

THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION.

OR, CHRISTIANA AND HER CHILDREN.

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THAT divine dreamer John Bunyan, having written the first part of the "Pilgrim's Progress," conceived a second, which is almost equally full of instruction and beauty, and exhibits such varieties of the Christian life as we cannot contemplate without advantage.

To one portion of it in particular I direct attention here. The pilgrims came to a beautiful valley called the Valley of Humiliation, and my object will be in this lecture to show you how they came there, what it proved, and whither it led.

HOW THEY CAME THERE.

They started on a pilgrimage. Christian had done this in the first part of the allegory, but he had done this alone.

How many are there who, like him, have had to pursue the pilgrim's way alone! How many who have refused to enter it at first, have at length done so when some friend, a husband, or a child, has died, and has reached the better land! Ah! God has to remove some of our friends to heaven ere we are willing to take a single step towards reaching it. Well, it is thus that we get linked to that world of light almost in spite of ourselves, and perhaps we can sing, many are the friends that are calling us away, to the abode of immortality and light. Beloved, you will not reach heaven unless you become pilgrims, neither will you reach the Valley of Humiliation, for there is no such valley in the paths of sin, but only mountains of pride or whirlpools of despair.

They reached the house of Interpreter.—Several stages were passed ere this, in one of which they saw the cross at a distance, as many a poor sinner does now; and then they knocked at the wicket-gate, and then they were scared by a dog who was chained; but they reached the house and were favourably received by Interpreter, who said, "Why standest thou at the door, come in, thou daughters of Abraham, and so he had them all in his house." There they passed into "the significant rooms," where they saw and had explained to them many striking things. Among others a man with his muck-rake taking up the dust and taking no heed of One above him who held out to him a golden crown. He represented the carnal mind. Then they saw a spider on the wall, by which they learnt that the venom of sin was found even in king's palaces. And then they saw a garden and a field, and were taught that only fruit was of any value, that leaves and stalks were committed to the flames.

These, and many such lessons, the Christian pilgrim has to learn before he gets into the Valley of Humiliation, and it is only in the house of Interpreter that they can be learnt. That house stands by the roadside, and all may enter it who will. But some there are who already think themselves too wise to be taught, and who imagine that they need no one to interpret to them either the mysteries of revelation, or the mysteries of Providence. "Be not high-minded, but fear." "As newborn babes, desire ye the milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." "Sit at the feast of any saint of God who can make known to you the deeper lessons of His grace, and what you know not the Spirit will teach you, and will lead you into all the truth. He is the true Interpreter, and to human teachers we are to give heed only as they are taught by Him.

They obtained the guidance and help of Greatheart. Clothed in fine linen, white and clean, the pilgrims left the house of Interpreter, and a man-servant of the latter, armed with sword, helmet, and shield, went before them. His name was Greatheart, and a noble character he was. Scared by no difficulties, afraid of no foes, he was the very opposite of Mistrust and Timorous; and when they came in sight of the Lion, and the boys were afraid and stepped back, he drew his sword and made a way for them; and, though Mr. Grim disputed their right, Greatheart gave him a downright blow, and brought him to his knees. He was for leaving the pilgrims once, but they implored him to remain, and after pausing for awhile at the porter's lodge, he was willing to go with them again. Here, in "the chamber of rest," they heard music, and here at night Christiana had a sweet dream. Here, too, the boys were catechised, and were proud to be well taught by their mother in the things of God. When they left, Mr. Greatheart again appeared, and they were full of joy at the prospect of having his company on their further journey. O, how he cheered them on their

way! O, what lessons he taught them of the deep things of God! He led them on from one stage to another, and was their fast and faithful friend; and when they came near the Valley of Humiliation, he told them there was nothing to fear, for though combats with Apollyon would await them, victory would certainly be theirs.

Christian pilgrims! take Greatheart with you. Arm yourselves with courage, and be afraid of nothing. Christ, if you ask him, will strengthen your heart, and make you like a lion in the glorious fight. Greatheart never yields to fear, never plays the coward, never shrinks from conflict and from battle. But there are some Christian pilgrims who are so timorous that the shaking of a leaf makes them tremble all over, and a shower of rain drives them into the first shelter they can find. Beloved, clothe yourselves with the invincible armour of faith, and then, whatever your age, or sex, or station in life, you shall go forth conquering and to conquer, and shall ultimately win the crown.

WHAT DID IT PROVE?

The pilgrims reached this valley, and we must go with them and observe them, and learn what kind of a valley it is.

It was *difficult to enter*. "It was a steep hill, and the way was slippery," for the Valley of Humiliation lies very low, far below the usual paths trodden by Christian pilgrims; and to go down into it, seems to some a very gloomy thing, so that they would fain pass it by and continue on the loftier path. Yes; it is difficult even to those who are wholly sanctified to become, and to keep humble, before God. They are in danger of spiritual pride, and Satan suggests to them: "You are now very favoured children of God, much better and holier than many around you, and there is no need that you should sorrow or weep, or even pray. You are sure of heaven whatever path you take." The truly sanctified will repel these thoughts, and will resist these vile suggestions; but to get down into the valley is even to them a difficulty, and only if they are very careful, as Christiana and her children were, will they get down "pretty well." As Prudence said to Christian: "It is a hard matter for a man to go down into the Valley of Humiliation, and to catch no slip by the way, therefore we are come to accompany thee down the hill." The difficulty arises here, that if a man begins to think that he is humble, that moment he is becoming proud. The best way down this hill is not to think of ourselves at all, but to lose sight of ourselves, to let ourselves alone, and just to sink into the will of God, as a child in danger would throw itself into its father's outstretched arms. I scarcely dare ask you, dear reader, if you have got into this valley, for if you say *no*, the answer will not satisfy; and if you say *yes*, I shall almost doubt your word. And yet a Christian may know whether he is there or not, and if he find the least degree of pride lurking in his heart, he can go to him whose grace can save him, and can say, "Search me, O Lord, and try my reins and my heart."

It proved of itself a very fruitful place. "It is the best and most fruitful piece of ground in all those parts. It is fat ground, and as you see, consisteth much in meadows; and if a man was to come here in the summer time as we do now, if he knew not anything before thereof, and if he also delighted himself in the sight of his eyes, he might see that that would be delightful to him. Behold how green the valley is, also how beautified with lilies. I have also known many labouring men who have got good estates in this Valley of Humiliation. For God resisteth the proud, but gives grace, more grace to the humble, for indeed it is a very fruitful soil, and doth bring forth by handfuls."

Christians thrive wonderfully in this valley, for when the weeds of pride and the briars of vanity have been rooted out of their heart, and they have learnt to sit at the feet of Jesus, or to occupy any place that he may assign to them, the fruits of holiness grow in their nature in rich clusters like the grapes of Eschol. Peace is theirs, and joy, and contentment, and they can join in some of the sweetest songs which ever rise from the lips of pilgrims. Hark! In this valley there is a poor shepherd boy, who is but meanly clad, and is not very plump of flesh; and what does he sing:—

"I am content with what I have.

Little it be or much,

And, Lord, contentment will I crave,

Because thou savest such."

Ah, that boy wears a herb called Heartsease in his bosom, and it is only in this valley that the herb is found. Moreover,