

Pliable is delighted, therefore, to hear Christian speak of the "endless kingdom,"—"everlasting life,"—"crowns of glory,"—and "garments shining like the sun in the firmament of heaven," in store for all who follow Christ. "The hearing of this is enough to ravish one's heart," he says, as Christian tells him that "there shall be no more crying, nor sorrow," that they shall dwell "with seraphim and cherubim," and with "thousands, and tens of thousands of loving and holy ones" that have gone before. And so much in haste is he that Christian seems to him not to travel fast enough, so he urges him to "mend his pace." Pliable felt nothing of the burden of sin which Christian bore upon his back, and which so oppressed and retarded him. His determination to become a Pilgrim had not sprung from the operation of the Holy Spirit within him, for every true work of grace in the human soul begins with *conviction of sin*, and of that he had felt nothing. With Christian, however, the work was genuine. He had learned something of the depravity of his nature, and the sinfulness of his life; and the consciousness of his own weakness, and liability to err, retarded his progress and kept him for the time from Christ. It *should not* have done so, for our sinfulness and unworthiness, instead of keeping us away from Christ, should rather make us fly to him, as the soul's only refuge.

We may learn from this incident, however, that "the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." Poor, trembling, weak Christian, so misled, and halting, and slow-paced at first, finished his course with joy, and obtained "a crown of glory that fadeth not away;" while Pliable, so self-confident, and strong in his own esteem, "ran well" at first, but soon returned to pursue his pilgrimage no more. Young christians, especially those of a naturally timid and diffident turn of mind, are often distressed at what they consider their own slow progress in the heavenly way as compared with that of others around them. They see some who began the race with them far ahead of them in *assurance*,—some who can *talk of religion* in any company, and *pray in public*, and perhaps *preach*, while they themselves can hardly lisp the alphabet of Christianity; and they are so distressed and discouraged by it that they can hardly venture to hope that they have any part or lot with the people of God. Let the experience of Christian encourage them. Thousands of just such trembling ones as they, have completed their pilgrimage with joy unutterable.

"From God, the overflowing spring,
Their souls have drunk a fresh supply;
While such as trust their native strength
Shall melt away, and drop, and die."

We would not be understood as commending a doubting, sorrowing experience, as that which alone can be genuine. On the contrary we would urge all to seek a full assurance of hope, for "the joy of the Lord is our strength;" but the case of Pliable should be a warning to a self-confident spirit. Let us equally avoid putting confidence in the flesh, and distrusting promised grace; both are ruinous.

In these opposite frames of mind, then, Christian and Pliable pursue their way. They had not proceeded far, however, when "they drew nigh to a very miry slough that was in the midst of the plain; and they being heedless, did both fall suddenly into the bog. The name of the Slough was "Despond." In this bog, Bunyan tells us, "they wallowed for a time; and Christian, because of the burden that was on his back, began to sink in the mire." Pliable, however, is the first to complain; he had not expected any such difficulties as this. Christian, on the other hand, though "perplexed, is not in despair." He has counted the cost, and regards "all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord." His sense of his own ill desert, moreover, reconciles him in some measure, to what he is called to endure. And, besides, they had no one to blame for their falling into the Slough but themselves. Bunyan properly represents them as falling into it through heedlessness. Had they duly consulted their guide-book they would have foreseen it, and might have avoided it. Pliable, however, not disposed to take any share of the blame to himself, thinks only how he may get out on "the side next his own house;" and succeeding in that, with a