

A Continuation of Mr. Bunyan's Life

BEGINNING WHERE HE LEFT OFF, AND
CONCLUDING WITH THE TIME AND
MANNER OF HIS DEATH AND BURIAL,
TOGETHER WITH HIS TRUE
CHARACTER.

By George Offor, 1875.

Reader, the painful and industrious author of this book has already given you a faithful and very moving relation of the beginning and middle of the days of his pilgrimage on earth; and since there yet remains somewhat worthy of notice and regard, which occurred in the last scene of his life; the which, for want of time, or fear that some over-censorious people should impute it to him, as an earnest coveting of praise from men, he has not left behind him in writing. Wherefore, as a true friend and long acquaintance of Mr. Bunyan's, that his good

end may be known as well as his evil beginning, I have taken upon me, from my knowledge, and the best account given by other of his friends, to piece this to the thread, too soon broke off, and so lengthen it out to his entering upon eternity.

He has told you at large of his birth and education; the evil habits and corruptions of his youth; the temptations he struggled and conflicted so frequently with; the mercies, comforts, and deliverances he found; how he came to take upon him the preaching of the gospel; the slanders, reproaches, and imprisonments that attended him; and the progress he notwithstanding made, by the assistance of God's grace, no doubt to the saving of many souls. Therefore take these things as he himself has methodically laid them down in the words of verity; and so I pass on as to what remains.

After his being freed from his twelve years' imprisonment and upwards, for nonconformity, wherein he had time to furnish the world with sundry good books, &c.; and, by his patience, to move Dr. Barlow, the then Bishop of Lincoln,¹ and other churchmen, to pity his

¹ Application was made to Bishop Barlow, through Dr. Owen, to use his powerful influence in obtaining liberty for this Christian captive; but he absolutely

hard and unreasonable sufferings, so far as to stand very much his friends in procuring his enlargement, or there perhaps he had died by the noisesomeness and ill usage of the place; being now, I say, again at liberty, and having, through mercy, shaken off his bodily fetters, for those upon his soul were broken before, by the abounding grace that filled his heart, he went to visit those that had been a comfort to him in his tribulation, with a Christian-like acknowledgment of their kindness and enlargement of charity; giving encouragement by his example if it happened to be their hard haps to fall into affliction or trouble, then to suffer patiently for the sake of a good conscience, and for the love of God in Jesus Christ towards their souls; and, by many cordial persuasions, supported some whose spirits began to sink low through the fear of danger that threatened their worldly concernment, so that the people found a wonderful consolation in his discourse and admonitions.

refused to interfere. See Preface to Owen's Sermons, 1721. Bunyan, upon his petition, heard by the king in council, was included in the pardon to the imprisoned and cruelly-treated Quakers. Whitehead, the Quaker, was the honoured instrument in releasing him.—Introduction to *Pilgrim's Progress*, Hanserd Knollys Edition.—Ed.

As often as opportunity would admit, he gathered them together in convenient places, though the law was then in force against meetings, and fed them with the sincere milk of the Word, that they might grow up in grace thereby. To such as were anywhere taken and imprisoned upon these accounts, he made it another part of his business to extend his charity, and gather relief for such of them as wanted.

He took great care to visit the sick, and strengthen them against the suggestions of the tempter, which at such times are very prevalent; so that they had cause for ever to bless God, who had put into his heart, at such a time, to rescue them from the power of the roaring lion, who sought to devour them; nor did he spare any pains or labour in travel, though to the remote counties, where he knew, or imagined, any people might stand in need of his assistance, insomuch that some of these visitations that he made, which was two or three every year, some, though in jeering manner, no doubt, gave him the epithet of Bishop Bunyan, whilst others envied him for his so earnestly labouring in Christ's vineyard, yet the seed of the Word he, all this while, sowed in the hearts of his congregation, watered with the grace of God, brought forth

in abundance, in bringing in disciples to the church of Christ.

Another part of his time he spent in reconciling differences, by which he hindered many mischiefs, and saved some families from ruin; and, in such fallings out, he was uneasy, till he found a means to labour a reconciliation, and become a peace maker, on whom a blessing is promised in Holy Writ: and, indeed, in doing this good office, he may be said to sum up his days, it being the last undertaking of his life, as will appear in the close of this paper.

