

doubt that Paul would have regarded dependence on divine grace as the truth for all, and self-sufficiency as error for all who cherished it. When we consider what he became by the grace of God, by dependence and not self-sufficiency, we may surely conclude that his message is one not only for men constituted as he himself was, but for all men, so that they may accomplish more than man's unaided effort can, and may find as he did that he could do all things, Christ strengthening him.

ALFRED E. GARVIE.

STUDIES IN CONVERSION.

IV. JOHN BUNYAN.

CONVERSION may be said to consist in the seeking and the finding of the Saviour. Both of these may synchronize or nearly so; but they may also be separated by a wide interval. The seeking of the Saviour may last a long time, before He is found; and this interval may be one of pain and even agony. In such delay there is always an element of stupidity and unbelief, because the Saviour is waiting to be gracious. Yet there may, at the same time, be a providential reason. A prolonged and painful period of seeking may leave marks of various kinds on subsequent experience, of some of which notice will be taken in the present study; but the principal result designed invariably is to deepen the sense of sin and to render more complete the breach with a life of transgression.

In the Puritan Period there was so much frankness in the expression of religious feeling, not only among the Roundheads but also among the Cavaliers, that records of conversion from that time might have been expected to be numerous; and not a few anecdotes, bearing on the

subject, might be collected from biographic works then produced ; but no such narrative, of deep and sustained interest, has come down to us except the account of the conversion of John Bunyan.¹

This work is entitled *Grace abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and, next to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, it is Bunyan's greatest book. It is the key to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, supplying the actual facts in the author's history of which the scenes in the allegory are the imaginative equivalents. Every intelligent reader would, indeed, guess that the Slough of Despond, the Battle with Apollyon, Doubting Castle and other scenes of the allegory were transcripts from personal experience ; but not only does *Grace Abounding* confirm this guess, but it introduces us in sober prose to the persons and the incidents of actual life from which were derived the characters and the scenery of the Pilgrimage.

"Prose" the writing of this book may be called, to distinguish it from the *Pilgrim's Progress*, which is poetry ; but "sober" it is hardly right to call it ; for it is astonishing prose. Strange it is that, in an age of learning, when multitudes of authors who had enjoyed every advantage afforded by the best schools and universities were doing their utmost to write the English language, a man from the lower ranks, who had received hardly any schooling and could not even spell, was able to enter into competition with these educated authors and, in mastery of his mother tongue, to beat them all. Taken as a whole, indeed, *Grace Abounding* is not a particularly well written book. It is

¹ The absence of such a narrative about Richard Baxter is the greatest disappointment ; for he was wont to speak without reserve of his own experiences, and conversion was to him a familiar theme. But the opening pages of his autobiographical work, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, are commonplace ; and we have not read far before we come upon the words, " Yet, whether sincere conversion began now, or before, or after, I was never able to this day to know."

confused and tedious. But here and there, at not too great intervals, there occur passages which, for originality and beauty, have hardly their match in the English language; and there is scarcely a page but contains a line or two over which the intelligent reader will linger with delight, admiring the felicity of expression, the depth of feeling or the ripeness of wisdom it reveals.

Bunyan was born in 1628, when Cromwell was twenty-nine and Milton twenty years of age, at the village of Elstow, a few miles from Bedford. This place, as I remember it from a visit paid some years ago, consists of a single row of tiled houses, running slantwise up an incline among the fields. At the top stands a parish church, with a fine old tower, with which Bunyan's history has a memorable connexion; while, near by, stand the ruins of an old manor house, from which he is supposed to have derived the notion of the House Beautiful in the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

"For my descent," he says, "it was of a low and inconsiderable generation, my father's house being of that rank which is meanest and most despised of all the families of the land." That is to say, his father was a tinker or brazier, and to this trade he himself was also brought up. When he was about fifteen, he served for a short time as a soldier in the struggle then raging between King and Parliament. He speaks of himself as a wild and reckless boy: "As for my own natural life, it was indeed according to the course of this world and the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. It was my delight to be taken captive by the devil at his will, being filled with all unrighteousness, and I had few equals for cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming the Holy Name of God."

And again he says, "I was the ringleader of all the youths who kept me company in all manner of vice and ungodliness." Lord Macaulay, in his well-known essay on Bunyan,

has thrown out the suggestion that these self-accusations require to be taken with a grain of salt. This, he remarks, is religious language, in which conduct assumes a totally different appearance from that which it presents in the ordinary language of the world; and Bunyan was not a whit worse, he was probably rather better, than ordinary young fellows of his own class. In this no doubt there is truth: Bunyan's sins appear to have been chiefly sins of the lips. Yet, although such sins are of little account in the eyes of the world, they are justly held by an awakened conscience to be specially significant evidences of enmity to God, because they bring to their perpetrator no advantage but are undisguised expressions of the godless humours by which the natural heart is soured and polluted.

