicked one. These, for instance: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin;" "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men;" "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." God grant that they may be effective in your case!

Sometimes, another Satanic temptation strikes the sinner, like a bolt shot from an ancient cross-bow. It is this, "It is too late for you to be saved. You had many Gospel invitations when you were young; you were 'almost persuaded' while you were but a youth; but you halted so long between two opinions that, at last, the Lord lifted His hand, and swear in His wrath that you should not enter into His rest. You are, therefore, now past all hope." There are many who have been for years burdened with this terrible fear; and there are some, who seem to be like the prisoners in the condemned cell at Newgate, who could hear the big bell of St. Sepulchre's tolling their death-knell. Yet there is not a word of truth in these insinuations of Satan; for, as long as a man is in this world, if he doth but repent of sin, and believe in Jesus Christ, he shall be forgiven. There have been many sinners saved at the very

end of their lives, as the penitent thief was. Many have been brought to Christ, and have been permitted to work in His vineyard even at the eleventh hour of the day. It is nowhere said, in Scripture, that God will say to any man, who truly repents, that He will not receive him. There is no limitation of age in that text I quoted just now. "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." If a man be ninety years of age, and he "cometh" to Christ, he shall not be cast out. Ay, and if he were as old as Methuselah, and he were to come to Christ, the promise would still hold good.

Where this fear vanishes, it is often followed by another. Satan says, "Yes, it may not be too late on account of your age, but you have resisted the Holy Spirit; you have stifled conscience; you have frequently, when you were 'almost persuaded,' said, 'Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will send for thee.'" "Besides," the enemy may say, "you were once outwardly so religious that everybody thought you were a Christian, and you even thought so yourself. You used to teach in the Sunday-school, and you sometimes preached; but you know where you have been, and how you have acted, since then. You have returned, like the dog to his vomit, and like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire; so, now, there can be no hope for you. You may knock at Mercy's gate, but it will not open to you." Now, dear friends, sharp as that arrow is, and well aimed as it frequently is, there is no real force in it. If Christ never received those who have once rejected Him, He would never have received any of us, for some of us refused His invitations, and stifled the admonitions of conscience a thousand times, yet, when we came to Jesus, He received us graciously, and loved us freely. Yes, beloved, and if you come to Him after you have rejected ten thousand invitations, if you trust in Him after all your thwartings of the Spirit of God, you shall in no wise be cast out.

Many burdened souls have been greatly troubled concerning the doctrine of election. It is part of the craft of Satan to take a truth which is more precious than fine gold, and to turn it into a stumbling-block in the way of a sinner who is coming to Christ. The doctrine of election is like a diamond for brilliance; but the

devil knows how to use its sharp edge to the grievous wounding of many a poor sinner. "You are not elect," says Satan; "you were never chosen by God: your name is not in the Lamb's Book of Life." How easily the sinner might answer the accuser if he were but in his wits! He might say, "How do you know that I am not elect, and that my name is not in the Book of Life? God has never authorized you to convey to me this doleful news, therefore I shall not distress myself about it." Why should we let such a fear as this keep us from Christ, when we do not let it keep us from other actions? A man is very ill, and his wife says that she will fetch a physician. "No, my dear wife," says he, "it is no use fetching a physician, for I am afraid I am predestined to die." Here is a man who is travelling, and suddenly he meets with an accident. Of course, he endeavours to extricate himself; but if he were to talk, as some do in spiritual matters, he would say, "I do not know whether I am ordained to escape, and therefore I shall not try." Does a shipwrecked sailor give up swimming because he does not know whether he will ever reach the land? Do you give up working because you do not know whether you will get your wages? Do you cease eating because you do not know whether you are ordained to live another day? Do you refuse to go to sleep because you do not know whether it is decreed that you are to wake any more? Nay, but you do go about the affairs of life independently of any thoughts about the Divine decree, and in that way the Divine decree is realized in you. You are bidden in God's Word, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and I will tell you one thing, that is, if you do believe in Christ, that is proof positive that you are one of the elect, and that your name is in the Book of Life. I have never seen that Book, but I know that no soul ever did believe in Jesus whose name was not already recorded there. If thou comest to Christ, repenting of thy sin, I know that God has chosen thee unto eternal life, for repentance in God's gift, and it is a token of His everlasting love. He says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee." God draws us to repentance and faith by the bands of His love because He has loved us from eternity. So, let not that blessed