When, in the late reign, liberty of conscience was unexpectedly given and indulged to Dissenters of all persuasions,² his piercing with penetrated the veil, and found that it was not for the Dissenters' sake they were so suddenly freed from the prosecutions that had long lain heavy upon them, and set, in a manner, on an equal foot with the Church of England, which the Papists were undermining, and about to subvert. He foresaw all the advantages that could have redounded to the Dissenters, would have been no more than

² See an authentic copy of this Royal Declaration, and observations upon it, in the Introduction to the *Pilgrim's Progress*, published by the Hanserd Knollys Society, 1847.—Ed.

what Poliphemus, the monstrous giant of Sicily, would have allowed Ulysses, viz., That he would eat his men first, and do him the favour of being eaten last. For, although Mr. Bunyan, following the examples of others, did lay hold of this liberty, as an acceptable thing in itself, knowing that God is the only lord of conscience, and that it is good at all times to do according to the dictates of a good conscience, and that the preaching the glad tidings of the gospel is beautiful in the preacher; yet, in all this, he moved with caution and a holy fear, earnestly praying for averting the impendent judgments, which he saw, like a black tempest hanging over our heads, for our sins, and ready to break upon us, and that the Ninevites' remedy was now highly necessary. Hereupon, he gathered his congregation at Bedford, where he mostly lived, and had lived, and had spent the greatest part of his life; and there being no convenient place to be had, for the entertainment of so great a confluence of people as followed him, upon the account of his teaching, he consulted with them, for the building of a meeting house; to which they made their voluntary contributions, with all cheerfulness and alacrity; and the first time he appeared there to edify, the place was so thronged, that many were constrained to

stay without, though the house was very spacious, every one striving to partake of his instructions, that were of his persuasion; and show their good will towards him, by being present at the opening of the place; and here he lived in much peace and quiet of mind, contenting himself with that little God had bestowed upon him, and sequestering himself from all secular employments, to follow that of his call to the ministry; for, as God said to Moses, he that made the lips and heart, can give eloquence and wisdom, without extraordinary acquirements in a university.

During these things, there were regulators sent into all cities and towns corporate, to new-model the government in the magistracy, &c., by turning out some, and putting in others. Against this, Mr. Bunyan expressed his zeal with some weariness, as foreseeing the bad consequence that would attend it, and laboured with his congregation to prevent their being imposed on in this kind; and when a great man in those days, coming to Bedford upon some such errand, sent for him, as it is supposed, to give him a place of public trust, he would by no means come at him, but sent his excuse.

When he was at leisure from writing and teaching, he often came up to London, and

there went among the congregations of the nonconformists, and used his talent to the great good liking of the hearers; and even some, to whom he had been misrepresented, upon the account of his education, were convinced of his worth and knowledge in sacred things, as perceiving him to be a man of sound judgment, delivering himself plainly and powerfully; insomuch that many who came as mere spectators, for novelty's sake, rather than to be edified and improved, went away well satisfied with what they heard, and wondered, as the Jews did at the apostles, viz., whence this man should have these things; perhaps not considering that God more immediately assists those that make it their business industriously and cheerfully to labour in his vineyard.

Thus he spent his latter years, in imitation of his great Lord and Master, the ever-blessed Jesus; he went about doing good, so that the most prying critic, or even malice herself, is defied to find, even upon the narrowest search or observation, any sully or stain upon his reputation with which he may be justly charged; and this we note as a challenge to those that have had the least regard for him, or them of his persuasion, and have, one way or other, appeared in the front of those that oppressed him, and for the turning whose

hearts, in obedience to the commission and commandment given him of God, he frequently prayed, and sometimes sought a blessing for them, even with tears, the effects of which they may, peradventure, though undeservedly, have found in their persons, friends, relations, or estates; for God will hear the prayers of the faithful, and answer them, even for those that vex them, as it happened in the case of Job's praying for the three persons that had been grievous in their reproach against him, even in the day of his sorrow.

