

The Baptist Pilgrimage to Bunyan Land.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE BAPTIST WORLD CONGRESS, ON ELSTOW GREEN, JULY 19th, 1905, BY

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Nothing could be more in keeping with this great gathering of the Baptists of the world than that we should visit this Elstow Green, walk by the side of the river Ouse, with its green banks, look at the "tempting stile that leads to Byepath Meadow," gaze on the "delicate plain called Ease," and catch some glimpses of the land on which grew into greatness our own John Bunyan, a man of consummate genius, heroic fidelity to righteousness, flaming zeal for God, sweet serenity of soul, and triumphant faith in the love and mercy of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

To Baptists no spot in old England is more sacred than this—not Stratford-on-Avon, with its memories of the myriad-minded poet of the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth, William Shakespeare; not the Jordans, rich in association with that noble-souled patriot-statesman the founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn; not even Chalfont St. Giles, where that other great Puritan Baptist, the secretary of Oliver Cromwell, John Milton, sang the sublime and regal strains of "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained."

For Bunyan was our Baptist faith incarnate—in its deep inwardness and heroic utterance, and still more heroic suffering, in its vehement and utter repudiation of all priestism and unreality, in its ringing emphasis on purity of conduct and in the measureless value of its ever-increasing service to mankind. Baptist ideas embodied; Baptist principles demonstrated in obedience to the King of Kings; the Baptist displayed, aggressive, patient, vocal and victorious. Personalities are the great forces of history. They create. They re-shape the life of the world. They speak to their own day, and being dead they still speak. The arrival of a new personality is the advent of a new force, the dawn of a new epoch, and amongst the new men brought on to the stage of serious action by Puritanism, the most remarkable, all things considered, was John Bunyan, a man whose faith and fortitude, conviction and courage, devotion and devoutness, sufferings and victory, we celebrate by our gathering here this day.

THE TRUE KEY FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF HIS LIFE.

He places it in our hands himself, in the pathetic and soul-stirring autobiography known all over the world as "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners." There we have Bunyan painted by his own hand. The title is Bunyan in a line; the man sketched in a sentence. It takes us at once to the kernel of the book, and to the beating heart of the man. By the grace of God he is what he is—"grace" revealed to a man who knew and felt more acutely than he felt anything else, that he was a sinner, that he deserved not favour, but punishment, not pardon for his sins, but condemnation, not life but death. That is the marvel of his experience to himself, and the explanation of the man and his career to us. He, a guilty sinner, has been met, conquered, soothed, healed, redeemed by the wholly unmerited favour, the undeserved and overflowing love of God. He has broken the law, his sins appal him. He feels he deserves the everlasting burnings, but God forgives him, fully, freely, and assures him that He is "able," "able" to save him from his sins.

So he comes to the Cross; and the strings that fastened his burden upon him are loosed; and the load slips away from his shoulders into the sepulchre, and he is a free man in Christ Jesus; a miracle of forgiveness is wrought, his soul is filled with wondering and adoring love, tears run down his cheeks, and a new song fills his mouth with thanksgiving and praise. He is reconciled to God, at peace with Him, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Grace abounding to the chief of sinners," is a superlative classic in literature, it belongs, by the confession of the foremost witnesses, to the "literature of power"; it is also a gracious aid to the devout life, but it is more, it is the history of a soul in its search for peace, for forgiveness, for oneness with God, for real religion, it is the record, traced by a master of the spiritual life, of the rise and progress of religion in the soul; it is an offering of gratitude and affection laid at the feet of the Great Physician for the healing of a man sick unto death.

That is the dearest fact in this new man's experience; grace has abounded to the chief of sinners. That is the beginning of his new life. That experience of the grace of God is as determinative as it is initial.

(1) No baptism in water is permissible before it or without it. Such baptism is an illusion and a snare. It is contrary to the will of Christ, to the spirit of New Testament religion and common sense. That must be first which is first. We may not alter God's order; we must follow it. "Now," writes Bunyan, "he that believeth in Jesus Christ hath richer and better than that (of baptism in water), viz., is dead to sin and lives to God; by Him he hath the heart, power and doctrine of baptism. All then that he wanteth is but the sign, the shadow, the outward circumstance thereof." The reality in the soul must take precedence of the symbol. (2) No Church mem-

bership is permissible without that reality. It menaces the Church's purity; confuses its witness, and hinders its progress. (3) No ministry of the Word should be undertaken without conscious discipleship to Christ; culture, genius, gifts may help, but the experience of grace is the primary qualification. Real religion is personal and inward. Effective religion is experimental. The message for all is "Ye may be born again." The qualification for baptism and for fellowship with the Church of Christ is "Ye must be born again."

