JOHN BUNYAN.
1628 NOVEMBER 1928.
A BRIEF SKETCH OF HIS LIFE, TIMES, AND WRITINGS.
BY THE EDITOR.

JOHN BUNYAN, whose birth three hundred years ago we commemorate in the month of November of the present year, was born into an era which was both stirring and romantic. His baptism is recorded in the parish register of Elstow as having taken place on the 30th of November, 1628.

Much was crowded into the sixty years of Bunyan's eventful life. It embraced the turbulent reign of Charles the first, the Star Chamber and the High Commission; the long intestine war with its memories of Edgehill, Naseby, and Marston Moor; a discrowned monarch, a royal trial, and a royal execution. Bunyan saw all that was venerable and all that was novel changing places like the scene shifting of a drama. Then followed the Protectorate during which an Englishman became a power and a name; the Restoration with its reaction of excesses; the Act of Uniformity framed in true succession to take effect on St. Bartholomew's day, by which at one fell swoop were ejected two thousand ministers; the Conventicle Act which hounded the ejected ones from the copse and from the glen, and made it treason for a vesper hymn to rise from the forest minster; and the great plague, a fitting sequel to enactments so foul. Then came the death of the dissolute king, the accession of James with a renewal of the struggle between prerogative and freedom; the wild conspiracy of Monmouth, the military cruelties of Kirke and Claverhouse, and the judicial cruelties of Jeffreys; the martyrdoms of Elizabeth Gaunt, of gentle Alice Lisle, the acquittal of the seven bishops: the final eclipse of the house of Stuart, and England's last
THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS FROM THIS WORLD, TO THAT WHICH IS TO COME: DELIVERED UNDER THE SIMILITUDE OF A DREAM. WHEREIN IS DISCOVERED, THE MANNER OF HIS SETTING OUT, HIS DANGEROUS JOURNEY; AND SAFE ARRIVAL AT THE DESIRED COUNTRY. I HAVE USED SIMILITUDES, HOS. 12.10. BY JOHN BUNYAN. LICENSED AND ENTERED ACCORDING TO ORDER. LONDON, PRINTED FOR NATH. PONDER AT THE PEACOCK IN THE POULTRY NEAR CORNHILL, 1678.
revolution which transferred the ultimate decision in the state from the king to parliament.

What a rush of history was compressed into a period less than the life span of man! These were times for the development of character, times for the birth of men. And the men were there: the poet, the wit, the divine, and the hero, as if genius had brought out her jewels, and furnished them for the nation's needs. Pym and Hampden bearded tyranny, Russell and Sydney dreamed of freedom, Blake secured the empire of ocean, and Falkland fought and fell. In those stirring times Charnock, Owen, Howe, Henry, and Baxter wrote, and preached, and prayed. Cudworth and Henry More were living at Cambridge, South was at Oxford, Prideaux in the close at Norwich, Whitby in the close at Salisbury. Sherlock preached at the Temple, Tillotson at Lincoln's Inn, Burnet at the Rolls, Stillingfleet at St. Paul's, Beveridge at St. Peter's, Cornhill. "Men who could set forth the majesty and beauty of Christianity with such justness of thought and such energy of language that the indolent Charles roused himself to listen, and the fastidious Buckingham forgot to sneer." It was but twelve years before Bunyan's birth that all that was mortal of Shakespeare was laid to rest. Waller, Cowley, Butler, Dryden, and George Herbert still flourished; and our great Milton sang mid the groves of Chalfont.

In such an era, with such men for his contemporaries, John Bunyan ran his course "a burning and a shining light kindled in dark places for the praise and glory of God."

It was a distinct and well-defined interval between the writers of the days of Elizabeth and James and those of the Restoration. It was the age of the writers who were concerned with the needs of the hour rather than with the purpose of creating and developing the higher forms of literature. The aim was to reach the public mind directly, and so shape the national policy at critical moments in the nation's life.