But yet let me come a little nearer to particulars and periods of time for the better refreshing the memories of those that knew his labour and suffering, and for the satisfaction of all that shall read this book.

After he was sensibly convicted of the wicked state of his life, and converted, he was baptized into the congregation and admitted a member thereof, viz., in the year 1655, and became speedily a very zealous professor; but, upon the return of King Charles to the crown, in 1660, he was, on the 12th of November, taken, as he was edifying some good people that were got together to hear the Word, and confined in Bedford jail for the space of six years, till the Act of Indulgence to Dissenters being allowed, he obtained his freedom by the

intercession of some in trust and power that took pity of his sufferings; but within six years afterwards [from his first imprisonment] he was again taken up, viz., in the year 1666, and was then confined for six years more, when even the jailer took such pity of his rigorous sufferings that he did as the Egyptian jailer did to Joseph, put all the care and trust into his hands. When he was taken this last time, he was preaching on these words, viz., “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” and this imprisonment continued six years; and when this was over, another short affliction, which was an imprisonment of half a year, fell to his share. During these confinements he wrote these following books, viz.: Of Prayer by the Spirit, The Holy City, Resurrection, Grace Abounding, Pilgrim’s Progress, the first part.

[Defence of Justification by Jesus Christ.]

In the last year of his twelve years’ imprisonment, the pastor of the congregation at Bedford died, and he was chosen to that care of souls on the 12th of December 1671. And in this his charge, he often had disputes with scholars, that came to oppose him, as

supposing him an ignorant person, and though he argued plainly and by Scripture without phrases and logical expressions; yet he nonplussed one who came to oppose him in his congregation, by demanding whether or no we had the true copies of the original Scriptures; and another, when he was preaching, accused him of uncharitableness, for saying, It was very hard for most to be saved; saying, by that, he went about to exclude most of his congregation; but he confuted him and put him to silence with the parable of the stony ground and other texts out of the 13th of Matthew, in our Saviour's sermon out of a ship, all his method being to keep close to the Scriptures; and what he found not warranted there, himself would not warrant nor determine, unless in such cases as were plain, wherein no doubts or scruples did arise.

But not to make any further mention of this kind, it is well known that this person managed all his affairs with such exactness as if he had made it his study, above all other things, not to give occasion of offence, but rather suffer many inconveniences to avoid; being never heard to reproach or revile any, what injury soever he received, but rather to rebuke those that did; and as it was in his conversation, so it is manifested on those books he has caused to

be published to the world; where, like the archangel disputing with Satan about the body of Moses, as we find it in the epistle of Jude, he brings no railing accusation, but leaves the rebukers, those that persecuted him, to the Lord.

In his family he kept up a very strict discipline in prayer and exhortations; being in this like Joshua, as that good man expresses it, viz., Whatsoever others did, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord; and, indeed, a blessing waited on his labours and endeavours, so that his wife, as the Psalmist says, was like a pleasant vine upon the walls of his house, and his children like olive branches round his table; for so shall it be with the man that fears the Lord; and though by reason of the many losses he sustained by imprisonment and spoil, of his chargeable sickness, &c., his earthly treasures swelled not to excess, he always had sufficient to live decently and creditably, and with that he had the greatest of all treasures, which is content; for, as the wise man says, that is a continual feast.

But where content dwells, even a poor cottage is a kingly palace; and this happiness he had all his life long, not so much minding this world as knowing he was here as a pilgrim and stranger, and had no tarrying city, but

looking for one not made with hands, eternal in the highest heavens; but at length, worn out with sufferings, age, and often teaching, the day of his dissolution drew near, and death, that unlocks the prison of the soul, to enlarge it for a more glorious mansion, put a stop to his acting his part on the stage of mortality; heaven, like earthly princes when it threatens war, being always so kind as to call home its ambassadors before it be denounced; and even the last act or undertaking of his was a labour of love and charity; for it so falling out, that a young gentleman, a neighbour of Mr. Bunyan, happening into the displeasure of his father, and being much troubled in mind upon that account, as also for that he had heard his father purposed to disinherit him, or otherwise deprive him of what he had to leave, he pitched upon Mr. Bunyan as a fit man to make way for his submission, and prepare his father's mind to receive him; and he, as willing to do any good office as it could be requested, as readily undertook it; and so, riding to Reading, in Berkshire, he then there used such pressing arguments and reasons against anger and passion, as also for love and reconciliation, that the father was mollified, and his bowels yearned towards his returning son.

