

A
MEMOIR
ON
JOHN-BUNYAN

(1628-1688)

BY
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THE life of John Bunyan is a very precious record of the grace of God. No other man's history that ever lived is more worthy of study for this particular object — to trace the workings of God's Spirit, in connection with the interpositions of his providence, in carrying on in an individual soul the great work of sanctification, and through that soul, thus prepared, the great work of redemption for multitudes, even to the end of time. Men take a deep interest in exploring the sources of a great river, especially if they are mysterious, if they require you to traverse surprising scenes and wonders of nature, vast deserts, great mountains, stupendous rapids and cataracts. And if the river is a fountain of life to millions, and of inexhaustible fertility to grand regions, making them a granary almost for the world, then so much the deeper is the interest. And somewhat such is the feeling with which we trace the course of divine love and providential mercy in the incidents and experiences of such a child of God as Bunyan, out of whose genius and conflicts, under the inspiration of heavenly grace, it has pleased the Giver of all good to cause to flow forth a river of the water of life for all generations.

Bunyan is better known by his own Pilgrim than most men, whose life has ever been deemed worth writing, even by their memoirs: for we always identify him with Christian in the *Pilgrim's Progress*: and indeed there is no doubt that in making up the portrait of Christian, and tracing the history of his adventures, Bunyan drew at every step from his own experience. He did this almost unconsciously, the perspective of his own inward and external life being always before him as in a stereoscope. It is Bunyan that we see at his first setting out from the City of Destruction; it is Bunyan in the hands of Worldly Wiseman, and of Mr. Legality; Bunyan trembling beneath Sinai; Bunyan in the Slough of Despond; Bunyan groaning under his Burden; Bunyan at the foot of the Cross; Bunyan arrayed by the three Shining Ones; Bunyan at the House Beautiful; Bunyan in the Valley of Humiliation; Bunyan

in the conflict with Apollyon; Bunyan in Giant Despair's Castle; Bunyan on the Delectable Mountains; Bunyan in the Land Beulah; Bunyan at the River of death. And as a great many persons have gotten the air of their theology more from Milton's "*Paradise Lost*" than from the Bible, so has it been with not a few in respect to their views and impressions of the Christian pilgrimage, as taken at the most impressible period of the mind, heart, and imagination, from the pages of the Pilgrim's Progress. Yet, in this case, the Pilgrim's own course, experience, and theological belief are presented with such singular exactness of fidelity to the delineations in the pages of divine inspiration, that we are perfectly safe in submitting the minds of the youngest children to this blessed influence. It is indeed the sweetest and the best book for children, the most instructive and fascinating, in the English language; and it forms a delightful preparation for the after reading of the Scriptures with a more serene and thoughtful appreciation of their meaning.

Everything in Bunyan's life, before the writing of the Pilgrim's Progress, converges towards and is at length concentrated in the production of that wonderful book. Probably the *Grace Abounding*, as well as the *Pilgrim's Progress*, were written in the prison, as were some other of Bunyan's most remarkable works; but of all his books, the *Pilgrim's Progress* was the one for the production of which God permitted Bunyan to be thrown into prison, and would not suffer him to be brought out till his purpose was accomplished. The grace of God abounding through all the previous life of Bunyan, studied and reviewed with much prayer and meditation, while in that Den on which the Pilgrim says he lighted as he walked through the wilderness of this world, was a discipline by the Divine Spirit preparatory for that work, and the enforced leisure of the Den was the opportunity afforded for it. When he was thrown into prison in 1660 he was only thirty-two years old, as yet too young for such a work as that which was to be the great fruit of his genius; too young also as a Christian, though already so advanced in Christian experience, for the composition of a work that might serve in every respect as a truthful guide to millions for salvation in all after ages.

Only thirty-two years of age, and thus withdrawn, in the very utmost vigour, joy, and pride of manhood, from the whole world and all its temptations, and hidden as in a pavilion of God's grace, though it was a den, a noisome jail, that God might there quietly employ him for his own glory and the world's

good, in that record of the Christian pilgrimage which, outside the prison, there is not the least reason to believe he ever would have traced! The thought of twelve years' imprisonment in a common jail, at such a time of life, is terrible. It would have been dreadful to Bunyan could he have known how long it would be, when the doors closed upon him.

He was thrown into prison for preaching the gospel to the poor, in what was called an unlawful assembly — that is, a meeting for prayer and the reading and hearing of the word of God, not gathered in a church of the Establishment. They were found with their Bibles in their hands, having just engaged in prayer for the divine blessing, and Bunyan was just about to have preached; and for this crime, as it was called, Bunyan was brought before the Justice, after having lain some days in prison, where, he says,

"I begged of God that if I might do more good by being at liberty than in prison, that then I might be set at liberty; but if not, his will be done. And verily at my return I did meet my God sweetly in the prison again, comforting of me, and satisfying me that it was his will and mind I should be there, where I lie waiting the good will of God, to do with me as he pleaseth, knowing that not one hair of my head can fall to the ground without the will of my Father which is in heaven. Let the rage and malice of man be never so great, they can do no more, nor go no further, than God permits them; but when they have done their worst, we know all things shall work together for good to them that love God."

Now the judgment of the Justice, on which Bunyan was returned to prison, from whence he did not come out for twelve years, was just this: —

"You must be had back again to prison, and there lie for three months following; and at three months' end, if you do not submit to go to church and hear divine service, and leave your preaching, you must be banished the realm; and if after such a day as shall be appointed you to be gone, you shall be found in this realm, or be found to come over again without special license from the king, you must stretch by the neck for it, I tell you plainly."

Then Bunyan made answer, and it was as noble an answer to an unrighteous verdict and threat as is to be found in all human history: —

"As to this matter, I am at a point with you; for if were out of the prison today, I would preach the gospel again tomorrow, by the help of God."