Of the three outstanding writers of that period: John Bunyan, Daniel Defoe, and Jonathan Swift, who belong to no special class and school, and whose literary genealogy cannot be traced, John Bunyan stands alone, with his vivid descriptions of characters, his quaint turns of thought, and his racy English style. In creative genius he was the most gifted of the three, although in educational advantages he was the least favoured.
Born in 1628, in the Bedfordshire village of Elstow, the son of a brazier, he attended the village school, but to his shame, he had to confess, he soon lost the little he learnt. His youth was spent in excess of riot, and there are expressions in his works descriptive of his manner of life, which cannot be interpreted, as Macaulay would have it, in a theological sense, nor resolved into morbid self-upbraidings. He was an adept and a teacher in evil.

During the civil war the army regulation age was from sixteen to sixty and in the very month in which Bunyan completed his sixteenth year he was drafted into service as a soldier in the parliamentary army. From the muster rolls of the garrison we know that he was on military duty at Newport Pagnell from November, 1644, to June, 1647.

On his release from military duty he returned to his native village, and in 1649 married a godly woman, and to quote his own words: “This woman and I came together as poor as poor might be, not having so much household stuff as a dish or spoon betwixt us both.” She brought him, however, two books which had belonged to her father entitled: The plain man’s pathway to Heaven, and The practice of piety, which they read together, and which excited a powerful influence over her husband, as may be seen in his Life and Death of Mr. Badman, 1680. The world owes much more to the influence of this godly woman than has been fittingly acknowledged. But for that influence we might never have had The Pilgrim’s Progress, and the world would have been all the poorer.

About this time Bunyan underwent, like Blake and Cowper, many strange religious experiences, and was led to take pleasure in the reading of his Bible, although he had not yet entered into that deep religious experience, those struggles of soul which he has so vividly described in his Grace Abounding. But when that time came, to quote J. R. Green: “He lived in the Bible till its words became his own, and so influenced his style, that his English may be described as the simplest and homeliest that has ever been used by any great English writer, which is the English of the Bible.”

The Bible and John Fox’s “Actes and Monuments” were, as far as we know, the only influences of a literary sort, except the two volumes already referred to, under which Bunyan ever came until he appeared before the world as an author.

In 1653, he joined a dissenting community, often erroneously
described as a Baptist church, and two years later began to preach in the neighbouring villages. His preaching brought him into collision with some of the followers of George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, and the consequence of this controversy was to launch Bunyan on his career of authorship. For the purpose of advancing what he held to be more scriptural teaching on the subject which had been in dispute, he published in 1656, when he was twenty-eight years of age, his first book: *Some Gospel truths opened*, the first of a series of controversial writings against the followers of George Fox, which he wrote in response to what he felt to be a call to duty. On the title-page of this little volume of 260 pages Bunyan describes himself as “that unworthy servant of Christ, John Bunyan, of Bedford, By the grace of God, Preacher of the Gospel of his dear Son.”

This book, published at Newport Pagnell, was a protest against the mystic teaching of the Quakers, and was replied to by Edward Burrough, an ardent Quaker. This reply called forth an instant rejoinder from Bunyan in a further volume of 200 pages entitled: *A Vindication of Gospel Truths*; this second book following his first, as he tells us, at an interval of only a few weeks.

It was about this time, probably in 1655, that Bunyan removed to Bedford, where he soon had to mourn the loss of the wife to whose piety he owed so much.

These first literary ventures are not specially characteristic of Bunyan’s genius, but they display the same ease of style, directness and naturalness which he maintained to the end, and are remarkable as the productions of a working man of the scantiest education.

In 1657, his calling as a preacher was formally recognised, and he was set apart for that office. His fame as a preacher soon spread, for as soon as it was known that the once blaspheming tinker had turned preacher, they flocked by hundreds, and from all parts, to hear him, though, as he himself says, some to marvel, some to mock, but some with an earnest desire to hear his words.

In 1658, Bunyan published another treatise, under the title: *Sighs from Hell, or the Groans of a Damned Soul*, on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, in which we have tokens of his more matured style. A further work appeared in 1659, entitled: *The Doctrine of the Law of Grace Unfolded*.

