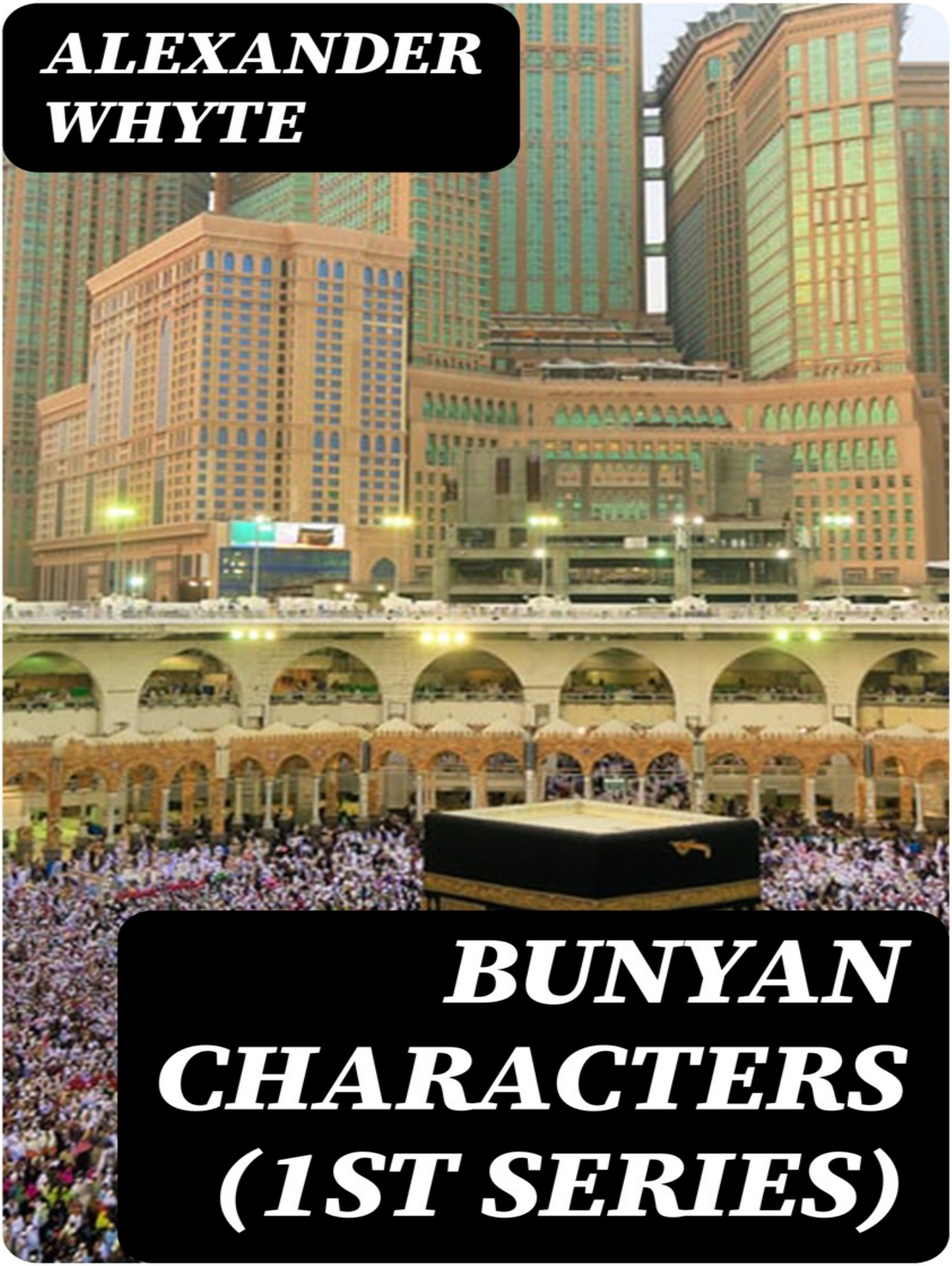
ALEXANDER WHYTE



BUNYAN CHARACTERS (1ST SERIES)

Alexander Whyte

Bunyan Characters (1st Series)

EAN 8596547249702

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

GIANT DESPAIR
KNOWLEDGE
EXPERIENCE
WATCHFUL
SINCERE

BUNYAN CHARACTERS: FIRST SERIES
BEING LECTURES DELIVERED IN ST. GEORGE'S FREE CHURCH EDINBURGH
BY ALEXANDER WHYTE, D.D.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTORY

Table of Contents

'The express image' [Gr. 'the character'].—Heb. 1. 3.