Of course Bunyan must remain in prison unless his persecutors would yield,

which it was not likely they would do unless it pleased God to change their mind and heart, or to interpose by his gracious providence, as he really at length in his own good time did interpose, for Bunyan's deliverance. But under this judgment, he lay, year after year, "weighing and pausing, and praising again, the grounds and foundation of those principles for which he thus suffered; having not only at his trial asserted them, but ever since, through all that tedious track of time, examined them in cold blood a thousand times, and found them good." This was his striking language towards the end of those twelve years of imprisonment, defying his judges "to find anything in his writing or preaching to render him worthy of twelve years' imprisonment, or to be hanged or banished for ever, according to their tremendous sentence." He added this solemn declaration, that "rather than violate his faith and principles by consenting that his soul should be governed in any of its approaches to God by the superstitious inventions of this world, putting out his own eyes and committing himself to the blind to lead him, he would lie there still, the Almighty God being his help and shield, and still suffer, if frail life might continue so long, even till the moss should grow upon his eyebrows." Till the moss should grow upon his eyebrows! No doubt the place was damp as it was gloomy, and the moss would have gathered on his brows had they been made of wood or stone; and nothing but the energies of a powerful life, and that too sustained by the grace of God, could have kept Bunyan's health undestroyed, and his body from the grave, through that long and terrible confinement. But by the Spirit and the word the prison was made better to him than a palace, as it had been by the Spirit and the word that his inward agonising conflicts had been made a triumph and a glory.

He describes himself, at the end of twelve complete years of his imprisonment, as still lying in jail, "waiting to see what God would suffer these men to do with him." In truth the *Pilgrim's Progress* answers this question; and in the very next sentence Bunyan goes on, describing his situation and experience in prison, —

"In which condition I have continued with much content through grace, but have met with many turnings and goings upon my heart, both from the Lord, Satan, and my own corruptions; by all which, glory be to Jesus Christ, I have also received, among many things, much conviction, instruction, and understanding. I never find, in all my life, so great an inlet into the word of God as now. Those scriptures that I saw nothing in before, are made in this

place and state to shine upon me. Jesus Christ also was never more real and apparent than now; here I have seen and felt him indeed."

It was such seeing and feeling that prepared him more perfectly for the work for which God was thus dealing with him; and his consolations in Christ were so great that he often said, "Were it lawful I could pray for greater trouble, for the greater comfort's sake."

Bunyan was born at Elstow in the year 1628, of poor and inconsiderable parents, but yet in his own life he recognises the divine hand, in that it pleased God to put it into the hearts of those parents to send their child to school, that he might learn to read and write according to the rate of other poor men's children; but again he says that even that little learning he almost utterly lost through his absorbedness in the vanities, sports, and evil habits of his childhood. But even at nine years of age he thought much of his own guilt; and he says that in his boyhood he had but few equals for cursing, lying, swearing, and blaspheming the holy name of God. Had he gone on in sins he would have been one of the greatest sinners the world ever saw; and until the age of eighteen years, he was actually the ringleader of the boys in all manner of ungodliness. His profaneness especially was so intense and dreadful, that profane and irreligious persons were shocked by it. He stood one day cursing and swearing, and playing the madman beneath a neighbour's shop window, when the woman of the house, though herself, as Bunyan avers, a loose and ungodly wretch, declared that Bunyan's fury of cursing was such that it made her tremble to hear him. She told him that he was the ungodliest fellow for swearing that ever she heard in all her life, and that he was enough to destroy the whole youth of the town, if they did but come in his company. This reproof, so coming, and from such a source, struck Bunyan with a sudden and irresistible conviction and shame. He stood silent, and hung down his head, and wished with all his heart that he might be a little child again, that his father might teach him to speak without this wicked way of swearing. He was now nearly eighteen years old, and seemed hurrying as fast as he could go to destruction. But just at this time God began to snatch him from the ruin of his vices; and the first step towards this reformation was his marriage. "My mercy was," says Bunyan, "to light upon a wife whose father was counted godly." She brought her husband, as their only marriage portion, two books which her father had left her when he died, "*The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven*," and "*The Practice of Piety*."

Sometimes Bunyan and his wife would sit down and read in the two volumes in company. They were very poor, not owning, Bunyan says, so much as a dish or a spoon between them; but yet his marriage was the turning point in his history, and the means of breaking him away from sins that would have been his destruction.

But the first real conviction of sin, the first time he really felt what guilt was, happened on the hearing of a sermon on the sin of Sabbath-breaking. This had been a great sin with him; and under this sermon his conscience was aroused, and he went home with a great burden upon his spirit, believing that the preacher had made that sermon expressly for him. Their, in the midst of a game of cat, he seemed to hear a voice crying into his soul, "Wilt thou leave thy sins, and go to heaven; or have thy sins, and go to hell?" He began to strive to keep all the ten commandments, making that his way of getting to heaven; and the neighbours were so struck with the change that they praised him for it, so that he grew very self-complacent, though all the while utterly ignorant of Jesus Christ, and of the corruptions of his own sinful nature. Yet he felt quite sure "that no man in England could please God better than he."

While in this frame, he one day heard three or four poor women sitting at a door in the sun, and talking about the things of God and heaven. This conversation grew out of an experience of which Bunyan knew nothing; it was to him a new language, and he was confounded. He had deemed himself a religious man, though the idea of a new heart, or of there being any such thing necessary, had not entered into his head. He knew nothing of the conflict in the heart against sin, nor of the power of the Holy Spirit, nor of redemption by the blood of Christ. But these things were the subjects of this conversation, and by it he was much perplexed, astounded, and cast down; and his heart began to shake and to misgive him in regard to his condition, for he perceived that he wanted all the tokens of a truly godly man.

Here was the very beginning of Bunyan's light and life; so true it is that, until enlightened by the Divine Spirit, he that thinketh he knoweth anything, knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know; and so true it is that self-distrust and humility are the beginning of wisdom.

Moreover, here again was visible in Bunyan the heart of the little child, the inward, inborn, and deep simplicity of his nature. Back again he goes to childhood, and waits, like a little child, on these poor women's heavenly

conversation. The pride of his nature just then seemed to be all gone, and the more he went into the company of these poor people, the more he questioned concerning his own condition; and he now found within himself, to his own astonishment, a tenderness of heart, and a fixedness of soul upon the things of the kingdom of heaven, and an openness to scriptural conviction, which prepared him to come to the word of God with a new vision. Every part of the Bible, but especially the epistles of Paul, began now to be sweet and pleasant to him. And now commenced that unequalled intensity and fervour of reading and meditation, in which all the powers of his being were absorbed for years in the study of the scriptures; all the while with importunate prayer to God, that he might know the truth and the way to heaven and glory. He distrusted his own wisdom, so that whatever he met of doctrine or example in others that was too hard for him, he betook himself in earnest prayer to God, feeling that he was himself but a fool, and weaker than a babe.