Bunyan's first upward step was his marriage, which took place at a very premature age and in circumstances so improvident that the bridegroom and bride had not as much household stuff as a dish or spoon betwixt them. But his wife was of godly parentage, and she brought home with her two good books left her by her father at his death—*The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and *The Practice of Piety*. Through reading in these Bunyan received his first religious impressions, and possibly this recollection may have had something to do long afterwards with giving his mind a bent towards the writing of books as a means of doing good; at least Richard Baxter attributes his own enormous production of books to the same cause. The immediate result was that he became a regular church-goer, attending the parish church, where, he says, "I would devoutly say and sing as others did, yet retaining my wicked life." And he adds—it is to be feared with a touch of sarcasm—that his spirit was then so overrun with devotion to everything belonging to the Church that he "counted all things holy that were therein contained, and especially

the priest and clerk most happy, because they were the servants of God, and principal in the holy temple, to do His work therein." In short, he had reached the stage of the churchman who, perhaps in his cups, will profess his loyalty to religion and, if necessary, confirm his statements by rapping-out a good round oath—a type not yet altogether extinct.

His next stage of progress was brought about in a singular way. "One day," he says, "I was standing at a neighbour's shop-window, and there cursing and swearing and playing the madman, when there sat within the woman of the house and heard me: who, though she was a very loose and ungodly wretch, yet protested that I swore and cursed at that fearful rate that she was made to tremble to hear me, and told me, further, that I was the ungodliest fellow for swearing that ever she heard in all her life, and that I, by thus doing, was able to spoil all the youths in a whole town, if they came in my company." This reproof, though coming from so strange a quarter, had the effect of making him altogether give up his habits of profanity. About the same time, under the encouragement of a neighbour, he began to read the Bible, at least the historical part thereof. "For," he adds, "as for Paul's Epistles and suchlike Scriptures, I could not away with them." "I knew not Jesus Christ, neither did I leave my sports and plays."

One of these sports and plays was bell-ringing, carried on in the tower of the parish church. It is difficult to understand what harm he saw in this practice; but the meaning probably is, that he was associated in it with a band of reckless companions, from whom it was necessary to separate, if he was to lead an earnest life. "Another thing," he adds, "was my dancing. I was a full year before I could quite leave that."

By these renunciations and other efforts after reformation he succeeded not only in satisfying his own conscience but in drawing on himself the admiration of his neighbours. "They were amazed," he says, "at this my great conversion from prodigious profaneness to something like a moral life. And truly so they well might ; for this my conversion was as great as for Tom of Bedlam to become a sober man. Now, therefore, they began to speak well of me both to my face and behind my back. But oh, when I understood that these were their opinions of me, it pleased me mighty well. For, though as yet I was nothing but a poor painted hypocrite, yet I loved to be talked-of as one that was truly godly. I was proud of my godliness, and, indeed, I did all I did either to be seen-of, or well-spoken-of by man. Poor wretch as I was, I was, all this while, ignorant of Jesus Christ and going about to establish my own righteousness ; and had perished therein, had not God in mercy showed me more of my state by nature."

The mode in which he was awakened to perceive the imperfection of this second stage of attainment and to desire the existence of another, far higher and better, is described in a passage which ranks among the finest not only in Bunyan's works but in the English language. "Upon a day," he says, "the good providence of God did cast me to Bedford, to work at my calling ; and, in one of the streets of the town, I came where there were three or four poor women sitting at a door in the sun and talking about the things of God ; and, being now willing to hear them discourse, I drew near to hear what they said, for I was now a brisk talker also myself in the matters of religion. But I may say, I heard, but I understood not ; for they were far above, out of my reach. Their talk was about a new birth, the work of God on their hearts, also how they were convinced of their miserable state by nature. They

talked how God had visited their souls with His love in the Lord Jesus, and with what words and promises they had been refreshed, comforted and supported against the temptations of the devil. Moreover, they reasoned of the suggestions and temptations of Satan in particular; and told to each other, by which they had been afflicted, and how they were borne up under his assaults. They also discoursed of their own wretchedness of heart and of their unbelief; and did contemn, slight and abhor their own righteousness as filthy and insufficient to do them any good. And methought they spoke as if joy did make them speak; they spake with such pleasantness of Scripture language and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me as if they had found a new world; as if they were people that dwelt alone and were not to be reckoned among their neighbours."

Never surely has the impression made by the beauty of holiness been so perfectly described. Bunyan went away convinced that he had not yet set foot within the mystic circle of real religion; but he was determined not to rest till he had found the secret.