The word 'character' occurs only once in the New Testament, and that is in the passage in the prologue of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the original word is translated 'express image' in our version. Our Lord is the Express Image of the Invisible Father. No man hath seen God at any time. The only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him. The Father hath sealed His divine image upon His Son, so that he that hath seen the Son hath seen the Father. The Son is thus the Father's character stamped upon and set forth in human nature. The Word was made flesh. This is the highest and best use to which our so expressive word 'character' has ever been put, and the use to which it is put when we speak of Bunyan's Characters partakes of the same high sense and usage. For

it is of the outstanding good or evil in a man that we think when we speak of his character. It is really either of his likeness or unlikeness to Jesus Christ we speak, and then, through Him, his likeness or unlikeness to God Himself. And thus it is that the adjective ‘moral’ usually accompanies our word ‘character’—moral or immoral. A man’s character does not have its seat or source in his body; character is not a physical thing: not even in his mind; it is not an intellectual thing. Character comes up out of the will and out of the heart. There are more good minds, as we say, in the world than there are good hearts. There are more clever people than good people; character,—high, spotless, saintly character,—is a far rarer thing in this world than talent or even genius. Character is an infinitely better thing than either of these, and it is of corresponding rarity. And yet so true is it that the world loves its own, that all men worship talent, and even bodily strength and bodily beauty, while only one here and one there either understands or values or pursues moral character, though it is the strength and the beauty and the sweetness of the soul.

We naturally turn to Bishop Butler when we think of moral character. Butler is an author who has drawn no characters of his own. Butler’s genius was not creative like Shakespeare’s or Bunyan’s. Butler had not that splendid imagination which those two masters in character-painting possessed, but he had very great gifts of his own, and he has done us very great service by means of his gifts. Bishop Butler has helped many men in the intelligent formation of their character, and what higher praise could be given to any author? Butler will lie on our table all winter beside

Bunyan; the bishop beside the tinker, the philosopher beside the poet, the moralist beside the evangelical minister.

In seeking a solid bottom for our subject, then, we naturally turn to Butler. Bunyan will people the house for us once it is built, but Butler lays bare for us the naked rock on which men like Bunyan build and beautify and people the dwelling-place of God and man. What exactly is this thing, character, we hear so much about? we ask the sagacious bishop. And how shall we understand our own character so as to form it well till it stands firm and endures? ‘Character,’ answers Butler, in his bald, dry, deep way, ‘by character is meant that temper, taste, disposition, whole frame of mind from whence we act in one way rather than another . . . those principles from which a man acts, when they become fixed and habitual in him we call his character . . . And consequently there is a far greater variety in men’s characters than there is in the features of their faces.’ Open Bunyan now, with Butler’s keywords in your mind, and see the various tempers, tastes, dispositions, frames of mind from which his various characters act, and which, at bottom, really make them the characters, good or bad, which they are. See the principles which Bunyan has with such inimitable felicity embodied and exhibited in their names, the principles within them from which they have acted till they have become a habit and then a character, that character which they themselves are and will remain. See the variety of John Bunyan’s characters, a richer and a more endless variety than are the features of their faces. Christian and Christiana, Obstinate and Pliable, Mr. Fearing

and Mr. Feeblemind, Temporary and Talkative, Mr. By-ends and Mr. Facing-both-ways, Simple, Sloth, Presumption, that brisk lad Ignorance, and the genuine Mr. Brisk himself. And then Captain Boasting, Mr. High-mind, Mr. Wet-Eyes, and so on, through a less known (but equally well worth knowing) company of municipal and military characters in the *Holy War*.