But at this period it is in Bunyan's life that he enters, and we enter with him, upon a series of years of the most distressing experience. Doubtless God saw that it was all requisite, that no one of these conflicts could be spared, though the sight is sometimes very strange to one looking on, the sight of a child of God permitted to be so terribly afflicted of the devil. As yet he cannot be considered a child of God, but is just finding out, to his amazement, that he is not such, not a Christian, that he knows nothing of true Christian experience. He is just beginning to run from the City of Destruction, and is crying, "Which way shall I flee?"

He was now about nineteen years of age. From this time forward every step was taken by experience, and for the most part without any earthly guide or teacher. God at this time especially suffered no one to lead him. There were wrong tendencies in his own mind, which must be worked out in order to be corrected; there was to be a wrestling with native evils all the way, as well as a conflict with Satan, in order that Bunyan might grow, not in or by the conversation or theology of others, but in the knowledge of his own heart and of the wiles of the great adversary of the soul, by the teachings and influences of the grace of God. Thus the Holy Spirit, by the word, was Bunyan's worked them out with as great originality almost as the apostles themselves; the language of Paul, in the relation of his own experience, being quite applicable to Bunyan's soul: — "Striving according to his working, that worketh in me

mighty;" for mighty indeed did God work with Bunyan. It was severe experience that taught him to trust God's word as God had given it, and to wait upon God in his word, and not upon the impulses of his own soul. This was Bunyan's danger, one of his most natural and hazardous temptations, from the first moment of his setting out from the City of Destruction, that of waiting upon his own powers, and obeying them too implicitly. Bunyan himself, in looking back, saw that he himself, like Gideon, with the experiments of his fleeces, had tempted God when he ought to have believed and ventured upon his word; and therefore did God permit him to be surrounded with enemies and harassed with temptations; for he should have believed his word, and not put an if either upon God's all-seeingness or any of his promises.

It was many months of conflicting experience before Bunyan gained courage to break his mind to those poor people in Bedford, from whom he had gained the first idea of the nature of true piety. When he did speak to them, they at once told Mr. Gilford, their faithful pastor, about his case, who conversed with him, and invited him to the meetings where he was accustomed to converse with others, and where he often gained more knowledge by listening, than he could by inquiries or directions addressed to his own soul. "This holy Mr. Gifford," as Bunyan calls him, was Bunyan's Evangelist in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and he taught Bunyan faithfully for years, and then received him into the visible fold of Christ on earth, the Baptist Church in Bedford, in the year 1653.

For several years before this he had to pass through seasons of inward trial, terrible assaults by the great Tempter, and conflicts between faith and unbelief, in which his only weapons were the word of God and prayer, and which without doubt are described in the passage of Christian through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and the dreadful fight with Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation.

"I saw," says Bunyan, in the review of these things twenty years afterwards, "that as God had in his hand all the providences and dispensations that overtook his elect, so he had his land in all the temptations that they had to sin against him; not to animate them to wickedness, but to choose their temptations and troubles for them, and also to leave them for a time to such things only as might not destroy, but humble them; as might not put them beyond, but lay them in the way of, the renewing of his mercy."

But this beauty and loveliness of God's wisdom in choosing, refining, and purifying his people, Bunyan could not at this time see; and what added to his misery under these besetments of Satan and boilings up of the mire of sin to devour him was, that he found his heart so exceeding hard at times, that though he would have given a thousand pounds for a tear, he could not shed one, and seemed to himself to have no feeling — a very natural result, and almost inevitable, at intervals, of his great excess of feeling; for nature itself could not support such an interminable war.

In the midst of all these evils, let it not be supposed that Bunyan was driven, either by the fiend Apollyon or by his own heart, to the neglect of any spiritual duty or possible means of grace set before him. He attended all the while, with great diligence, on the word of God and prayer, hoping still for mercy; although for the space of a whole year his performance of these particular duties was the occasion of his sharpest distress by reason of these temptations; and nothing can be a more convincing revelation of the anguish of his state, and the intolerableness of these temptations, than the fact that in attending upon the ordinances of God, though he would not be driven from those duties, he was then most of all tortured with blasphemies. Whether hearing the word, or reading it, or engaged in prayer, the enemy of his soul and the morbid terrors of his heart took those very opportunities to trouble him. They stood, as it were, in the very gates of Paradise — in the very lanes through which Bunyan must pass to heaven — and thronged the passages with dreadful faces and with fiery arms. But though all these complicated evils brought his soul into great straits, so that he was laid, as it were, at the mouth of hell, they did never, by reason of God's watchful and sustaining grace, prevail with him to slacken his zeal for heaven and glory, or diminish his importunity in prayer, or turn him away from the sole object of his life, the finding of his Saviour. Nay, in these fierce fires his resolutions heavenward were rather confirmed and purified daily.

This long and terrible season of conflict and darkness was to Bunyan's own soul the Valley of the Shadow of Death, of which he has presented so gloomy and powerful a delineation in the progress of his Pilgrim. A point most manifestly taken from his own experience at this time, is that where he says that he took notice that now poor Christian was so confounded "that he did not know his own voice," and had not the discretion either to stop his ears, or

to know from whence the blasphemies, that seemed uttered out of his own mind, really came.

Furthermore, there is at this period in Bunyan's experience the interesting event of his meeting with the old tattered copy of Martin Luther's "*Commentary on Galatians*," in which, he says, he found his own condition so largely and profoundly handled, as if the book had been written out of his own heart. This was when he was longing much to see some ancient godly man's experience; and indeed it was almost the first human being that had met him to comfort him or direct him aright, except those poor women at Bedford, and "holy Mr. Gifford," their pastor. And Bunyan is enforced to say, that he does prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians excepting the Holy Bible, before all the books that ever he has seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience.

