

THE Heavenly Footman

OR,

A description of the man that gets to Heaven; together with the way he runs in, the marks he goes by; also, some

DIRECTIONS

how to run so as to obtain. With an epistle to all the

lothful and careless people.

By JOHN BUNYAN

(1628-1688)

1698.

Edited by George Offor.

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About forty years ago a gentleman, in whose company I had commenced my pilgrimage, and who had joined me in communion with a Baptist church, about four years previously, came to my house one Monday morning, greatly delighted with the sermon which our pastor had preached on the previous day, while I was engaged in superintending the Sunday school. It had caused a very remarkable sensation, which, if properly followed up, bid fair to occasion an extraordinary revival of religion in the neighbourhood. He, with the deacons, had begged of our minister to fill up his outline, and prepare the sermon for publication, to which he had consented. He wished to ascertain from me, as a publisher, the expense of printing five thousand copies, being sure that the sale of it would be unprecedented, not only throughout the kingdom, but as far as the English language was spoken. In about a week, the copy fairly written was left with me. The text was Hebrews 12:1, Let us run with patience the race that is set before us. After the introduction that all men desire heaven, but all do not run for it, the word run was explained as a flying, pressing, persevering. Then seven reasons, and nine directions, were followed by nine motives and nine uses. This, and the striking ideas and language of the sermon, brought Bunyan to my recollection, and, on comparison, it proved to be the Heavenly Footman, with very slight alterations. Having very recently purchased a new edition of the book, at a very low price, my inquiry was, whether they would not prefer having the book in its genuine state, especially as it was ready for delivery. I need not add, that all thoughts of circulating the sermon was at once abandoned. In conversation with my excellent pastor, who afterwards for many years bore the honour of a D.D., he acknowledge his obligation to me for detecting the plagiarism before the sermon was published, and explained to me that, when very young, he had read Bunyan's Heavenly Footman with intense interest, and made a full analysis of it, in the shape of notes, which, having committed to memory, he preached to a very delighted and deeply impressed congregation; that after a lapse of many years, looking over the outlines of his early sermons, he was struck with it, and believing it to be his own composition, had again used it with such extraordinary success, as led his deacons and members to request him to print it. Doubtless Bunyan being dead has often similarly spoken, may his voice never be lost in silence or be forgotten.

The title of Heavenly Footman was probably suggested by the words of the prophet Jeremiah, If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And in the land of peace thou trustedst, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan? (12:5), and Let us run with patience the race that is set before us (Heb 12:1). The word footman does not refer to that class of servants who are badged and dressed in livery to gratify the pride of their masters, nor to that description of foot-soldiers or infantry, whose business is designated by the blood-stained colour of their cloths. But it refers to those who are travelling a foot to a distant country, engaged on a pilgrimage from earth to heaven. It is worthy of remark, that the whole of the children of God, of every age and clime, class and kindred, the richest and the poorest, are all upon terms of perfect equality in running the race set before them. No wealth, nor grade, can procure a horse to carry them, or a carriage to ride in; all must run a foot. The only carriage for the foot-sore, weary pilgrim is the bosom of Christ; he carries the lambs in his bosom, and there is room enough for all; the poorest labourer and the noblest aristocrat meet there upon a level with each other; there is no first class for the rich, and parliamentary train for the poor. It is all first class. In the varied adventures of Christian and his associates, and of Christiana, her children, and her lovely friend Mercy, they never ride. The little one is led by the hand up the steep and rough hill of Calvary, but his own feet carry him throughout the wearisome road. The only carriage was the fiery chariot which carried the soul of the martyred Faithful to the Celestial City; there is no riding to heaven while in the body. Wealth may procure many pleasures to clog the soul in its journey. It may purchase indulgencies; it may incline some disciples to look at sinful imperfections through the wrong end of the telescope; it may purchase prayers, but devotional exercises, bought by gold, will freeze the soul. It is the poor disciple that receives the faithful admonitions of his equally poor fellow-saints. The rich have more ceremony, while the labourer enjoys more richly, more free from restraint, the warm outpourings of a devotional spirit. Still there is nothing to prevent the greatest nobleman or monarch from running to heaven in company with the disciples of our lowly Master. If he refuses this road and this company, he must pursue his downward course to destruction.