But Mr. Bunyan, after he had disposed all

things to the best for accommodation, returning to London, and being overtaken with excessive rains, coming to his lodging extreme wet, fell sick of a violent fever, which he bore with much constancy and patience; and expressed himself as if he desired nothing more than to be dissolved, and to be with Christ, in that case esteeming death as gain, and life only a tedious delaying of felicity expected; and finding his vital strength decay, having settled his mind and affairs, as well as the shortness of his time and the violence of his disease would admit, with a constant and Christian patience, he resigned his soul into the hands of his most merciful Redeemer, following his pilgrim from the City of Destruction to the New Jerusalem; his better part having been all along there, in holy contemplation, pantings, and breathings after the hidden manna, and water of life; as by many holy and humble consolations expressed in his letters to several persons, in prison and out of prison, too many to be here inserted at present.³ He died at the house of one Mr. Straddocks, a grocer, at the Star on Snowhill,

³ All these letters, and nearly all his autographs, have disappeared. Of his numerous manuscripts, books, and letters, not a line is now known to exist. If discovered, they would be invaluable.—Ed.

in the parish of St. Sepulchre, London, on the 12th of August 1688, and in the sixtieth year of his age, after ten days' sickness; and was buried in the new burying place near the Artillery Ground; where he sleeps to the morning of the resurrection, in hopes of a glorious rising to an incorruptible immortality of joy and happiness; where no more trouble and sorrow shall afflict him, but all tears be wiped away; when the just shall be incorrupted, as members of Christ their head, and reign with him as kings and priests for ever.⁴

A BRIEF CHARACTER OF MR. JOHN BUNYAN.

He appeared in countenance to be of a stern and rough temper; but in his

⁴ Strongly does the departure of Bunyan, on his ascent to the celestial city, remind us of Rev. 14:13, 'And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.' What an exchange! From incessant anxious labour; from sighing and sorrow; from corruption and temptation; to commence an endless life of holiness and purity, rest and peace. To be with and like his Lord! His works have followed, and will follow him, till time shall be no more.—Ed.

conversation mild and affable, not given to loquacity or much discourse in company, unless some urgent occasion required it; observing never to boast of himself, or his parts, but rather seem low in his own eyes, and submit himself to the judgment of others; abhorring lying and swearing, being just in all that lay in his power to his word, not seeming to revenge injuries, loving to reconcile differences, and make friendship with all; he had a sharp quick eye, accomplished with an excellent discerning of persons, being of good judgment and quick wit. As for his person, he was tall of stature, strong-boned, though not corpulent, somewhat of a ruddy face, with sparkling eyes, wearing his hair on his upper lip, after the old British fashion; his hair reddish, but in his latter days, time had sprinkled it with grey; his nose well-set, but not declining or bending, and his mouth moderate large; his forehead something high, and his habit always plain and modest. And thus have we impartially described the internal and external parts of a person, whose death hath been much regretted; a person who had tried the smiles and frowns of time; not puffed up in prosperity, nor shaken in adversity, always holding the golden mean.

In him at once did three great worthies

shine,

Historian, poet, and a choice divine;
Then let him rest in undisturbed dust,
Until the resurrection of the just.

POSTSCRIPT.

In this his pilgrimage, God blessed him with four children, one of which, names Mary, was blind, and died some years before; his other children are Thomas, Joseph, and Sarah; and his wife Elizabeth, having lived to see him overcome his labour and sorrow, and pass from this life to receive the reward of his works, long survived him not, but in 1692 she died; to follow her faithful pilgrim from this world to the other, whither he was gone before her; while his works, which consist of sixty books, remain for the edifying of the reader, and the praise of the author. *Vale.*

JohnBunyan.org