This, we apprehend, is the original of just that beautiful incident recorded in the progress of Christian through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, where, when Christian had travelled in this disconsolate condition some considerable time, he thought he heard the voice of a man as going before him, saying, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." This, doubtless, was Luther's voice; and by it Bunyan perceived that some others who feared God might be in this valley as well as himself, and that God was with them, though in that dark and dismal state; and, therefore, might also be with him, although by reason of the darkness, smoke, flames, and rushing evil creatures, he could not then perceive it. King David had been there also, and Bunyan refers to his experience in the 69th Psalm, when he cried, "Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink; let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the water-flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me." These footprints and voices of Luther and of David were a joy to Bunyan's soul.

And now the storm began to lighten, and the day to break. The water-spouts ceased bursting, and at brief intervals the sun shone down through a bright promise, as through a rift in the thunder-rolling clouds over the waste of waters. "Hints, touches, and short visits of mercy," says Bunyan, "though very sweet at present, yet they lasted not, but, like to Peter's sheet, were of a sudden caught up again to heaven." "But at length," says he, "the temptation

was removed, and I was put into my right mind again, as other Christians were. And whereas, before, I lay continually trembling at the mouth of hell, now methought I was got so far therefrom that I could not, when I looked back, scarce discern it." And now he felt as if he had evidence from heaven of his salvation, with many golden seals thereon, in manifestations of divine grace, all hanging in his sight.

And now indeed he enjoyed sweet disclosures of his Saviour's love and comfort of his promises, and was led from truth to truth by the Spirit of God, and was gaining an experience of grace, which itself again was speedily to be tried so as by fire, and strengthened by renewed temptations. For such was the course of God with this chosen vessel of his grace, as when a workman, with a set of vases intended to be of exquisite rareness and beauty, prepares the figures of his pictures upon them slowly one by one, and carefully completes them; first gives one set of colours, then burns it in; then another set, and burns that; and so on, till all the figures and designs are finished: so the colours that were now fresh in Bunyan's Christian experience must be burnt in; and such was the course of God with him from revelations to temptations, and from temptations to revelations.

During his seasons of conflict and gloom some terrible passages of scripture troubled Bunyan so exceedingly, that he hardly dared come up to them to examine them even in prayer. The passage concerning Esau selling his birthright, and finding no place of repentance, was one of them: which Bunyan at length, by divine grace, was enabled to meet and conquer by that other sweet passage, "My grace is sufficient for thee." How cautiously and modestly he speaks after twenty years, and with what affecting simplicity and beauty, of the meeting of these passages, and the triumph of the promise:

"Truly," says he, "I am apt to think it was of God; for the word of the law and wrath must give place to the word of life and grace, because, though the word of condemnation be glorious, yet the word of life and salvation doth far exceed in glory; and Moses and Elias must both vanish, and leave Christ and his saints alone."

And now, out of this conquest came to Bunyan, as a divine hand with leaves from the tree of life, that other comprehensive promise, on which his soul ought to have rested from the outset: "Him that cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out." "Oh, the comfort I had," says Bunyan, "from this word, 'in

nowise;' as who should say, 'By no means, for nothing whatever he hath done." And in the light, power, and sweetness with which this promise was now revealed to Bunyan, we have the origin and peculiarity of the admirable little work of his, Come, and Welcome, to Jesus Christ — a work written, like the *Pilgrim's Progress* itself, out of his own heart, and produced by this very conflict with Apollyon.

"Oh, what did I see in that blessed 6th of John! 'Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.' If ever Satan and I did strive for any word of God in all my life, it was for this good word of Christ; he at one end, and I at the other. Oh, what work we made! It was for this in John, I say, that we did so tug and strive; he pulled and I pulled, but, God be praised, I overcame him; I got sweetness from it."

And always the sweetness that Bunyan so obtained from the word of God (of which he gives this almost ludicrous account out of the deep vein of humour in his character), with all passages thus fought for, were the source of great power to him, and were put to great use. "They were the nest of honey," as he said afterwards, "in the dead conquered lion."

And now, having got this fortress and vantage-ground in his possession, and a solid comfort in Christ, out of which he could sally forth against his enemies, Bunyan began to take heart so far as to come up and examine both his own sin and those terrible scriptures under which he had so long lain trembling, and afraid even to question them. But his perils and the anguish of his wounds had made him very critical, and carefully and critically did he now look at the nature, both of his own sin, and of those dreadful texts that had well-nigh slain him with despair. And now he found on drawing near to them, and looking them in the face, as a child of God, from the bosom of the promise, that they were not so grim and terrible in reality, but, rightly Understood, were in agreement with the promise, and not against it. So after this thorough and believing examination, the thunder of the tempest was all gone, and only a few big scattered drops now and then fell upon him, though still the very memory of the thunder and the flames was fearful.

And now indeed the hand came to Bunyan with leaves from the tree of life, as he has so sweetly described it in the *Pilgrim's Progress* after Christian's fight with Apollyon, and he was refreshed with heavenly refreshments. He now found Christ made unto his soul, of God, his wisdom, righteousness,

sanctification, and redemption Christ, in all his exaltation and glory, was now the subject of his thoughts, the object of his affections, the life of his soul. He was loosed from his afflictions and irons, his temptations fled away, the dreadful scriptures of God left off troubling him, and he went rejoicing in the grace and love of God. And out of this joy and peace it was, after such long and fearful conflicts, that he gained courage to be at length, in the year 1653, propounded to the Baptist church of Christ in Bedford, by whose members he was received into a fellowship greatly valued by him in the order and ordinances of Christ in the gospel.

"Twas glorious to me," says Bunyan, "to see his exaltation, and the worth and prevalency of all his benefits, and that because now I could look from myself to him, and would reckon that all those graces of God that now were green on me, were yet but like those cracked groats and four-pence-half-pennies that rich men carry in their purses, when their gold is in their trunks at home. Oh, I saw my gold was in my trunk at home, in Christ my Lord and Saviour. Now Christ was all — all my righteousness, all my sanctification, and all my redemption."

These periods were the seasons in which Bunyan gained that knowledge of the scriptures and of the human heart, and of the wiles of the great adversary of souls, and that deep, rich, original, powerful experience in the things of the Spirit of God, which prepared him to write such works as the Pilgrim's Progress; the History of the Town of Mansoul; the Come, and Welcome, to Jesus Christ; and the Jerusalem Sinner Saved. His comfort and joy, as well as his knowledge, he always gained directly from the word of God, ministered by the Holy Spirit in his heart; and in his seasons of darkness and sore conflict, he was always labouring after a resting-place in the word, following hard after God, wrestling in prayer, and though faint, pursuing, still subject to great alternations of feeling, but always following on to know the Lord.