word “election” ever trouble you. The day will come when you will dance at the very sound of it; and, then, nothing will fill your heart with such music as the thought that the Lord has chosen you from before the foundation of the world to be the object of His special grace.

Another of the devil’s fiery darts is this, “You have committed the unpardonable sin.” Ah! this arrow has rankled in many a heart, and it is very difficult to deal with such cases. The only way in which I argue with a person thus assailed is to say, “I am quite certain that, if you desire salvation, you have not committed the unpardonable sin, and I am absolutely sure that, if you will come and trust Christ, you have not committed that sin, for every soul that trusts in Christ is forgiven, according to God’s Word, and therefore you cannot have committed that sin.” Nobody knows what that sin is. I believe that even God’s Word does not tell us, and it is very proper that it does not. As I have often said, it is like the notice we sometimes see put up, “Man-traps and spring gun set here.” We do not know whereabouts the traps and guns are, but we have no business over the hedge at all. So, “there is a sin unto death;” we are not told what that sin is, but we have no business to go over the hedge into any transgression at all. That “sin unto death” may be different in different people; but, whoever commits it, from that very moment, loses all spiritual desires. He has no wish to be saved, no care to repent, no longing after Christ; so dreadful is the spiritual death that comes over the man who has committed it that he never craves eternal life. We need not pray for such a case as that; the apostle John says, “I do not say that he shall pray for it.” I have met with some few cases, in which there has been such stolid indifference to all Divine things, or such jeering, mocking scorn at everything spiritual that, though I would pray for the very worst of sinners, I have felt, “I cannot pray for that man.” But none of you are in that condition if you long for mercy; if you hate sin; and seek to escape from it, that sin unto death has not been committed by you.

There are others who are troubled with this temptation, that it would be presumption for them to trust Christ. That is another of

Satan's lies, for it can never be presumption for a man to do what the Word of God tells him to do. If the Lord Jesus Christ bids a man trust Him, it must be the man's duty to do so; and, consequently, it cannot be presumption. It is presumption to say, "O Lord, Thou hast bidden me trust Thee, but I am afraid that I may not." That is presumption of the worst possible kind. "I cannot repent as I would," says one. Who made you a judge of your own repentance? You are told to trust in what Christ has done. "But I cannot pray as I should like to do." Who told you that you were to trust in your prayers? You are to rely on what Christ has done for you, and not on what you can do for yourself. "But if I could get into a better state of mind, I should have hope." Who told you that you were to get into a better state of mind, and then come to Christ? The Gospel message is: "Come just as your are, poor sinner, and cast yourself upon Christ, resting entirely upon the person, the blood, the righteousness of the once-crucified but now exalted Redeemer." It is no presumption for thee to do this. Nobody ever did get to Heaven by presumption, but unnumbered millions have entered there by trusting Christ, and you will be one of them if you will but trust in Him, and in Him alone.

Besides all these fiery darts that I have mentioned, there are many indefinable insinuations which Satan casts into the hearts of men when they are coming to Christ. I should hardly like to tell you what they are; for I might, by so doing, really do the devil's work; but this one may serve as a specimen. Men, and women, too, have sometimes been in such trouble of soul that they have been tempted to self-destruction. There have been instances in which they have almost committed that awful crime; but, just at the last, there has been some Good-will to stretch out his hand, and pull them inside the door of mercy. "Ah!" thinks Satan, "if I could only get one of God's elect people to destroy himself before he believed in Jesus, I should be able to boast of it forever." Ay, but he never has done that, and he never will. If thou, my friend, shouldst ever be tempted to commit that sin, thou mayest well say, "What good could I get by destroying myself? What! 'Leap out of the frying-pan into the fire,' as the old proverb says. To escape

from my sins, I shall rush, red-handed, before my Maker's bar?" There is no insanity like that. Art thou in such dreadful haste to die, and in such a hurry to surround thyself with quenchless flames? Oh, think not of it; but turn to Jesus, for there is hope yet, even for thee, and if thou wilt but cast thyself upon Him, thou shalt have joy and peace in believing.