He did not, however, find it easily. Like many another both before and since, he perplexed himself with inquiries about the nature of faith, instead of looking out at the Object of faith. He tormented himself with wondering whether or not he was one of the elect, instead of listening to the call of the Gospel, which is addressed to all. Still, although as yet he enjoyed no settled peace, he was making progress. "I began," he says, "to look into the Bible with new eyes, and read it as I never did before; and especially the Epistles of the Apostle Paul were sweet and pleasant to me; and, indeed, I was then never out of the Bible, either by reading or meditation, still crying out to God that I might know the truth, and the way to heaven

and glory." He was introduced, probably by the female friends whom he had heard talking in the sun, to Mr. Gifford, the pastor of the Baptist Church at Bedford, who invited him to his house and did what he could to relieve his troubles. But the state of his mind at this stage has been incomparably described by himself: "About this time," he says, "the state and happiness of these poor people at Bedford was thus, in a dream or vision, presented to me. I saw as if they were on the sunny side of some high mountain, there refreshing themselves with the pleasant beams of the sun, while I was shivering and shrinking in the cold, afflicted with frost, snow and dark clouds. Methought, also, betwixt me and them I saw a wall that did compass about this mountain. Now, through this wall my soul did greatly desire to pass; concluding that, if I could, I would go even into the very midst of them and there also comfort myself with the heat of their sun. About this wall I thought myself to go again and again, still prying as I went, to see if I could find some way or passage by which I might enter; but none could I find for some time. At the last I saw, as it were, a narrow gap, like a little doorway in the wall, through which I attempted to pass. Now, the passage being very straight and narrow, I made many efforts to get in, but all in vain, even until I was wellnigh bent out, by striving to get in. At last, with great striving, methought I at first did get in my head, and after that, by a sidling striving, my shoulders and my whole body. Then was I exceeding glad, and went and sat down in the midst of them, and so was comforted with the light and heat of their sun."

In spite of the happy ending of this dream, he was not yet, however, by any means out of trouble. Indeed, soon after this, to use his own words, a very great storm came down on him, which handled him twenty times worse than

all he had met with before. Doubts of the most radical nature as to the very existence of God, the divinity of Christ, and the trustworthiness of the Scriptures invaded his mind; and, besides, the most horrible oaths, curses and blasphemies rushed to his lips with such violence that it was with the utmost difficulty he prevented them from escaping. He seemed to be possessed by some spirit of evil and to have lost control over his own thoughts. "I often," he says, "when these temptations have been with force upon me, did compare myself to a child whom some gipsy hath by force took up under her apron, and is carrying from friend and country. Kick sometimes I did, and also shriek and cry; but yet I was as bound in the wings of the temptations, and the wind would carry me away." Whether or not he was right in referring these suggestions directly to the agency of Satan, we need not seek to determine. Perhaps that is as reasonable a hypothesis as any. Or perhaps we may believe that these were the last reactions of a rude and strong nature against the imposition of the yoke of Christ. Some would attribute them to the temperament of genius; others to the fanaticism of the age. Anyway, they occasioned him enormous suffering; though he shrewdly remarked, even at the time, that the distaste they gave to his spirit proved that there was in him something of a nature totally different from them. Gradually this storm subsided. The counsels of good Mr. Gifford helped; and he was greatly assisted by falling in with a dilapidated copy of Luther's *Commentary on the Galatians*. Here he found himself in company with a master-spirit, who had long wandered in the same arctic region of doubt and despair; and he was encouraged to look away out of himself to the life and death of Christ on his behalf. This was what he needed. He was too introspective—too much occupied with his own feelings, the rise or fall of which

elated or depressed him. He had to learn to anchor his faith in a work completed for him long ago—in accomplished facts, over which time and change have no power.

But he was not yet out of the wood. Indeed, his most terrible period of despair was still to come. Among the blasphemous thoughts which poured into his mind there was one which especially haunted him: it was a voice which whispered, "Sell Christ, sell Him, sell Him." "This temptation," he says, "did put me to such scares, lest I should, at some time, consent thereto, that, by the force of my mind in labouring to gainsay and resist it, my very body also would be put into action and motion, by way of pushing or thrusting with my hands and elbows, still answering, as fast as the destroyer said, 'Sell Him,' 'I will not, I will not, I will not, no, not for thousands, thousands, thousands of worlds'." But, one morning, while this was going on, the overwearyed mind let slip the words, "Let Him go if He will." "And then," says Bunyan, "was the battle won, and down fell I, as a bird is shot from the top of a tree, into great guilt and fearful despair." He believed he had sold the Saviour; he compared himself to Judas; he was certain he had committed the unpardonable sin; and he especially tormented himself with the saying about Esau, that he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. His anguish lasted for months, even years; and, as we follow him, he seems often to be trembling on the brink of melancholy madness. "I felt," he says, "such a clogging and heat at my stomach that I was as if my breastbone would have split asunder. I feared also that this was the mark that the Lord did set on Cain, even continual fear and trembling. Thus did I wind and twine and shrink, under the burden which was upon me; which burden also did so oppress me, that I could neither stand, nor go, nor lie, either at rest or quiet."