Now all these changeful experiences, thus far related, seem to have characterised the discipline of Bunyan up to a year or more after the time of his uniting with the church, say, up to the year 1655. At this time, the knowledge of his character, and the glowing freshness and power with which he spoke of his failings to his fellow-christians led some of the most experienced and judicious among them to persuade him sometimes to attempt a word of exhortation in their social Christian meetings. The very thought of this at first terrified Bunyan; but after some entreaty he consented to make

the trial, and did begin accordingly, though in much weakness and trembling, in one or two private assemblies. Then by degrees, when some of the more experienced of the brethren went into the country to teach, they took Bunyan along with them; and as his gifts were more and more developed and known in these little exercises, the church at length prevailed with him to consent to a more particular appointment to the work of the ministry; and so, after solemn prayer with fasting, having been manifestly prepared by the Holy Spirit for such a work, he was more particularly called forth and appointed to a more ordinary and public preaching of the word. He was conscious of a call of God within him, by the Divine Spirit and by the holy scriptures, to which he yielded, and by which he was guided. Yet he was at this very time greatly distressed with the fiery darts of the wicked one concerning his own eternal state; though this temptation and experience only served to quicken his compassion for other souls, and, instead of turning him away from the endeavour to alarm and save them, greatly animated him in that work, pressed him onwards, and gave him power in it.

In this way Bunyan went on preaching without molestation for the space of five or six years, till the month of November, 1660. On the 12th of that month the hand of state and church tyranny was laid upon him, and he was cast into prison for presuming to preach without prelatical ordination, and to pray without the prayer-book. God now had more for him to do in prison than he had ever done in the open air; he was now to be a greater preacher than ever, though in a very different way. The period previous to the year 1660 might be called the chronology of Bunyan's experiences; the period after that year the chronology of his works. The Whole history might be set down as in a tablet, thus, beginning with the starting-point from the City of Destruction:

1628. The natural man, John Bunyan, was born.

1646. He was married, and his awakening began.

1647. An external reformation from his vices for about a year.

1648. A great year. His first lessons from the company of poor and godly women sitting in the sun. His intense study of the whole Bible commenced. His encounter with the books and men of the Ranters; his trials about faith, and his temptation to work a miracle. His year's

study to find the passage in the Apocrypha. His many months of fear, fainting, and fire, and then the first disclosure of his mind to those poor women of Bedford, and their introduction of him to "holy Mr. Gifford."

1649. His first view of the love of Christ, followed by the great storm of about a year's continuance, and the temptation as to the being of a God.

1650. The meeting with Luther, the deliverance into the liberty of Christ, and the light of the word, followed by the temptation to sell Christ, for the space of a year.

1651. The conflict and agony after this temptation.

1652. The gradual and triumphant deliverance therefrom.

1653. The union with the visible church of Christ.

1654. Great conflicts renewed for three-fourths of a year, with sicknesses, despondencies, and triumphs.

1655. His ordination by the church to the work of the gospel ministry.

1656./1657. His preaching from the experience of guilt and of fire, as a man in chains to men in chains, out of compassion and alarm for souls.

1658/1659/1660. His preaching of Christ's grace and righteousness from the fire of love and the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1660. His lighting upon the Den in the prison of Bedford, and his discipline from God there, preparatory to the Dream of the Pilgrim's Progress.

And now was Bunyan hidden in God's pavilion, and left alone with God. Now he was at leisure for just as much of divine meditation as a heart filled with the Spirit would thirst after. Now he could say, My feet stand upon Mount Zion. My body, indeed, is in prison, but my mind is free to study Christ, and the unsearchable riches of his infinite, everlasting love. Mine enemies may draw their bolts and bars around me, but by faith I rise above

them, and soar beyond the stars; they cannot fetter the wings of faith and hope; they cannot bind me from my God.

It was not for the want of the circumstances of gloom and suffering that Bunyan's prison years were so happy to him and so glorious for the world; nay, if he had remained in those circumstances a little longer, doubtless life would have given way under the pressure of evil: but it was because of the abundant ministration of the wondrous love of God; it was because, by the revelations of Christ to his soul, "as the sufferings of Christ abounded in him, so his consolation also abounded by Christ." That is a great text realised Bunyan concerning the God of all comfort, "Who comforteth us all in our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." So was Bunyan comforted. In all his life he never had such a period of continued, and sometimes ecstatic revelations and experiences, of light, peace, and joy. In many respects it was, almost all the way, as the Land Beulah, beyond the Valley of the Shadow of Death, out of the reach of Giant Despair, Doubting Castle not so much as to be seen, the sun shining night and day, the air sweet and pleasant, continually the birds singing, every day the flowers blooming. The existence of such a period of spiritual enjoyment might have been surely inferred from the nature of the works known to have been the fruit of Bunyan's imprisonment; the Pilgrim's Progress itself could have come only from a serenity and sweetness of religious experience, shining, with the play of celestial rainbows intermingled, like an evening sunset after a storm. And so Bunyan says, in his own rugged and homely but expressive verses: —

*"The prison very sweet to me
Hath been since I came here;
And so would also hanging be,
If God would there appear.
Here dwells good conscience, also peace,
Here be my garments white;
Here, though in bonds, I have release
From guilt, which else would bite."*

But with all this he had an intermingling of many "turnings and goings upon his heart" from Satan and his own corruptions — those seven abominations that he speaks of, beginning with unbelief; the Diabolonians that would still dwell in the town of Mansoul — by which things he was continually

humbled. It was still, as of old, his every day's portion "to be let into the evil of my own heart, and still made to see such a multitude of corruptions and infirmities therein, that it hath caused hanging down of the head under all my gifts and attainments."

While Bunyan was thus suffering for Christ, yet enjoying Christ's presence and writing from the fullness of his love in prison, a great multitude of his nonconformist brethren were passing through the fires without. It was a period of peril, persecution, and great tribulation for such as kept an independent conscience and were faithful to God's word. The Act of Uniformity being passed the 13th of May, 1662, all ministers were ejected from their livings, and silenced, who would not conform to the established hierarchy, who would not declare their unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained and prescribed in and by the *Book of Common Prayer*, administration of the sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies of the Church. Manton, Owen, Bates, Calamy, Howe, and Baxter, were among the number of those who, in this grand struggle for principle, liberty, and the honour of Christ, as Mr. Orme most justly describes it, would not submit to the decrees of an ecclesiastical despotism, nor, in the sacred matter of prayer and supreme obedience to Christ, be subject to ordinances after the commandments and doctrines of men. They obeyed the inspired injunction, and, at whatever cost, stood fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.