The restoration of the monarchy in 1660 vitally affected the social
and religious condition of Nonconformists, and Bunyan was almost the first man to feel the change. In the month of November, following the King's return in May, he was confined to Bedford county gaol, for preaching in a farmhouse in the south of the county, and there he remained for twelve years, until the King's declaration of indulgence, in 1672. Upon his release he was chosen pastor of his old church in Bedford, of which since 1653 he had been a private member, a charge he held without State interference for the next three years.

About a year before Bunyan's apprehension he took a second wife, to watch over his four little motherless children. She was a noble-hearted woman, who showed undaunted courage in seeking her husband's release, in which, although she met with kindly sympathy, there was but little encouragement.

As a preacher Bunyan had a high reputation in his day. Sympathy, earnestness, and power were the great characteristics of his successful ministry. He preached what he felt, and his preaching corresponded to the various stages of his personal experience. Many churches were founded by his labours. Dr. Owen assured King Charles that for the tinker's ability to prate, he would gladly barter his own stores of learning. In his annual visit to London, twelve hundred people would gather at seven in the morning of a winter's working day to hear him.

The twelve years of Bunyan's incarceration fall into two equal parts. During the first six years he published no fewer than nine of his books: Profitable Meditations, 1661; Praying in Spirit, 1663; Christian Behaviour, 1663; Four Last Things, 1664; Ebal and Gerizim, 1664; The Holy City, 1665; Resurrection of the Dead, 1665; Prison Meditations, 1665; and Grace Abounding, 1666.

The last of these, Grace abounding to the Chief of Sinners, which appeared in 1666, is the first of the four outstanding creations of his genius. It is in reality his own autobiography, an intense record "written as it were by a pen of fire," and it has been recognised as one of the great books of the world in religious experience, not unworthy to take its place by the side of the Confessions of St. Augustine.

Another book, which preceded this by a year, entitled The Holy City, or the New Jerusalem, is a kind of foregleam of that celestial city to which in after days he conducted the pilgrims of his dream.
For the next five years Bunyan seems to have laid aside his pen, but in 1671 he broke his silence and published a book entitled *A Confession of my Faith, and a Reason of my Practice*, in which he gives a reasoned statement of his religious opinions. It is a kind of *Apologia pro vita sua*, a vindication of his conduct in resolutely standing by his convictions. In 1672 he published his *Defence of Justification by Faith*, a vehement attack of Edward Fowler's *Design of Christianity*, which Richard Baxter deemed also worthy of a reply.

In 1675 the declaration of indulgence, under which he had been released from prison in 1672, was repealed, and Bunyan was once more exposed to all the penalties of the Conventicle Act. He was arrested and sent to prison for six months, this time in the small town gaol on Bedford bridge.

It was during this second and shorter imprisonment that he wrote the first part of *The Pilgrim's Progress from this world to that which is to come*. This allegory appeared in the early part of 1678. Its fate was to be read almost out of existence. Macaulay, writing in 1854, said that not a single copy was known to be in existence. Of the two issues which are known, less than a dozen copies have survived, of which all save three or four are imperfect. A complete copy of the first issue is preserved in the John Rylands Library.

In a second edition which appeared in the same year, 1678, and in the third edition, which appeared in the year following, and which is rarer even than the first, Bunyan made several important and characteristic additions. How important may be judged when it is pointed out that in the first edition you may look in vain for the Wordly-Wiseman. Mr. By-Ends of the Town of Fair-Speech does himself more justice in the second edition, where in answer to Christian's enquiry: "Pray who are your kindred, if a man may make so bold," he gives the following details for the first time: "Almost the whole town; and in particular my Lord Turn-about, my Lord Time-server, my Lord Fair-speech (from whose ancestors the town first took its

---

1 A copy in the original sheepskin binding was sold at auction in July, 1926, for £6800. It is true that it was afterwards found to be a copy of the second issue of the first edition, and was on that account returned to the auctioneer, but the high price paid for it is none the less an index of the value now set upon the book.
A Pilgrim's Progress, as Mr. Birrell remarks, without a Worldly-wiseman, and Mr. Facing-both-ways, would have been sadly incomplete.