Footnote

[In answer to C. H. Spurgeon's disagreement with Evangelist's directing Christian to the Wicket-gate instead of the cross, I quote the following:

Question: At what point in Pilgrim's Progress does Christian get saved?

Jim Orrick, professor of literature and culture at Boyce College (Louisville), gave this answer to the question. (Taken from <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org> on the internet).

When I ask this question to my students who have just finished reading the book, they nearly always respond with a variety of answers. After batting around several ideas, we narrow the possibilities down to two: Christian was saved either (1) when he entered through the Wicket-gate or he was saved (2) when his burden rolled off his back at the cross.

Most students come to the conclusion that Christian got saved at the cross.

But this is, in fact, the wrong answer. Christian got saved when he entered through the Wicket-gate.

Students get the wrong answer because they misunderstand three critical elements of Bunyan's allegory: 1. The Wicket-gate, 2. Christian's Burden, and 3. the proper object of saving faith.

1. The Wicket-gate

First, a wicket-gate is a small or narrow gate, and in the Bible,

Jesus identifies himself as the narrow gate, so in *Pilgrim's Progress* the Wicket-gate represents Christ. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, when Christian asks Evangelist "Whither must I fly?" Evangelist directs Christian to the Wicket-gate, or to Christ, and not to the cross. The Wicket-gate represents Christ.

2. Christian's Burden

A second error results because my students usually misunderstand what the burden on Christian's back represents. When we meet him, Christian has an enormous burden on his back, and Christian's burden represents not sin *per se*, but it represents the shame and doubt that he feels because of his sin. Christian's sins get forgiven, and he was justified when he received Christ, which is represented by his entering the Wicket-gate. But Christian does not yet understand the basis of his forgiveness, so his conscience continues to bother or burden him. Put in more technical terms (always a welcome means of clarification) the burden represents *psychological* guilt not *forensic* guilt. Therefore, what Christian loses at the cross is his shame and doubt caused by sin, because his sins had already been forgiven when he entered the Wicket-gate. Also, at the cross Christian receives a scroll, which he later calls his assurance. When Christian entered the Wicket-gate, he received Christ. When Christian gazed at the cross, he understood substitutionary atonement and imputed righteousness, and this gave him assurance that his sins were forgiven.

This understanding of Christian's salvation in *Pilgrim's Progress* parallels Bunyan's own experience as he describes it in his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. There he informs us that for many months after his conversion he was tormented by deeply unsettling questions about his salvation, but all these questions were put to rest when he came to understand imputed righteousness.

So Christian was saved the moment he entered the Wicket-gate and that was before he came to the cross.