The order in which the allegorical works of Bunyan were written, very naturally suggest itself from his own narratives, and from the dates of their publication. It was thus, while suffering his tedious and dangerous imprisonment for Christ's sake, he was led to write an account of the dealings of God with his soul, which work he published in 1666, under the title of Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners. While engaged in writing this remarkable narrative, the almost unbounded allegorical powers of his mind were brought into exercise

And thus it was: I writing of the way

And race of saints, in this our gospel-day.

Fell suddenly into an allegory

About their journey, and the way to glory.

Having finished his Grace Abounding, he allowed his fertile imagination its full scope, and again wrote the result of his experience in the form of an allegorical narrative, called the Pilgrim's Progress from this World to that which is to Come. At first the thoughts pressed upon him as fast as he could write them, yet he says

I did not think

To show to all the world my pen and ink

In such a mode.

And it was several years before he ventured to publish his beautiful allegory. He was released from prison in 1672, having been chosen in the previous year to be the pastor, or ministering elder of the church at Bedford. His time was then much occupied in re-organizing the church, after years of tempest and fiery persecution. At length, having overcome his own and his friends reluctance to publish so solemn a work on the conversion of a sinner and his way to heaven, in the form of an allegory, the Pilgrim's Progress was printed in 1678. The wonderful popularity of this book, and the great good it produced, led him again to turn his Grace Abounding into a different form of narrative, in the more profound allegory of the Holy War; this was published in 1682, and in two years afterwards he completed the Pilgrim by a delightful second part. His long incarceration, followed by sudden and great activity, probably brought down his robust constitution; and as the end of his course drew nigh, he was doubly diligent, for in 1688, before his death-day, which was in August, he published six important treatises, and had prepared fourteen or fifteen others for the press. Among these were his final and almost dying instructions to the pilgrim, under the title of The Heavenly Footman, the man whom he describes in the poetical apology to the Pilgrim's Progress, as he that

Runs and runs,

Till he unto the gate of glory comes.

This treatise sheds a lustre over the latter days of our immortal allegorist. It is evidently the production of a mind expanded and chastened with the rich experience of sanctified age. In it we are reminded of those important directions to heavenly footmen, contained in his most admired books. Is there a Slough of Despond to be passed, and a hill Difficulty to be overcome? Here the footman is reminded of many a dirty step, many a high hill, a long and tedious journey through a vast howling wilderness; but he is encouraged, the land of promise is at the end of the way. Must the man who would eternally draw his sword, put on his helmet, and fight his way into the temple, the heavenly footman must press, crowd, and thrust through all that stand between heaven and his soul. Did Ignorance, who perished from the way, say to the pilgrims, You go so fast, I must stay awhile behind? He who runs to heaven is told that the hasty-heeled, lazy, wanton, and foolish professor will not attain the prize. The wicket-gate, at the head of the way, is all-important; none can get to heaven unless they enter by Christ, the door and way, so the footman is reminded that it matters not how fast he runs, he can never attain the prize, if he is in the wrong road. Did the pilgrims so severely suffer from entering upon Byopath-meadow, and even after that bitter experience were they again misled into a by-path, by a black man clothed in white raiment? Our footman is warned. Beware then of bye and crooked paths that lead to death and damnation; the way to heaven is one, still there are many well-beaten bye paths that butt or shroud upon it, and which lead to destruction. To prevent van and foolish company from calling you out of the path, or from loitering in it, say, I am haste, I am running for a prize; if I win I am made, I win ALL; if I lose I am all, and um done. So it was with Faithful when even Christian, who saw him before, cried Ho, so ho. Faithful answered, No, I am upon my life, the avenger of blood is behind me. In the same way the pilgrims refused the invitations of Demas with his silver mine. No, said the heavenly footman, I am running for heaven, for my soul, for God, for Christ, from hell and everlasting damnation. Did the poor pilgrims go grunting, puffing, and sighing, one tumbler over a bush, another sticks fast in the dirt, one cries out, I am down, and another, Ho! where are you? Pilgrim's Progress. So the footman is told that he will meet with cross, pain, and wearinessomeness to the flesh, with briars and snares, and other encumbrances, through all which he must persevere. Did Formalist and Hypocrite turn off into bye ways at the foot of the hill Difficulty, and miserably perish? Did Mistrust and Timorous run back for fear of the persecuting lions, Church and State? So the man that runs for heaven is cautioned. Some when they come at the cross can go no further, but back again to their sins, they go, stumble and break their necks, or turn aside to the left or to the right, and perish. Be not ready to halt, nor turn hobbling and halting, but, like my Lord Will-be-will in the Holy War, when fighting against Diabolus, get thy will tip with heavenly grace, and go full speed for heaven. These quotations are a summary of the guide books which Bunyan had before written. It was doubtless one of the last productions of his prolific pen.