“ One day,” he says, “ I walked to a neighbouring town, and sat down upon a settle in the street, and fell into a deep pause about the fearful state my sin had brought me to ; and, after long musing, I lifted up my head ; but methought I saw as if the sun that shineth in the heavens did grudge to give me light, and as if the very stones in the street and the tiles upon the houses did bend themselves against me ; methought that they all combined against me to banish me out of the world. I was abhorred of them and unfit to dwell among them, or to be partaker of their benefits, because I had sinned against the Saviour. Oh how happy now was every creature over I was ! For they stood fast and kept their station, but I was gone and lost.” It is undeniable that sentiments like these are morbid and dangerous ; indeed, Bunyan himself speaks of some of the fancies by which he was tormented at this period as ridiculous. Yet out of these dark experiences precious consequences were derived—honey, as he himself says, out of the carcase of the lion.

For one thing, he thus obtained a lifelong sympathy with spiritual distress of every kind. Tenderness is one of the leading features of *The Pilgrim's Progress* ; and such names as the Slough of Despond, Giant Despair, Doubting Castle, Mr. Fearing, Mr. Feeble-mind and the like are eloquent indications that it is a book especially fitted for them that labour and are heavy-laden. But it was by his own troubles that Bunyan was taught to speak a word in season to him that is weary.

Again, his prolonged and passionate search for salvation made him lay hold of it with tenacity when at length he found it. The trouble with most people is, that they never realise what they are missing when they neglect Christ and His salvation. Those even who obtain peace very easily are in danger of never realising either the danger from which they

have escaped or the value of the possession they have won. But Bunyan saw the prize shining far above him and coveted it with unspeakable longing ; and, when it came into his hands, it seemed to him not to be sold for worlds.

Finally, in these years of despair he acquired an incomparable knowledge of the Word of God. Many, at their conversion, are enabled to lay hold of a single text of Scripture, on which they rest in peace ever afterwards. But this was not Bunyan's experience. He would find relief in a text for a day, or a week, or a month, and then he would have to search for another. Thus he was led from promise to promise, scrutinising page after page of the Bible, in order to find words able to keep his soul from sinking ; and this went on so long that he acquired a most extensive experimental knowledge of the treasures of the Word of God. Nothing in *Grace Abounding* is more striking than his references to texts which were made precious to him ; and the brief comments made on these in passing are pointed and original.

This was admirable preparation for the work of preaching, to which he was called by his fellow-members of the Baptist Church at Bedford, in the pastorate of which he succeeded his friend Mr. Gifford. The waves of his own troubles had not yet wholly subsided when he began to deal with the troubles of others. Indeed, he confesses that at first he went himself in chains to preach to those in chains and carried in his own conscience the fire that he persuaded them to beware of. But anxiety for the souls of others was salutary for him, because it diverted his mind from his own morbid imaginings. As a preacher he sprang at once into popularity, and in his later life he was like a bishop to the Baptist churches of Bedfordshire—a tall, strong-boned, but not corpulent man ; with ruddy face and sparkling eyes ; hair reddish ; nose well-set, not declining ; fore-

head high ; and his habit always plain and modest. His work as a minister was interrupted by an imprisonment lasting twelve years. What a satire on human life that a man like John Bunyan should have been imprisoned as a malefactor by a man like Charles II. ! Yet God knows how out of evil still to bring forth good ; and those twelve years, during which he and his friends were sighing and groaning over the suspension of his work, proved, in God's wonderful providence, to be the years of his immortal influence ; for in prison *Grace Abounding* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* were penned, as well as the best of the other books by which, being dead, he yet speaketh and will continue to speak as long as the English language is understood and as long as there are human beings capable of the experiences which these books record.

JAMES STALKER.

LEXICAL NOTES FROM THE POPYRI.*

XXIII.

σκόλοψ.—In *Notes* i. (p. 274) BU 380⁹ (iii/A.D.) τὸν πόδαν πονεῖς ἀπὸ σκολάπου was quoted in illustration of the fact that in Hellenistic vernacular the word had become *thorn* or *splinter* rather than *stake* : the same result followed from late citations in L. and S. So in *Syll.* 802⁹² (iii/B.C.) a man περὶ σκόλοπας τινὰς τοὺς ὀπτίλλους ἀμφέπεισε in falling from a tree, and became blind, apparently not at once (κακῶς δὲ διακείμενος καὶ τυφλὸς γεγενημένος). Unless this is an illustration of the "beam in the eye" (!), we should think naturally of thorns or spikes. The R.V. margin "or *stake*" at 2 Corinthians xii. 7 may perhaps be added to the places

* For abbreviations see the February and March (1908) *EXPOSITOR*, pp. 170, 262.