3. The Proper Object of Saving Faith

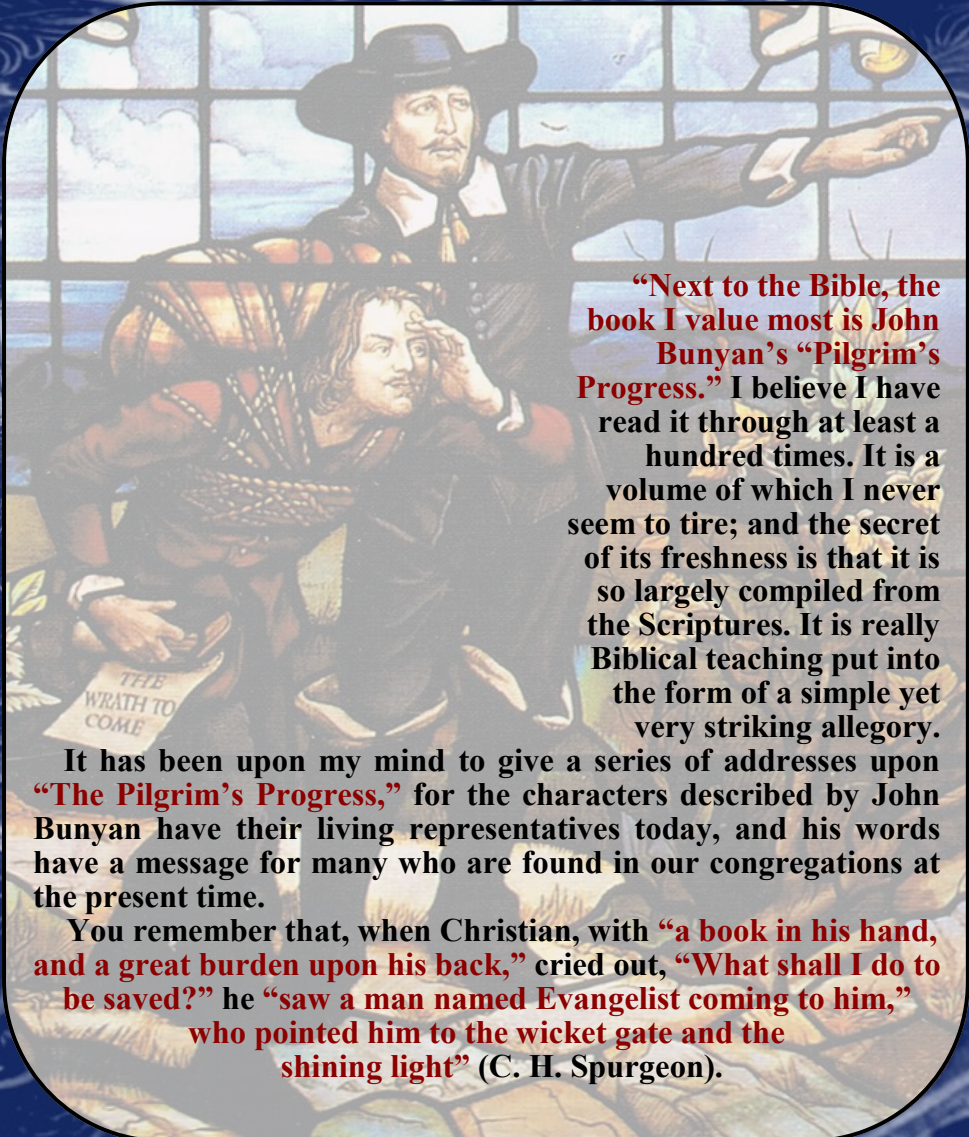
This paves the way for us to think about the third error my students sometimes make, they are confused about the proper object of saving faith.

“Are you saying that someone can be saved without the cross?” a concerned student asks.

“No,” I answer, “No one can be saved apart from what Jesus accomplished on the cross, but the Bible proclaims that a person gets saved when he receives Christ, and the Bible does not say that a person gets saved through believing that Jesus died for him. Christ himself is the proper object of saving faith, not some part of his work.”

This is a reflective moment for most, because in these days, virtually everyone has been told that if he will believe that Jesus died for him, he will be saved, but I repeat: this is not found in the Bible. A person is saved not when he believes in right doctrine (substitutionary, penal atonement, in this case) but a person is saved when he believes in the right person, namely Christ. So the object of saving faith is not a doctrine but a person. Christ himself is the treasure chest of salvation. Receive him, and you receive all that is in him. The doctrine of substitutionary, penal atonement is an indispensable, essential component of the gospel, but it is not the whole gospel. How many Christians understood this crucial doctrine when they first received Christ? Nearly none! So how could they have been saved? Because, in spite of having underdeveloped or even mistaken ideas about the nature of the atonement, all who receive Christ the risen Lord as Lord and Saviour are saved].

The first 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).