After this career of bigotry and cruelty, on the part of church and state, had been pursued to such an extent that it seemed as if the kingdom were given up of God to Moloch, there came forth most unexpectedly, in 1672, a royal declaration dispensing with the penal laws against nonconformists. The twelve years' experience of hierarchical cruelty began with Bunyan's release; and the one great event in the kingdom during that period, though then utterly unknown to any mortal in it save John Bunyan, and perhaps two or three obscure fellow-prisoners, had been the writing of the *Pilgrim's Progress* — an event brought about through the instrumentality of those twelve years' persecutions!

Bunyan was forty-four years of age when he was released from prison in September, 1672; and the next most memorable event of his life, after the *Pilgrim's Progress*, was that of the production and publication of the *Holy*

War. This second great original work of Bunyan's genius and piety was published in 1682, the year in which the *Pilgrim's Progress* had reached its eighth edition. The strongly-marked originality of his genius is quite as striking in the *Holy War* as it is in the *Pilgrim's Progress*. Indeed, that work has no prototype in any language, nor any approximation to it. No dream, or vision, or fancy, or artful thought of mortal mind recorded, ever bore any resemblance to it. Its personifications, its characters, its scenery, the warriors, banners, shields, and music of its contending armies, its changes of victory and defeat, are altogether peculiar, and yet perfectly natural. There is in it an exquisite mixture of solemnity and humour, of terror and of pathos. Its tracery of inward experiences, of immortal hopes and fears, of all the events and feelings of the Christian conflict, portrayed by the different faculties of the mind and states of the heart, set in human shape and living and acting before us, and all as the machinery and advancement of a great spiritual epic, are things of which we know no other example in any literature.

In truth, it is the pilgrimage from the City of Destruction to the City of Emmanuel reproduced under another form, as different from that of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, almost, as the Apocalypse of John is different from the Psalms of David, or as Edwards' "*History of Redemption*" is different from Doddridge's "*Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*." And yet it is the same pilgrimage, the same work traced, of the conversion and sanctification of fallen man. In the *Holy War* it is an abstraction of the race personified, and redemption carried on, the supernatural in the poem being brought into the foreground; in the *Pilgrim's Progress* it is an individual selected, and toiling upwards from earth to heaven, nearly the whole space and interest being taken up with his movements. In both the *Holy War* and the *Pilgrim's Progress* there is a combination of theology and experience most beautiful and instructive; but in the *Holy War* it is more the theological form, God working in you; in the *Pilgrim's Progress* it is more the experimental form, man receiving and working under God's grace.

In the *Holy War* Bunyan shows himself a skilful meta-physician as well as theologian, in his apportionment of the provinces and operation of the understanding, the will, the conscience, the affections, in the profoundest work of metaphysics the mind of man can ever be engaged in studying, that is, the process of the new creation of the soul in Christ Jesus. And indeed, the

complications of the allegory are so deep, as it proceeds, that the ingenuity even of Bunyan's mind must have been tasked to sustain it; and yet, amidst all the minute threads of the web he is weaving, he is evidently never at a loss, never labouring, but always at ease; all is as spontaneous, as ready, as apparently unpremeditated, as Bunyan's own personal heart-work of prayer and praise. The book in this view is astonishing. Dealing as it does with such multitudinous abstractions, they are nevertheless presented and act their parts, not as by any elaborate artificial arrangement, but as naturally as the characters in the *Pilgrim's Progress* itself. It is a work that must have cost much greater labour than that more simple and obvious allegory; but we have no revelation or record of the manner in which its conception or its execution went on in the mind of the writer. There is an exquisite vein of quiet humour, wit, and satire running through it, especially through the last half, in the disclosure of the character and fate of the various crafty Diabolonians figuring in the town of Mansoul.

There are in the course of this work four separate periods and subjects: —

First, the fall and ruin of the town by the wiles of the devil;

Second, the conquest of it by Emmanuel, which is the work of conversion;

Third, the falling away and backsliding of the town, and its wretched state in that condition; and,

Fourth, its recovery by divine grace, after long misery, and its final possession by the Prince.

In all these stages of the work there is wonderful skill and beauty in tracing both the law of sin and of death in our corrupt nature, and the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus — the soul dead in trespasses and sins, and the workings of truth and grace to redeem it. What can be more admirable than the delineation of the various tactics of Diabolus and his captains, and their management after the town was taken; their putting Captain Prejudice to keep guard at Ear-gate, and sixty men under him called Deaf-men; their imprisonment and darkening of the understanding; debauching of the conscience, and appointing of new laws and officers; their pride in their two great guns, High-mind and Heady; and the terrible armour of proof provided by Diabolus for the inhabitants of the town, from the headpiece to the hand-

weapons. The account of the Recorder, Conscience, after the town was taken, with the terrible noises with which he still made the whole town to shake when his fits were on him, is a fine passage. And when Emmanuel had laid siege to the town and was about to take it, the promises of reformation proposed by Diabolus if he would draw off his forces, and afterwards the conditions of submission drawn out by Mr. Loath-to-stoop, with the attitudes of that man, are equally admirable. So likewise are the judicial trials of Incredulity, Atheism, Hard-heart, Lustings, and others, the mayor, aldermen, and burgesses of the town while it was in Diabolus' possession.

One of the most instructive satirical passages in the whole book is that of the enlistment of Tradition, Human-wisdom, and Man's-invention in the army of Emmanuel, when his captains came to recover the town. These fellows came crossing over the country, and proper men they were, and men of courage and skill to appearance; and Boanerges being at first much taken with them, they were made captains under him in the Prince's army: but in one of the very first brisk skirmishes, old Will-be-will, under Diabolus, out of the town, took them prisoners. Whereupon, when they had been put in ward and examined, the Giant Diabolus asked them if they were willing to serve him against their former captain. They then told him plainly that "they did not so much live by religion as by the fates of fortune, and that since his worship was willing to entertain them, they would most certainly be willing to serve him." There never was penned a more masterly hit at the folly of throwing the support of religion upon the testimony of human science, tradition, and mere external evidence.

