

BUNYAN AND THE SPIDER.

BUNYAN'S chief enjoyment in prison, next to his high communion with God and heaven, was the composition of his "Pilgrim's Progress." That work was the only one of his joys which he allowed neither stranger nor friend to intermeddle with. He kept it "a fountain sealed" from all his family and fellow-prisoners until it was completed. He says expressly of the "Pilgrim's Progress"—

"Manner and matter too
were all my own,
Nor was it unto any
mortal known
Till I had done it."

When Bunyan lifted his eyes from his Bible in prison he saw little, of course, to sharpen his wit, or to give play to his fancy. He could, however, make much of little. His cell overhung the river, and thus he could look down upon the gliding stream, and forth on the aspects of the sky. A leaping fish, or a skimming swallow, was both an event and a sermon to him, when he could spare a few moments at the grated window from the labours of his pen and pincers. But it was not often he could do so. He had to work hard with his pincers, in order to tag the stay-laces which his wife and his poor blind daughter made and sold for the support of the family.

He had also to study hard, in order to bring his writings up to something like the scheme and scale of other theologians. His pen was thus heavier to him than his pincers; for he had nothing to lighten its labour but his Concordance. When he did escape, however, from his chair to the window, he was all eye and ear to whatever was stirring in the heavens above or in the waters beneath; and if nothing presented itself outside the window, he could learn much from the spiders and flies inside. It was whilst watching them one day that he drew the striking picture of an entangled and struggling Christian.

"The fly in the spider's web," says he, "is an emblem of a soul which Satan is trying to poison and kill. The fly is entangled in the web; at this the spider shows himself. If the fly stir again, down comes the spider, and claps a foot upon her. If the fly struggle still, he poisons her more and more. What shall the fly do now? Why, she dies, if somebody do not quickly release her. This is the case with the tempted. Their feet and wings are entangled. Now Satan shows himself. If the soul struggleth, Satan laboureth to hold it down. If it maketh a noise, then he bites with a blasphemous mouth, more poisonous than the gall of a serpent. If

it struggle again, he then poisons it more and more; insomuch that it must needs die, if the Lord Jesus help not. But though the fly is altogether incapable of looking for relief, this tempted Christian is not. What must he do, therefore? If he look to his heart, there is blasphemy. If he look to his duties, there is sin. Shall this man lie down in despair?

No. Shall he trust in his duties? No. Shall he stay away from Christ until his heart is better? No. What then? Let him look to Christ crucified! Then shall he see his sins answered for, and death dying. This sight destroys the power of the first temptation, and both purifies the mind and inclines the heart to all good things."

Bunyan was so pleased with this parallel between Satan

and a spider, that away went pincers and laces until he rhymed the fact. He makes the spider say:—

"Thus in my ways God wisdom doth conceal,
And by my ways that wisdom I reveal.
I hide myself when I for flies do wait;
So doth the devil, when he lays his bait.
If I do fear the losing of my prey,
I stir me, and more snares upon her lay.
This way and that, her wings and legs I tie,
That, sure as she is caught, so she must die;
And if I see this like to get away,
Then with my venom I her journey stay."

Bunyan studied and talked with this spider so much at the window, that it became a favourite with him at last. He abuses it in "good set terms" through half a long poem; but it taught so much sound wisdom, that he withdrew his sarcasms, and sang:—

"Well, my good spider, I my errors see;
I was a fool in railing thus at thee.
Thy nature, venom, and thy fearful hue,
But show what sinners are, and what they do.
Well, well, I will no more be a derider;
I did not look for such things from a spider.
O spider! I have heard thee, and do wonder
A spider thus should lighten, and thus thunder.
O spider! thou delightest me with thy skill;
I pray thee spit this venom at me still."

Thus he ended with high compliments to his web-weaving neighbour; for from her instincts and habits he found her the best philosopher he had ever met with.

Philip's "Life and Times of Bunyan."



Bunyan's House on Elstow Green.