We shall see, as we proceed, how this and that character in Bunyan was formed and deformed. But let us ask in this introductory lecture if we can find out any law or principle upon which all our own characters, good or bad, are formed. Do our characters come to be what they are by chance, or have we anything to do in the formation of our own characters, and if so, in what way? And here, again, Butler steps forward at our call with his key to our own and to all Bunyan's characters in his hand, and in three familiar and fruitful words he answers our question and gives us food for thought and solemn reflection for a lifetime. There are but three steps, says Butler, from earth to heaven, or, if you will, from earth to hell—acts, habits, character. All Butler's prophetic burden is bound up in these three great words—acts, habits, character. Remember and ponder these three words, and you will in due time become a moral philosopher. Ponder and practise them, and you will become what is infinitely better—a moral man. For acts, often repeated, gradually become habits, and habits, long enough continued, settle and harden and solidify into character. And thus it is that the severe and laconic bishop has so often made us shudder as he demonstrated it to us that we are all with our own hands shaping our character not only for this

world, but much more for the world to come, by every act we perform, by every word we speak, almost by every breath we draw. Butler is one of the most terrible authors in the world. He stands on our nearest shelf with Dante on one side of him and Pascal on the other. He is indeed terrible, but it is with a terror that purifies the heart and keeps the life in the hour of temptation. Paul sometimes arms himself with the same terror; only he composes in another style than that of Butler, and, with all his vivid intensity, he calls it the terror of the Lord. Paul and Bunyan are of the same school of moralists and stylists; Butler went to school to the Stoics, to Aristotle, and to Plato.

Our Lord Himself came to be the express image He was and is by living and acting under this same universal law of human life—acts, habits, character. He was made perfect on this same principle. He learned obedience both by the things that He did, and the things that He suffered. Butler says in one deep place, that benevolence and justice and veracity are the basis of all good character in God and in man, and thus also in the God-man. And those three foundation stones of our Lord’s character settled deeper and grew stronger to bear and to suffer as He went on practising acts and speaking words of justice, goodness, and truth. And so of all the other elements of His moral character. Our Lord left Gethsemane a much more submissive and a much more surrendered man than He entered it. His forgiveness of injuries, and thus His splendid benevolence, had not yet come to its climax and crown till He said on the cross, ‘Father, forgive them’. And, as He was, so are we in this world. This world’s evil and ill-desert made it but the better

arena and theatre for the development and the display of His moral character; and the same instruments that fashioned Him into the perfect and express image He was and is, are still, happily, in full operation. Take that divinest and noblest of all instruments for the carving out and refining of moral character, the will of God. How our Lord made His own unselfish and unsinful will to bow to silence and to praise before the holy will of His Father, till that gave the finishing touch to His always sanctified will and heart! And, happily, that awful and blessed instrument for the formation of moral character is still active and available to those whose ambition rises to moral character, and who are aiming at heaven in all they do and all they suffer upon the earth. Gethsemane has gone out till it has covered all the earth. Its cup, if not in all the depth and strength of its first mixture, still in quite sufficient bitterness, is put many times in life into every man's hand. There is not a day, there is not an hour of the day, that the disciple of the submissive and all-surrendered Son has not the opportunity to say with his Master, If it be possible, let this cup pass: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.

It is not in the great tragedies of life only that character is tested and strengthened and consolidated. No man who is not himself under God's moral and spiritual instruments could believe how often in the quietest, clearest, and least tempestuous day he has the chance and the call to say, Yea, Lord, Thy will be done. And, then, when the confessedly tragic days and nights come, when all men admit that this is Gethsemane indeed, the practised soul is able, with a calmness and a peace that confound and offend the

bystanders, to say, to act so that he does not need to say, Not my will, but Thine. And so of all the other forms and features of moral character; so of humility and meekness, so of purity and temperance, so of magnanimity and munificence, so of all self-suppression and self-extinction, and all corresponding exalting and magnifying and benefiting of other men. Whatever other passing uses this present world, so full of trial and temptation and suffering, may have, this surely is the supreme and final use of it—to be a furnace, a graving-house, a refining place for human character. Literally all things in this life and in this world—I challenge you to point out a single exception—work together for this supreme and only good, the purification, the refining, the testing, and the approval of human character. Not only so, but we are all in the very heat of the furnace, and under the very graving iron and in the very refining fire that our prefigured and predestinated character needs. Your life and its trials would not suit the necessities of my moral character, and you would lose your soul beyond redemption if you exchanged lots with me. You do not put a pearl under the potter's wheel; you do not cast clay into a refining fire. Abraham's character was not like David's, nor David's like Christ's, nor Christ's like Paul's. As Butler says, there is 'a providential disposition of things' around every one of us, and it is as exactly suited to the flaws and excrescences, the faults and corruptions of our character as if Providence had had no other life to make a disposition of things for but one, and that one our own. Have you discovered that in your life, or any measure of that? Have you acknowledged to God that you have at last discovered