Two passages in the Heavenly Footman appear to favour the idea, that a period in life is, in some cases, fixed, beyond which there is no repentance; thus in a solemn warning against procrastination to the sinner, Does thou know whether the day of grace will last a week longer or no? For the day of grace is past with some before their life is ended; and sometimes sinners have not heaven gates open to them so long as they suppose; and if they be once shut against a man, they are so heavy that all the men in the world, not all the angels in heaven, can open them. Francis Spira can tell us that it is to stay till the gate of mercy be quite shut. It becomes an interesting inquiry as to who Bunyan means by the some of whom he says, that the day of grace is past before their life is ended. This cannot refer to those who, neglecting the Saviour, are in a perishing condition. No minister felt a more ardent desire to rouse them to a sense of their danger and to guard them against despair than John Bunyan. In his Jerusalem Sinner Saved he thus argues Why despair? thou art yet in the land of the living. It is a sin to begin to despair before one sets his foot over the threshold of hell gates. What, despair of bread in a land that is full of corn? Despair of mercy when our God is full of mercy, thou scropulous fool; despair when we have a redeeming Christ alive. Let them despair that dwell where there is no God, and that are confined to those chambers of death which can be reached by no redemption. In Bunyan's Come and Welcome, he proves that it would be high blasphemy and damnable wickedness to imagine that Christ would cast out any that come to God by him. He cannot mean the backslider, for Bunyan was such. David also, to an awful extent, and Peter to the denial of his Lord. No, he may mean those who, while

neglecting the Saviour, are overtaken by madness, or more probably to such as Judas, Spira, and others who sell their Master, or renounce him. If a man abandons the Saviour, there is no other name under heaven whereby he can be saved; there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin; he is a despiser of God's way of salvation, and tramples under foot the Son of God. While such a career continues, fiery indignation must be his wretched destiny. They who contemn the heavenly gift the Holy Ghost, the word of God, the powers of the world to come, if they persevere unto death in such sentiments, the day of grace is past. There have been some who, like Esau, having sold their birthright, sought repentance even with tears, but found it not; they sought it not in God's appointed way. All hope depends upon such sinners coming unto Christ, humbled and broken-hearted. He is willing, He is able to save even then to the uttermost, but they will not. He has promised, and will perform his word, him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. The volume of inspiration is crowned at its close with the same cheering encouragement, And the Spirit and the bride say, Come, And let him that is athirst come. And WHOSOEVER WILL, let him take the water of life freely. I cannot imagine that any man would have sung with greater pleasure than Bunyan that hymn of Dr. Watts

Life is the time to serve the Lord,

The time to insure the great reward;

And while the lamp holds out to burn,

The vilest sinner may return.

They only who reject the counsel and mercy of God, shut heavens gates against their own souls, and rush upon Jehovah's buckler like Judas, or Spira, or like one of Bunyan's early friends, John Childs, who apostatized for fear of persecution, and perished by his own hand. To such only the day of grace is past; they have set themselves in the scorner's seat, from which they will be hurried into uttermost wretchedness.

