

The Pilgrim's Progress.

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The Interpreter's House.

'It would be difficult,' says Cheever, 'to find twelve consecutive pages in the English language that contain such volumes of meaning . . . in so pure and sweet a style, and with so thrilling an appeal to the best affections of the heart, as these pages.' This is high praise, yet the imagination and conscience of Christendom has borne it out, and the passage describing the Interpreter's House is one of the great Christian classics. The form which the allegory here takes is familiar in the earlier literature. Like the play within the play of *Hamlet*, Act III. sc. 2., this shows a set of allegorical tableaux within the main allegory. An interesting parallel may be found in the complicated 'riddles' of the Child and Lion, etc., which, like some of these of Bunyan, stand for teaching regarding the Law and the Gospel, in the history of the *Holy Graal*, branch 6 (Dent). Compare also the engravings on the rock (Dante, *Purgatorio*, canto 10).

The House.

As the Interpreter is the Holy Spirit, this house has often been identified with the Church, in which case the figure would be comparable with that of Herbert's *Temple*. The idea would of course be a true one. Even of the Architecture of old English churches, Coventry Patmore's words are true, that it is 'as if the Spirit had builded its own house.' Here, too, this would be suitable, for the Church stands just where it ought to be, immediately on the other side of the Wicket Gate. Mr. Worldly Wiseman's church in the village of Morality, standing on the other side of the gate, is doomed to failure and is indeed a fraud. To those who have never made the great choice represented by the Wicket Gate, the Interpreter's House might indeed be a place of many and fascinating interests for the intellect and the imagination, but it is a place of essential falsehood and consequently of spiritual danger. One remembers the words of Ezk 33³², from which many sermons to this effect were preached to a former generation: 'And lo, thou art unto them

as a very lovely song, of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.' On the other hand, after the great choice has been made, the sooner Church membership follows the better. Additional arguments in favour of this view of the Interpreter's House are the figure of the minister at the beginning of the passage, and the treatment of the subject in part ii., where the Table, the Bath, and the Seal are introduced.

Yet in spite of all these considerations, it seems probable that the Church is not here meant. The Christian ministry is always a favourite subject with Bunyan, and frequently appears in his pages apart from the Church. Again, the House Beautiful is evidently meant for a formal and detailed picture of the Church, and to have introduced this less distinct picture of it would have involved a confusion of allegory which would be unlike Bunyan. Accordingly, it seems better to take this passage as an account of personal illumination by the Holy Spirit, apart from the services of the Church. We are presented with views of life regarding several of the fundamental religious experiences and thoughts. These views may be taken as noted from his own religious experience regarding the most important things. The earlier part of *Grace Abounding* contains striking accounts of private dealing of this sort between the Holy Spirit and John Bunyan. It will be noted that all the views, given by the Interpreter in his seven scenes, are essentially views of life. The religious teaching of them is psychological or experimental, showing religious truths, not so much as they are in themselves, but from the man's point of view. They are the answers given by God to the deepest questions which life has suggested to man (cf. Walt Whitman's *Answerer*).

The figure of a House of Interpretations is a peculiarly interesting one. Hawthorne may have been thinking of it when he wrote his *Hall of Fantasy*. But the finest parallel is D. G. Rossetti's master-conception of the *House of Life*. Of this, Pater in his *Appreciations* writes one of his most suggestive and illuminative passages: 'The dwelling-place in which one finds oneself by chance or

destiny, yet can partly fashion for oneself; never properly one's own at all if it be changed too lightly, in which every object has its associations—the dim mirrors, the portraits, the lamps, the books, the hair-tresses of the dead and visionary magic crystals in the secret drawers, the names and words scratched on the windows,—windows open upon prospects the saddest or the sweetest; the house one must quit, yet taking, perhaps, how much of its quietly active light and colour along with us!

THE INTERPRETER'S HOUSE shows the Holy Spirit working upon memory, imagination, experience, and knowledge of life. Out of the complex of these, certain images or facts seem to arise and shine conspicuous for a lifetime as the master-truths and commanding inspirations of the soul. The vast importance of these shows how critical is the time which a man passes immediately after his great decision. It is a time comparable with Christ's sojourn in the wilderness and St. Paul's in Arabia, and those are happy who emerge from it under the power of such visions as those which Bunyan here introduces.

Part iii. introduces at this point also the healing of the pilgrim's wounds. At first this appears fantastic, but the idea is happier than most of the conceptions of Part iii. For a great deal of healing comes by knowledge, and many of the wounds of the spirit are closed when a man attains clear views of God and life, men, and things. This is that 'comfort of the truth' of which Christ spoke (Jn 14^{16, 17}).

It is to be noted also that at this gate, as well as at the Wicket Gate, Christian has to knock over and over. Formerly it was knocking in order to travel, here it is knocking in order to see. Spiritual illumination does not by any means always come in intuitive flashes. Far oftener, as in this instance, it is the result of severe thought and determined meditation. Even in spiritual vision a man must knock over and over in order to see.

The Interpreter.