the true key of your life? Have you given Him the satisfaction to know that He is not making His providential dispositions around a stock or a stone, but that He has one under His hand who understands His hand, and responds to it, and rises up to meet and salute it?

And we cease to wonder so much at the care God takes of human character, and the cost He lays out upon it, when we think that it is the only work of His hands that shall last for ever. It is fit, surely, that the ephemeral should minister to the eternal, and time to eternity, and all else in this world to the only thing in this world that shall endure and survive this world. All else we possess and pursue shall fade and perish, our moral character shall alone survive. Riches, honours, possessions, pleasures of all kinds: death, with one stroke of his desolating hand, shall one day strip us bare to a winding-sheet and a coffin of all the things we are so mad to possess. But the last enemy, with all his malice and all his resistless power, cannot touch our moral character—unless it be in some way utterly mysterious to us that he is made under God to refine and perfect it. The Express Image carried up to His Father's House, not only the divine life He had brought hither with Him when He came to obey and submit and suffer among us; He carried back more than He brought, for He carried back a human heart, a human life, a human character, which was and is a new wonder in heaven. He carried up to heaven all the love to God and angels and men He had learned and practised on earth, with all the earthly fruits of it. He carried back His humility, His meekness, His humanity, His approachableness, and His sympathy. And we see to our salvation some of the uses to

which those parts of His moral character are at this moment being put in His Father’s House; and what we see not now of all the ends and uses and employments of our Lord’s glorified humanity we shall, mayhap, see hereafter. And we also shall carry our moral character to heaven; it is the only thing we have worth carrying so far. But, then, moral character is well worth achieving here and then carrying there, for it is nothing else and nothing less than the divine nature itself; it is the divine nature incarnate, incorporate, and made manifest in man. And it is, therefore, immortal with the immortality of God, and blessed for ever with the blessedness of God.

EVANGELIST

Table of Contents

‘Do the work of an evangelist.’—Paul to Timothy.

On the 1st of June 1648 a very bitter fight was fought at Maidstone, in Kent, between the Parliamentary forces under Fairfax and the Royalists. Till Cromwell rose to all his military and administrative greatness, Fairfax was generalissimo of the Puritan army, and that able soldier never executed a more brilliant exploit than he did that memorable night at Maidstone. In one night the Royalist insurrection was stamped out and extinguished in its own blood. Hundreds of dead bodies filled the streets of the town, hundreds of the enemy were taken prisoners, while hundreds more, who were hiding in the hop-fields and forests around the town, fell into Fairfax’s hands next morning.

Among the prisoners so taken was a Royalist major who had had a deep hand in the Maidstone insurrection, named John Gifford, a man who was destined in the time to come to run a remarkable career. Only, to-day, the day after the battle, he has no prospect before him but the gallows. On the night before his execution, by the courtesy of Fairfax, Gifford's sister was permitted to visit her brother in his prison. The soldiers were overcome with weariness and sleep after the engagement, and Gifford's sister so managed it that her brother got past the sentries and escaped out of the town. He lay hid for some days in the ditches and thickets around the town till he was able to escape to London, and thence to the shelter of some friends of his at Bedford. Gifford had studied medicine before he entered the army, and as soon as he thought it safe he began to practise his old art in the town of Bedford. Gifford had been a dissolute man as a soldier, and he became, if possible, a still more scandalously dissolute man as a civilian. Gifford's life in Bedford was a public disgrace, and his hatred and persecution of the Puritans in that town made his very name an infamy and a fear. He reduced himself to beggary with gambling and drink, but, when near suicide, he came under the power of the truth, till we see him clothed with rags and with a great burden on his back, crying out, 'What must I do to be saved?' 'But at last'—I quote from the session records of his future church at Bedford—'God did so plentifully discover to him the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ, that all his life after he lost not the light of God's countenance, no, not for an hour, save only about two days before he died.' Gifford's