Bunyan well knew that idleness engenders poverty and crime, and is the parent of every evil; and he exhorts his runner to the greatest diligence, not to fool away his soul in slothfulness, which induces carelessness, until the sinner is remedied. Our first care is to get into the right way, and then so to run that the devil, who is light of foot, may not overtake and trip us up. Running to heaven does not prevent the true, the real enjoyment of earthly blessings, but sanctifies and heightens them. The great impetus in our course is love to the prize, to Christ, to heaven; having our affections set upon things above. Looking unto Jesus. His righteousness imputed unto us by the shedding of his blood, marks all the road, and while we keep that in sight we cannot err. In all earthly things we anticipate too much, but in the glories of heaven, our anticipations are feeble indeed, compared with eternal realities. Could the saints in glory impart to us a sense of their indescribable happiness, with what activity and perseverance we should run. The case of Lot, when flying from destruction, is put by Bunyan with peculiar force, he dared not to look back even to see what had been done to him. Runs and runs, till he unto the gate of glory comes.

This treatise sheds a lustre over the latter days of our immortal allegorist. It is evidently the production of a mind expanded and chastened with the rich experience of sanctified age. In it we are reminded of those important directions to heavenly footmen, contained in his most admired books. Is there a Slough of Despond to be passed, and a hill Difficulty to be overcome? Here the footman is reminded of many a dirty step, many a high hill, a long and tedious journey through a vast howling wilderness; but he is encouraged, the land of promise is at the end of the way. Must the man who would eternally draw his sword, put on his helmet, and fight his way into the temple, the heavenly footman must press, crowd, and thrust through all that stand between heaven and his soul. Did Ignorance, who perished from the way, say to the pilgrims, You go so fast, I must stay awhile behind? He who runs to heaven is told that the hasty-heeled, lazy, wanton, and foolish professor will not attain the prize. The wicket-gate, at the head of the way, is all-important; none can get to heaven unless they enter by Christ, the door and way, so the footman is reminded that it matters not how fast he runs, he can never attain the prize, if he is in the wrong road. Did the pilgrims so severely suffer from entering upon Byopath-meadow, and even after that bitter experience were they again misled into a by-path, by a black man clothed in white raiment? Our footman is warned. Beware then of bye and crooked paths that lead to death and damnation; the way to heaven is one, still there are many well-beaten bye paths that butt or shroud upon it, and which lead to destruction. To prevent van and foolish company from calling you out of the path, or from loitering in it, say, I am haste, I am running for a prize; if I win I am made, I win ALL; if I lose I am all, and um done. So it was with Faithful when even Christian, who saw him before, cried Ho, so ho. Faithful answered, No, I am upon my life, the avenger of blood is behind me. In the same way the pilgrims refused the invitations of Demas with his silver mine. No, said the heavenly footman, I am running for heaven, for my soul, for God, for Christ, from hell and everlasting damnation. Did the poor pilgrims go grunting, puffing, and sighing, one tumbler over a bush, another sticks fast in the dirt, one cries out, I am down, and another, Ho! where are you? Pilgrim's Progress. So the footman is told that he will meet with cross, pain, and wearinessomeness to the flesh, with briars and snares, and other encumbrances, through all which he must persevere. Did Formalist and Hypocrite turn off into bye ways at the foot of the hill Difficulty, and miserably perish? Did Mistrust and Timorous run back for fear of the persecuting lions, Church and State? So the man that runs for heaven is cautioned. Some when they come at the cross can go no further, but back again to their sins, they go, stumble and break their necks, or turn aside to the left or to the right, and perish. Be not ready to halt, nor turn hobbling and halting, but, like my Lord Will-be-will in the Holy War, when fighting against Diabolus, get thy will tip with heavenly grace, and go full speed for heaven. These quotations are a summary of the guide books which Bunyan had before written. It was doubtless one of the last productions of his prolific pen.

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