Although we Baptists do not agree with all that Bunyan taught, we stand firmly by these essentials. (1) The primary place he assigns to personal and individual experience of God, of His grace, of His love and power in all things appertaining to the religious life; (2) the necessity for a "regenerate" Church membership, or what Bunyan calls "a converted state," of a serious quest for the deepest and highest things of the soul and of God; (3) and the out-and-out repudiation of all ceremonialism as religion, or as having any vital connection with religion. We refuse to yield an inch to the authority of the priest, the tyranny of a hierarchy and the substitution of symbols and ritual for faith and love, for doing justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with God. Here on this Green we declare our faith, renew our covenant and offer ourselves anew to our Redeeming Lord.

But Bunyan never allows us to forget that though he is exalted to "the heavenlies", by the grace of God,

HE STILL HAS HIS ROOT IN THE COMMON SOIL.

belongs to the common people who mend pots and pans, and finds his sphere of work amongst and on behalf of the people. He reminds us of Shakespeare in the splendid march of his mind and the largeness of his literary gifts, yet he was a man of the common folk. He belonged to them. He sprang up amongst them, gained his experience in their midst, knew their woes and their wants, and graduated as Carlyle would phrase it, in that best university, the university of the world. He had his place amongst the rank and file of humanity, and understood them because he loved them, and wrote for them with captivating charm, and spoke to them with conquering power, because he understood them. He frankly tells us that "for his descent, it was of a low and inconsiderable generation; my father's house being of that rank that is meanest and most despicable of all the families of the land." His father was a black smith, and his mother a peasant woman who died before he reached the age of sixteen. When he married it was to a woman who had "not so much household stuff as a dish or a spoon," but she was rich in faith and in gracious ministry to her husband, and with the aid of a godly woman and John Gifford the Bedford pastor, led him to the Church of the people where he was taught—"not to take any truth on trust as from this or that, or any other man, but to cry mightily to God that he would convince us of the reality thereof and set us down therein, by His own Spirit in the Holy Word." Then he was apprenticed to, and qualified for, his life-long service of the people, with the effect, as Mark Rutherford puts it, that "for more than two hundred years he has been mainly the beloved interpreter of their religion to the common folk."

He is one of the most eminent of saints, an expert of the highest life, a master-Christian. He is a teacher and preacher, working wonders, beyond many of his contemporaries. He is the "Poet of Puritanism," endowed with luxuriant imagination, a strong dramatic instinct, buoyant humour, and able to make the inward things of the spirit actual and living. He is the "historian of the human soul," of the fierce fight between God and Satan for the solitary beleaguered human spirit; all the battalions of wickedness led against the armies of the All-Holy for that unspeakable prize. He is all passion for union with God; warning man of Apollyon, and bidding him fight all unfeared, with his face to the foe, and a knowledge that he has no armor for his back; comforting him by urging him to pluck the key of promise from his bosom and open forthwith the gates of Doubting Castle and march into the land of the free; cheering him as he comes to the edge of the cold river of death with the vision of the shining ones on the other side.

Hence the common people have loved him and do love him still. They called him "Bishop Bunyan," risked their liberty as they listened to the gracious words that proceeded from his mouth, as they stealthily gathered in woods of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, and later on crowded at early morning the places where he preached the unsearchable riches of Christ. And since his departure, successive generations of the people have followed the inspired lead of this Greatheart, as he has led them, with speech simple and strong, pure, and undefiled, from the City of Destruction, through the wicket gate, to the Interpreter's House, and on by the Valley of Humiliation until they have arrived in the land that is afar off and seen the King in His beauty.