conversion had been so conspicuous and notorious that both town and country soon heard of it: and instead of being ashamed of it, and seeking to hide it, Gifford at once, and openly, threw in his lot with the extremest Puritans in the Puritan town of Bedford. Nor could Gifford's talents be hid; till from one thing to another, we find the former Royalist and dissolute Cavalier actually the parish minister of Bedford in Cromwell's so evangelical but otherwise so elastic establishment.

At this point we open John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and we read this classical passage: —'Upon a day the good providence of God did cast me to Bedford to work in my calling: and in one of the streets of that town I came where there were three or four poor women sitting at the door in the sun and talking about the things of God. But I may say I heard, but I understood not, for they were far above and out of my reach . . . About this time I began to break my mind to those poor people in Bedford, and to tell them of my condition, which, when they had heard, they told Mr. Gifford of me, who himself also took occasion to talk with me, and was willing to be well persuaded of me though I think on too little grounds. But he invited me to his house, where I should hear him confer with others about the dealings of God with their souls, from all which I still received more conviction, and from that time began to see something of the vanity and inner wretchedness of my own heart, for as yet I knew no great matter therein . . . At that time also I sat under the ministry of holy Mr. Gifford, whose doctrine, by the grace of God, was much for my stability.' And so on in that inimitable narrative.

The first minister whose words were truly blessed of God for our awakening and conversion has always a place of his own in our hearts. We all have some minister, some revivalist, some faithful friend, or some good book in a warm place in our heart. It may be a great city preacher; it may be a humble American or Irish revivalist; it may be *The Pilgrim's Progress*, or *The Cardiphonia*, or the *Serious Call*—whoever or whatever it was that first arrested and awakened and turned us into the way of life, they all our days stand in a place by themselves in our grateful heart. And John Gifford has been immortalised by John Bunyan, both in his *Grace Abounding* and in his *Pilgrim's Progress*. In his *Grace Abounding*, as we have just seen, and in *The Pilgrim*, Gifford has his portrait painted in holy oil on the wall of the Interpreter's house, and again in eloquent pen and ink in the person of Evangelist.

John Gifford had himself made a narrow escape out of the City of Destruction, and John Bunyan had, by Gifford's assistance, made the same escape also. The scene, therefore, both within that city and outside the gate of it, was so fixed in Bunyan's mind and memory that no part of his memorable book is more memorably put than just its opening page. Bunyan himself is the man in rags, and Gifford is the evangelist who comes to console and to conduct him. Bunyan's portraits are all taken from the life. Brilliant and well-furnished as Bunyan's imagination was, Bedford was still better furnished with all kinds of men and women, and with all kinds of saints and sinners. And thus, instead of drawing upon his imagination in writing his books, Bunyan drew from life. And thus it is that we see first John

Gifford, and then John Bunyan himself at the gate of the city; and then, over the page, Gifford becomes the evangelist who is sent by the four poor women to speak to the awakened tinker.

‘Wherefore dost thou so cry?’ asks Evangelist. ‘Because,’ replied the man, ‘I am condemned to die.’ ‘But why are you so unwilling to die, since this life is so full of evils?’ And I suppose we must all hear Evangelist putting the same pungent question to ourselves every day, at whatever point of the celestial journey we at present are. Yes; why are we all so unwilling to die? Why do we number our days to put off our death to the last possible period? Why do we so refuse to think of the only thing we are sure soon to come to? We are absolutely sure of nothing else in the future but death. We may not see to-morrow, but we shall certainly see the day of our death. And yet we have all our plans laid for to-morrow, and only one here and one there has any plan laid for the day of his death. And can it be for the same reason that made the man in rags unwilling to die? Is it because of the burden on our back? Is it because we are not fit to go to judgment? And yet the trumpet may sound summoning us hence before the midnight clock strikes. If this be thy condition, why standest thou still? Dost thou see yonder shining light? Keep that light in thine eye. Go up straight to it, knock at the gate, and it shall be told thee there what thou shalt do next. Burdened sinner, son of man in rags and terror: What has burdened thee so? What has torn thy garments into such shameful rags? What is it in thy burden that makes it so heavy? And how long has it lain so heavy upon thee? ‘I cannot run,’ said the man, ‘because of