Whatever view may be taken of the Interpreter's House as such, there can be no question as to whom the Interpreter stands for—the Holy Spirit. The figure of the Interpreter is touched lightly and with great reverence in the allegory, like that of Goodwill in the previous passage. Indeed, we

hardly ever get a full look of the Interpreter at all, and the spiritual impression is preserved by this reticence. It is characteristic of Bunyan that so little direct reference to the Holy Spirit is to be found in his allegory. Yet the presence of the Holy Spirit is felt throughout it. The pilgrim is under divine illumination, guidance, and comfort during the whole journey, and it is by a true instinct that Bunyan allows us to feel these mysterious factors in life rather than to see their origin.

Two things at least we learn from the Interpreter's House regarding the Holy Spirit. (i.) *His hidness*. 'The hidness of perfect things' is a well-known phrase whose far-reaching insight experience is constantly confirming. Here, nothing could be homelier than the incidents of the narrative. There is no apparent magic, but merely the speech of what always seems a human voice—

... that gentle voice we hear,
Soft as the breath of even,
That checks each thought, that calms each fear,
And speaks of heaven.

He seems to have identified himself with the personality of the pilgrim, and the scenes which he shows him seem to be but the man's own hopes and fears written large—

And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are his alone.

Above all, keeping himself in the background, he takes of the things of Christ and shows them; yet these are shown by the agency of the very ordinary and homely facts of life—a man lights a candle and Christian follows him. The Holy Spirit is not the rival of human means of teaching. He quotes familiar words of Scripture which grow luminous as he uses them. The men around us, the common facts and objects that may be seen in any day's walk, are capable under his power of taking on the highest spiritual meaning (cf. Tennyson's 'Flower in the crannied wall'). (ii.) The *gentleness* of the Interpreter is noteworthy. He took Christian by the hand, and, as Gregory says, 'his touch is itself a teaching.' Nothing in the world is so delicate as this means of grace. The quiet voices of the Spirit have power both to shake and to strengthen the human soul, yet every experienced Christian knows how

easily the Spirit can be 'grieved' and even 'quenched.' No figure in the whole book is at once so awful and so tender as this half-seen and suggested form of him who has the 'world's secret trembling on his lip.'

The Scenes.

While there is no attempt at systematic teaching in these, they form a unity when taken as a whole. The minister, the human spiritual guide, is merely introductory, and naturally occurs first in Bunyan's thought of such matters as are here dealt with. Then there is a presentation of the fundamental conception of Law and Gospel, in the dusty room, which shows these not in themselves, but as they affect the Christian. Then follow, still from the point of view of experience rather than of abstract doctrine, pictures of the supreme human and divine factors in the Christian life. The human factor is patience and the divine is grace. The next picture is the strenuous and victorious picture of the whole life, in which the entire *Pilgrim's Progress* may be said to be summarized. But to a soul like Bunyan's there is an inevitable and constant undertone of tragedy in

the thought of life, and before the visions close we have to look upon two aspects of the underlying terror. The first is of that despair which is the judgment of the careless on this side of death,—the other is of the judgment beyond the grave.

These scenes we shall examine more fully in the next article; meanwhile, a phrase which epitomizes them at the end of the passage is worthy of remark. The scenes end in six lines of verse, which are, as poetry, below the level even of Bunyan's verses. But the first line tells us that we have here seen things 'rare and profitable.' There could not be a happier combination. To be interesting is one ideal of religious teaching; to be profitable is, alas! in many cases a quite different one. Human teaching which combines the two has come within sight of the ideal education, and the very note of the teaching of the Spirit of God, rightly understood, is just that combination. His is the most profitable teaching that is ever given, but while he teaches he also quickens all the vital interests of life, so that his scholars confess with full assent, that they have 'seen things rare and profitable.'

At the Literary Table.

COMPARATIVE RELIGION.

COMPARATIVE RELIGION: ITS GENESIS AND GROWTH. By Louis Henry Jordan, late Special Lecturer in Comparative Religion at the University of Chicago. (T. & T. Clark. 8vo, 12s.)

WHAT do the two words mean to us? 'Religion' itself does not mean very much; it is too distant and indefinite. And 'Comparative' sometimes adds the element of suspicion. When some of us read 'Comparative Religion' as the title of a book, in our own minds we are reading, 'One religion as good as another.' But one religion is not as good as another; and Comparative Religion is with us for the very purpose of saying so.

Comparative Religion is with us. Of that there is now no longer any doubt; this handsome volume is itself the unmistakable evidence. Our way with it has been peculiar. We have not welcomed it, as the French have done. Nor have

we slammed our doors in its face, as the Germans have done. We have simply left it alone. For we have not been sure whether on the whole it is a friend or a foe. But it is with us now. We have heard of it with the hearing of the ear; we can no longer keep our eyes from seeing it.

There are those to whom the accident of looking into a volume of Tylor's *Primitive Culture* or Frazer's *Golden Bough* was an epoch in life. These are they who will take to Mr. Jordan's great book first, and they will not be disappointed. For they have passed now from the weird fascination of those two books. They have come to see that the study of the phenomena of religion has the unique privilege of claiming the rank of a science, while it still appeals to the imagination as in the first flush of our surprise with it. And having already enjoyed the romance, they will be ready now for the orderly exposition.

Mr. Jordan gives a complete account of Com-