During the last years of his life, and indeed from the time of his release out of prison, and his entrance on the full responsibility of his pastorship to the period of his death, Bunyan's labours, both as a preacher and writer, were incessant and exceedingly great. He mingled the vocations of a pastor and an author more successfully and laboriously than any other man, except Baxter. "Here's sixty pieces of his labours," Charles Doe quaintly remarks at the end of the catalogue of his books, published and unpublished; "and he was sixty years of age": besides, "he might have added with Paul in regard to no small region of country, "what cometh upon me from without, the care of all the churches;" for in the care and love of the people Bunyan had a diocese larger than a bishop's, preaching whenever he had opportunity. A willing happy

mind bore him on in all these labours; for his was like a seraph's fire, and his ardent heavenly affections were as wings to his mind, instead of his mind having to labour in sustaining his affections. Preaching or writing, it was all with him a labour of love.

He often visited London, and in the region round about Bedford he was indefatigable in his circuits and preachings of the gospel. "At all times," it is a striking and true remark of Mr. Phillip, "his character and talents commanded the veneration of all rabbles, except the rabble magistracy of the Restoration." We wonder at the treatment of men like Baxter by such creatures as Chief-justice Jeffries; but such creatures would have spit upon Jesus Christ himself had he been arraigned before them, and they supported by the countenance and applause of a crowned monarch. We have said that for the most part, in the evening of Bunyan's life, the enemy was as still as a stone; yet, persecutors and informers are said to have often searched for him, especially about the close of Charles' reign, but God preserved him. His reputation as a preacher and writer had grown so great, that in London the place of preaching would not hold half the crowds that flocked to hear him. His friendly and affectionate admirer and brother minister, Charles Doe, says that he had seen above twelve hundred persons to hear him at a morning lecture on a working-day in dark winter-time, and three thousand at a town's-end meeting-house, where he had almost to go upon men's shoulders to get into the pulpit.

Bunyan's style, so far as it was not a tendency born in him, grew out of his habitual and exclusive familiarity with the English Bible. It is a triumphant example of the power of that one book, if the Spirit of God goes with it, to educate and arm the mind. Bunyan thought nothing of this; it never entered into his head to imagine while he was studying the Bible as for his life, with such intense, incessant, protracted, and fiery earnestness, that he was thus acquiring a native mastery over the purest forms of the English language, such as the foremost minds in the nation might envy. He sought an infinitely higher object; but seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all other things were added to him. While the spirit of the Bible took possession of his inmost being, the idiomatic beauty of its English translation entered into his soul, and attended every movement, every expression of his thoughts and feelings; it fell upon his imagination as a mantle, it was diffused around

his mind as an atmosphere: he found in it a dialect exactly suited to the simplicity of his nature.

And, indeed, a childlike being, such as he was, will always speak and write in simple sweet Saxon, the language of home and of childhood. Childlike natures in literature have ever done this, as in the cases of Goldsmith, Cowper, and Burns. Bunyan's style is a thing of such unconscious ease, propriety, and unelaborate grace — the thought to which he wishes to give expression he conveys in such plain unassuming words, intelligible by all classes, with such purity of conversational phrases, and such fine natural idioms — that it flows like the music and turnings of a running brook, along which you are wandering in a green Pasture, or among the woods in spring. Besides this, his language has at times no small degree of imaginative power, and his pages are sometimes flashing with the quick and graphic light of whole pictures presented in a single sentence.

Bunyan was only thirty-two years of age when he was thrown into prison. He must have been somewhere about the fortieth year of his life when he composed the Pilgrim's Progress; and he was probably about fifty-four years of age when he wrote the Holy War — a work which develops a fire of imagination and invention undiminished, a most profound knowledge of the human heart under the workings of divine grace, and the same simplicity and purity of style characterising all his productions.

The Jerusalem Sinner Saved, which is one of his best minor works, was one among the numerous publications of the last year of his life, in 1688, although he had preached the substance of it many years and many times before. That work is the only one in which he illustrates his subject by a reference to the exceeding sinfulness of his own early life.

"I infected," says he, "all the youth of the town where I was born with all manner of youthful vanities. The neighbours counted me so; my practice proved me so; wherefore Christ Jesus took me first, and taking me first, the contagion was much allayed all the town over. When God made me sigh, they would hearken, and inquiringly say, What is the matter with John? They also gave their various opinions of me; but, as I said, sin failed and cooled as to his full career. When I went out to seek the bread of life, some of them would follow, and the rest be put into a muse at home. Yea, almost the town, at first, at times would go out to hear at the place where I found good; yea, young and old for a while had some reformation on them; also some of them, perceiving

that God had mercy on me, came crying to him for mercy too."

From beginning to end this sovereignty and fullness of the divine mercy, by which the Redeemer delights to save "the biggest sinners," whomsoever he will, was a favourite subject with Bunyan. No wonder that it was, for the glory of God's sovereign grace had never been more remarkably displayed than in the example of Bunyan's own conversion. The power of Bunyan, both as a preacher and a writer, like that also of Luther, lay in his own deep experience of the things of God. It was thus that he knew so thoroughly God's word, and had the comfort of such immutable certainty in it. "When a man has this certainty," says Luther, "he has overcome the Serpent: but if he be doubtful of the doctrine, it is for him very dangerous to dispute with the devil." Bunyan's disputes with the devil drove him continually to God's word, and then God's word prepared him and gave him the victory in his conflicts with the devil. Bunyan could say with Luther,

"I have grounded my preaching upon the literal word; he that pleases may follow me; he that will not may stay. I call upon St. Peter, St. Paul, Moses, and all the saints, to say whether they ever fundamentally comprehended one single word of God without studying it over and over and over again."