the burden on my back.’ And it has been noticed of you that you do not laugh, or run, or dress, or dance, or walk, or eat, or drink as once you did. All men see that there is some burden on your back; some sore burden on your heart and your mind. Do you see yonder wicket gate? Do you see yonder shining light? There is no light in all the horizon for you but yonder light over the gate. Keep it in your eye; make straight, and make at once for it, and He who keeps the gate and keeps the light burning over it, He will tell you what to do with your burden. He told John Gifford, and He told John Bunyan, till both their burdens rolled off their backs, and they saw them no more. What would you not give to-night to be released like them? Do you not see yonder shining light?

Having set Christian fairly on the way to the wicket gate, Evangelist leaves him in order to seek out and assist some other seeker. But yesterday he had set Faithful’s face to the celestial city, and he is off now to look for another pilgrim. We know some of Christian’s adventures and episodes after Evangelist left him, but we do not take up these at present. We pass on to the next time that Evangelist finds Christian, and he finds him in a sorry plight. He has listened to bad advice. He has gone off the right road, he has lost sight of the gate, and all the thunders and lightnings of Sinai are rolling and flashing out against him. What doest thou here of all men in the world? asked Evangelist, with a severe and dreadful countenance. Did I not direct thee to His gate, and why art thou here? Christian told him that a fair-spoken man had met him, and had persuaded him to take an easier and shorter way of getting rid of his burden. Read the whole

place for yourselves. The end of it was that Evangelist set Christian right again, and gave him two counsels which would be his salvation if he attended to them: Strive to enter in at the strait gate, and, Take up thy cross daily. He would need more counsel afterwards than that; but, meantime, that was enough. Let Christian follow that, and he would before long be rid of his burden.

In the introductory lecture Bishop Butler has been commended and praised as a moralist, and certainly not one word beyond his deserts; but an evangelical preacher cannot send any man with the burden of a bad past upon him to Butler for advice and direction about that. While lecturing on and praising the sound philosophical and ethical spirit of the great bishop, Dr. Chalmers complains that he so much lacks the *sal evangelicum*, the strength and the health and the sweetness of the doctrines of grace. Legality and Civility and Morality are all good and necessary in their own places; but he is a cheat who would send a guilt-burdened and sick-at-heart sinner to any or all of them. The wicket gate first, and then He who keeps that gate will tell us what to do, and where next to go; but any other way out of the City of Destruction but by the wicket gate is sure to land us where it landed Evangelist's quaking and sweating charge. When Bishop Butler lay on his deathbed he called for his chaplain, and said, 'Though I have endeavoured to avoid sin, and to please God to the utmost of my power, yet from the consciousness of my perpetual infirmities I am still afraid to die.' 'My lord,' said his happily evangelical chaplain, 'have you forgotten that Jesus Christ is a Saviour?' 'True,' said the dying philosopher, 'but how shall

I know that He is a Saviour for me?' 'My lord, it is written, "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out."' 'True,' said Butler, 'and I am surprised that though I have read that Scripture a thousand times, I never felt its virtue till this moment, and now I die in peace.'

The third and the last time on which the pilgrims meet with their old friend and helper, Evangelist, is when they are just at the gates of the town of Vanity. They have come through many wonderful experiences since last they saw and spoke with him. They have had the gate opened to them by Goodwill. They have been received and entertained in the Interpreter's House, and in the House Beautiful. The burden has fallen off their backs at the cross, and they have had their rags removed and have received change of raiment. They have climbed the Hill Difficulty, and they have fought their way through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. More than the half of their adventures and sufferings are past; but they are not yet out of gunshot of the devil, and the bones of many a promising pilgrim lie whitening the way between this and the city. Many of our young communicants have made a fair and a promising start for salvation. They have got over the initial difficulties that lay in their way to the Lord's table, and we have entered their names with honest pride in our communion roll. But a year or two passes over, and the critical season arrives when our young communicant 'comes out,' as the word is. Up till now she has been a child, a little maid, a Bible-class student, a young communicant, a Sabbath-school teacher. But she is now a young lady, and she comes out into the world. We soon see that she has so come out, as we begin to miss her