Into that success also we have come. We, too, are of the people and with the people. Our message and service are for the people. Our goal is their salvation, and we seek to reach it with them and by them. Others may find their work in a special class or sec-

tion of society, the cultured or the ignorant, the white or black. We cannot. I heard a great preacher of another denomination declare that their mission was to the cultured class in society. I thanked God I was not in a company with so restricted a work. We do not work for a section or a fragment. Our principles forbid it. It is to the indestructible human spirit we call, and for it we minister. Our business is with man, as man; the whole man; man in the variety of his interests and uttermost fullness of his development. Shame on us, if we become narrow in our sympathies, unsympathetic with the poor and oppressed, indifferent to the woes of the toiling masses. It would discredit our traditions. Bunyan would rise up in the judgment and condemn us.

For that we need not only Bunyan's experience of the grace of God, full and broad sympathy with man, but also his

INVINCIBLE PASSION FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Bunyan was a prisoner for Jesus Christ, because he belonged to Jesus Christ. He must go to prison because he is Jesus Christ's bondsman. He cannot keep out. Righteousness is sovereign. It must reign, in the least as well as in the greatest things. There can be no paltering with error, no temporising. He must obey; and he does, it without fuss and without noise, simply, naturally, inevitably. He says, as if he were uttering an axiom, "Where I cannot obey actively, there I am willing to lie down and to suffer what they shall do unto me." But it is said, "You ought to obey the laws of civilized communities. It is anarchy to put individual opinion and right against those of the majority." "Well," he hero simply says, "I will not dispute the point with you. You must hang me or shoot me." There is infinite comfort in that. A man is in heaven when he can say "You may hang me or shoot me, my neck is fixed."

So bravely and cheerfully to prison he goes. In prison he stays—one year, five years, aye, ten years, and when he is told that he must abidethere or cease preaching Christ, he calmly says he will stay in prison till the moss grows on his eyes, rather than cease his soul in the things which concern the salvation of men.

By many infallible proofs Bunyan belongs to the heroes of God. He is a true man, faithful to his vocation, loyal to eternal fact, bravely standing for the right and the true at all hazards to himself. Great as he was in grace, and few there are amongst the saints of God who take higher rank, originally, he was in genius, and, according to Lord Macaulay, he is one of the only two men produced in England in the seventeenth century who could claim that distinction, the other being John Milton; great as he is as an author, having produced one of the greatest works in English literature of "universal popularity"—before having given us the other—he is greatest of all in the fine qualities of his character, in his unswerving allegiance to truth, his passion for righteousness, his bold and fearless hazard for what he felt to be his duty to God.

It is to what we are called today with a clarion voice. God calls us. His summons falls on our ears. His mandate is final, and must be obeyed, and as we look at John Bunyan, we pray the God of Bunyan to fire us with Bunyan's invincible passion for righteousness, and to keep us faithful and true as he was, even unto death.

There are two religions in this country today, as there were in the days of Bunyan—

THE RELIGION OF ARCHBISHOP LAUD AND THE RELIGION OF JOHN BUNYAN.

Laud was the son of a Reading clothier, and hated to be reminded of his descent; Bunyan was the child of a blacksmith, and was too much of a man to attempt to ignore it. Laud was wily as a Jesuit, slippery as an eel, crafty and designing as a priest; Bunyan was a man of settled convictions, direct and clear speech, and pure conduct. Laud was dishonest and cruel, covetous of place and power, and to get them would cringe before the king and his satellites; Bunyan was unstained in character, manly, and gentle, dead to fame and love of power, and headless of the fates of magistrates and judges. Laud was sacerdotal, superstitious, and Papist in all except the acknowledgment of the supremacy of the Pope. Bunyan was a Puritan, a hater of sin and sins, of falsehood and greed, a man who feared God and the eternal penalties of wrong and sought for a holy life in union with God as his chief joy.

As are the men, so are the religions. The Laudian religion is sacerdotal and outward, the religion of Bunyan is non-priestly, anti-priestly, and inward. That coerced the conscience of man, sought to triumph over Puritanism by the aid of the power of the magistrate, punished those who would not yield to it, slit ears, cut off noses, and flung men into prison. This glorified the grace of God, protested against the acceptance of man's authority in matters of religion, and claimed freedom for all to worship God.

Bunyan died in 1688 on Snow-hill; London. It was the

DAWNING OF THE ERA OF LIBERTY.

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