Again, Luther says — and the passage is interesting set over against the same experience of Bunyan —

"I did not learn my divinity at once, but was constrained by my temptations to search deeper and deeper; for no man without trials and temptations can attain a true understanding of the holy scriptures. St. Paul had a devil that beat him with fists, and with temptations drove him diligently to study the holy scripture. I had hanging on my neck the pope, the universities, all the deep-learned, and the devil; these hunted me into the Bible, wherein I sedulously read, and thereby, God be praised, at length attained a true understanding of it. Without such a devil we are but only speculators of divinity, and according to our vain reasoning, dream that so and so it must be, as the monks and friars in monasteries do. The holy scripture of itself is certain and true; God grant me grace to catch hold of its just use."

The vein of deep genuine humour that runs through Bunyan's character and writings, was the feature in which he greatly resembled Luther. That vein is visible sometimes even in the most solemn of his works; and how truly has he said in explanation of it —

*"Some things are of that nature as to make
One's fancy chuckle while his heart doth ache."*

It was the combination of an aching heart and a humorous fancy that produced the comic ballad of "John Gilpin;" yet, had not the author been known, who would not have denied the possibility that such a piece could have been written by Cowper? The union of genuine rich humour with deep piety, and the chastened spontaneous use of it under the guidance of a just judgment, are among the rarest manifestations of intellectual power.

Bunyan was also a poet. What else, indeed, are the *Pilgrim's Progress* and the *Holy War*, but true and noble poems? But even in the poetical form, and in effusions almost unpremeditated, the mind of this remarkable man exhibited a command of thought, imagery, and language, with a sweetness and nobleness of feeling, and a sense of rugged harmony, which, cultivated with one half the assiduity and fervour bestowed by Wordsworth upon the training and enriching of his imaginative and meditative faculties, would have made a mighty poet. Indeed, there were fathomless depths of beauty in Bunyan's soul, beauty of thought, beauty of feeling, beauty of natural language; and what was better than all, no consciousness of it whatever, nor attempt after it, no more than a bird, cutting the air with its wings, is conscious of its movements, or seeks to show its plumage. And the melodies that fell from him were such as to remind us of his own exquisitely beautiful description of the music heard by Christiana and her companions from the birds and the happy shepherd's boy in the Valley of Humiliation.

During the last year of his life, in 1686, Bunyan is said to have published six volumes of his writings — an industry that must have been produced by his foresight of impending calamities, and his earnest desire to get as much truth before the people as he could while the times of quiet lasted. But the great and incessant labour thus occasioned must have exhausted his strength, and prepared his frame for the attack of that sudden disease by which his life was terminated. In the midst of this activity in preaching and publishing, he was called upon to go to Reading on a mission of reconciliation between an offended father and an anxious son. From this labour of harmony and love, in which he was successful, he returned to London on horseback in the rain; and on arriving at the house of his friend Mr. Strudwick, was seized with a violent fever. The time had come when Bunyan himself must realise that last scene

through which the imagination of the dreamer had conducted the children of God in so enchanting a manner in the *Pilgrim's Progress*. The fear of death is quite taken away in his beautiful descriptions of the passing of Christiana and her children over the river; and just so, when he himself came to pass over, the gloom was all gone.

Bunyan had been twice married during his own pilgrimage. His first wife he himself attended down to the River of Death, and witnessed, it can hardly be doubted, so sweet a departure of her spirit, that it may have been her experience, as well as his own confidence in Christ, which dictated the bright closing scenes of the Second Part of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. God gave to him his first wife to be with him in his setting out from the City of Destruction, and at the Slough of Despond, and in his conflicts with Apollyon, and his passage through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and in all his severe temptations up to the earliest exercise of his ministry. The same kind and watchful Providence allotted to him a second wife, to act that noble part recorded of her in the processes of his trial with such high, heroic courage and Christian firmness, and to bless and comfort him in his imprisonment, and to share in the happiness of his release and the success of his labours. But now he seemed about to die alone; though surrounded by friends, yet away from his beloved family. The time had come when he too must go down to the river.

There is a collection of his dying thoughts and sayings. They are certainly his thoughts, whether uttered in his last illness, or expressed in his previous life. But we would rather choose, for describing, the picture of his dying moments, a few of the sweet realities recorded at the close of his immortal allegory, as attendant on the death of the righteous who die in the Lord. Indeed, nothing could give a more correct view of Bunyan's dying than his own account of the pilgrim Standfast in the River of Death.

The day drew on that he must be gone, for the whole of his illness was but little more than a week's duration, and it ended the last day of August, 1688.

"So the road was full of people to see him take his journey. But behold, all the banks beyond the river were full of horses and chariots, which were come down from above to accompany him to the city gate. Now, there was a great calm at that time in the river, wherefore, when he was about half way in, he stood awhile and talked to his companions that had waited upon him thither;

and he said, 'This river has been a terror to many; yea, the thoughts of it also have frightened me. Now, methinks, I stand easy; my foot is fixed upon that on which the feet of the priests that bare the ark of the covenant stood, while Israel went over this Jordan. Cold indeed are the waters, but the thoughts of all that awaits me at the other side are as a glowing coal at my heart. I see myself now at the end of my journey; my toilsome days are ended. I am going to see that head that was crowned with thorns, and that face that was spit upon for me. I have formerly lived by hearsay and faith; but now I go where I shall live by sight, and shall be with Him in whose company I delight myself. I have loved to hear my Lord spoken of, and wherever I have seen the print of his shoe in the earth, there I have coveted to set my foot too. His name has been to me as a civet-box, yea, sweeter than all perfumes. His voice to me has been most sweet, and his countenance I have more desired than they that have most desired the light of the sun. His words I did use to gather for my food, and for antidotes against my faintings. 'He has held me, and hath kept me from mine iniquities; yea, my steps have been strengthened in his way.'"

"Now, while he was thus in discourse, his countenance changed, his 'strong man bowed under him;' and after he had said, 'Take me, for I am come unto Thee,'" the Lord took him, and he ceased to be seen of men.

"But glorious it was to see how the open region was filled with horses and chariots, with trumpeters and pipers, with singers and players on stringed instruments, to welcome the pilgrims as they went up, and followed one another in at the beautiful Gate of the City. And over it was written in letters of gold,

**'BLESSED ARE THEY THAT DO HIS COMMANDMENTS
THAT THEY MAY HAVE RIGHT TO THE TREE OF LIFE,
AND MAY ENTER IN THROUGH THE GATES INTO THE CITY.'"**

GEORGE B. CHEEVER, D.D.
NEWTON PLACE, GLASGOW,
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