from places and from employments her presence used to brighten; and, very unwillingly, we overhear men and women with her name on their lips in a way that makes us fear for her soul, till many, oh, in a single ministry, how many, who promised well at the gate and ran safely past many snares, at last sell all—body and soul and Saviour—in Vanity Fair.

Well, Evangelist remains Evangelist still. Only, without losing any of his sweetness and freeness and fulness of promise, he adds to that some solemn warnings and counsels suitable now, as never before, to these two pilgrims. If one may say so, he would add now such moral treatises as Butler's *Sermons* and *Serious Call* to such evangelical books as *Grace Abounding* and *A Jerusalem Sinner Saved*.

To-morrow the two pilgrims will come out of the wilderness and will be plunged into a city where they will be offered all kinds of merchandise,—houses, lands, places, honours, preferments, titles, pleasures, delights, wives, children, bodies, souls, and what not. An altogether new world from anything they have yet come through, and a world where many who once began well have gone no further. Such counsels as these, then, Evangelist gave Christian and Faithful as they left the lonely wilderness behind them and came out towards the gate of the seductive city—'Let the Kingdom of Heaven be always before your eyes, and believe steadfastly concerning things that are invisible.' Visible, tangible, sweet, and desirable things will immediately be offered to them, and unless they have a faith in their hearts that is the substance of things

hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, it will soon be all over with them and their pilgrimage. ‘Let no man take your crown,’ he said also, as he foresaw at how many booths and counters, houses, lands, places, preferments, wives, husbands, and what not, would be offered them and pressed upon them in exchange for their heavenly crown. ‘Above all, look well to your own hearts,’ he said. Canon Venables laments over the teaching that Bunyan received from John Gifford. ‘Its principle,’ he says, ‘was constant introspection and scrupulous weighing of every word and deed, and even of every thought, instead of leading the mind off from self to the Saviour.’ The canon seems to think that it was specially unfortunate for Bunyan to be told to keep his heart and to weigh well every thought of it; but I must point out to you that Evangelist puts as above all other things the most important for the pilgrims the looking well to their own hearts; and our plain-spoken author has used a very severe word about any minister who should whisper anything to any pilgrim that could be construed or misunderstood into putting Christ in the place of thought and word and deed, and the scrupulous weighing of every one of them. ‘Let nothing that is on this side the other world get within you; and above all, look well to your own hearts, and to the lusts thereof.’

‘Set your faces like a flint,’ Evangelist proceeds. How little like all that you hear in the counsels of the pulpit to young women coming out and to young men entering into business life. I am convinced that if we ministers were more direct and plain-spoken to such persons at such times; if we, like Bunyan, told them plainly what kind of a world it is they

are coming out to buy and sell in, and what its merchandise and its prices are; if our people would let us so preach to their sons and daughters, I feel sure far fewer young communicants would make shipwreck, and far fewer grey heads would go down with sorrow to the grave. ‘Be not afraid,’ said Robert Hall in his charge to a young minister, ‘of devoting whole sermons to particular parts of moral conduct and religious duty. It is impossible to give right views of them unless you dissect characters and describe particular virtues and vices. The works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit must be distinctly pointed out. To preach against sin in general without descending to particulars may lead many to complain of the evil of their hearts, while at the same time they are awfully inattentive to the evil of their conduct.’ Take Evangelist’s noble counsels at the gate of Vanity Fair, and then take John Bunyan’s masterly description of the Fair itself, with all that is bought and sold in it, and you will have a lesson in evangelical preaching that the evangelical pulpit needed in Bunyan’s day, in Robert Hall’s day, and not less in our own.

‘My sons, you have heard the truth of the gospel, that you must through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God. When, therefore, you are come to the Fair and shall find fulfilled what I have here related, then remember your friend; quit yourselves like men, and commit the keeping of your souls to your God in well-doing as unto a faithful Creator.’

OBSTINATE

Table of Contents

‘Be ye not as the mule.’—David.

Little Obstinate was born and brought up in the City of Destruction. His father was old Spare-the-Rod, and his mother’s name was Spoil-the-Child. Little Obstinate was the only child of his parents; he was born when they were no longer young, and they doted on their only child, and gave him his own way in everything. Everything he asked for he got, and if he did not immediately get it you would have heard his screams and his kicks three doors off. His parents were not in themselves bad people, but, if Solomon speaks true, they hated their child, for they gave him all his own way in everything, and nothing would ever make them say no to him, or lift up the rod when he said no to them. When the Scriptures, in their pedagogical parts, speak so often about the rod, they do not necessarily mean a rod of iron or even of wood. There are other ways of teaching an obstinate child than the way that Gideon took with the men of Succoth when he taught them with the thorns of the wilderness and with the briars thereof. George Offor, John Bunyan’s somewhat quaint editor, gives the readers of his edition this personal testimony:—‘After bringing up a very large family, who are a blessing to their parents, I have yet to learn what part of the human body was created to be beaten.’ At the same time the rod must mean something in the word of God; it certainly means something in God’s hand when His obstinate children are under it, and it ought to mean something in a godly parent’s hand also. Little Obstinate’s two parents were far from ungodly people, though they lived in such a city; but they were daily destroying their only son by letting him always have his own

way, and by never saying no to his greed, and his lies, and his anger, and his noisy and disorderly ways. Eli in the Old Testament was not a bad man, but he destroyed both the ark of the Lord and himself and his sons also, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. God's children are never so soft, and sweet, and good, and happy as just after He restrains them, and has again laid the rod of correction upon them. They then kiss both the rod and Him who appointed it. And earthly fathers learn their craft from God. The meekness, the sweetness, the docility, and the love of a chastised child has gone to all our hearts in a way we can never forget. There is something sometimes almost past description or belief in the way a chastised child clings to and kisses the hand that chastised it. But poor old Spare-the-Rod never had experiences like that. And young Obstinate, having been born like Job's wild ass's colt, grew up to be a man like David's unbitted and unbridled mule, till in after life he became the author of all the evil and mischief that is associated in our minds with his evil name.

In old Spare-the-Rod's child also this true proverb was fulfilled, that the child is the father of the man. For all that little Obstinate had been in the nursery, in the schoolroom, and in the playground—all that, only in an aggravated way—he was as a youth and as a grown-up man. For one thing, Obstinate all his days was a densely ignorant man. He had not got into the way of learning his lessons when he was a child; he had not been made to learn his lessons when he was a child; and the dislike and contempt he had for his books as a boy accompanied him through an ignorant and a

narrow-minded life. It was reason enough to this so unreasonable man not to buy and read a book that you had asked him to buy and read it. And so many of the books about him were either written, or printed, or published, or sold, or read, or praised by people he did not like, that there was little left for this unhappy man to read, even if otherwise he would have read it. And thus, as his mulish obstinacy kept him so ignorant, so his ignorance in turn increased his obstinacy. And then when he came, as life went on, to have anything to do with other men's affairs, either in public or in private life, either in the church, or in the nation, or in the city, or in the family, this unhappy man could only be a drag on all kinds of progress, and in obstacle to every good work. Use and wont, a very good rule on occasion, was a rigid and a universal rule with Obstinate. And to be told that the wont in this case and in that had ceased to be the useful, only made him rail at you as only an ignorant and an obstinate man can rail. He could only rail; he had not knowledge enough, or good temper enough, or good manners enough to reason out a matter; he was too hot-tempered for an argument, and he hated those who had an acquaintance with the subject in hand, and a self-command in connection with it that he had not. 'The obstinate man's understanding is like Pharaoh's heart, and it is proof against all sorts of arguments whatsoever.' Like the demented king of Egypt, the obstinate man has glimpses sometimes both of his bounden duty and of his true interest, but the sinew of iron that is in his neck will not let him perform the one or pursue the other. 'Nothing,' says a penetrating writer, 'is more like firm conviction than