Another addition must be mentioned. In the first edition Giant Despair was a bachelor. In the second edition he is married "and his wife's name is given as Diffidence."

In 1684, after the publication of ten editions of the First Part, the first edition of the Second Part appeared, of which a copy is also to be found in the John Rylands Library. Bunyan seems to have had the intention to publish a third part, for the closing words of the second part clearly indicates as much. A third part did appear, but it is an impudent forgery.

The question of the originality of The Pilgrim's Progress has been raised again and again. Comparisons were drawn between it and Guillaume de Guilleville's Pilgrimage of the Soul, which was probably translated from the French by John Lydgate, and printed by Caxton in 1483. This is the only known English edition of the work. In this work we have a vision of a city of the heavens acting as an incentive to a pilgrimage on earth, and in the course of which we come to a wicket-gate and a reception in the house of Grâce Dieu, recalling that of Christian in the house called Beautiful. That there are ideas in common is obvious enough. The quest for a city with eternal foundations was a New Testament idea, as accessible alike to Bunyan, De Guilleville, or Spenser. The House of Grâce Dieu, the Palace Beautiful, and the House of Mercy in The Faerie Queene may have been suggested by the old houses of entertainment provided for pilgrims or travellers on their way.

The question is: "Could Bunyan have been influenced by these or similar works?" He was in prison when the idea of the pilgrim journey first laid hold of him. Even had he thought of it beforehand the literature of the subject, which he might have studied by way of preparation, was not easily accessible in those days to the working classes. But apart from these considerations we have Bunyan's own express declaration on the subject in the following words: "Some say The Pilgrim's Progress is not mine. Manner and matter, too, was..."
JOHN BUNYAN

all mine own, nor was it unto any mortal known till I had done it. The whole, and every whit is mine.” When the vision descended on him it was a surprise to no one more than to himself. Bunyan himself tells us that it was written without thought even of a possible reader:

I did not think
To shew to all the World my Pen and Ink
... nor did I undertake
Therby to please my Neighbour; no not I;
I did it mine own self to gratifie.

“This is the great merit of the book,” said Dr. Johnson, “that the most cultivated man cannot find anything to praise more highly, and the child knows nothing more amusing.” Horace Walpole thought he was paying Edmund Spenser a compliment when he spoke of him as “John Bunyan in rhyme.”

The general world of readers never wavered in their favourable estimate of the book. Between 1678 and 1778 thirty-five editions of the first part, and fifty-nine editions of parts one and two together were issued, and then publishers left off counting. It is computed that one hundred thousand copies were sold during Bunyan’s lifetime.

Three years after its publication The Pilgrim’s Progress was reprinted in the Puritan colony in America, and there, ever since, it has continued to be published in an untold number of editions. With Shakespeare it forms part of the literary bond which unites the two English-speaking peoples on opposite sides of the Atlantic.

The work was translated into Dutch and French in 1662. The first edition in German appeared in 1694, and has since been followed by many successive editions. Other translations have gone on multiplying down to the present time until there are versions in no fewer than one hundred and ten different languages and dialects, so that it is no mere poetical figure to say “that it follows the Bible from land to land as the singing of birds follows the dawn.”

Between 1656, when he gave his first book to the world and 1688, when a few weeks before his death he saw his last book partly through the press, Bunyan sent forth altogether no fewer than sixty different publications, as the product of his pen.

While all, more or less, bear the impress of his genius, the four outstanding works, which by common consent are recognised as surpassing
all the rest in power are: Grace Abounding, The Pilgrim’s Progress, The Holy War, and The Life and Death of Mr. Badman.

In point of personal interest and popular power, it is said that The Holy War contrasts unfavourably with the story of Christian and Christiana, yet it contains fine passages and lofty conceptions, and is interesting as throwing light upon Bunyan’s own military experience. Macaulay’s estimate of the work was that, if The Pilgrim’s Progress had not been written, The Holy War would have been our greatest English allegory.

The remaining work, The Life and Death of Mr. Badman, though disfigured by grotesque stories, and somewhat coarse passages, bears the characteristic marks of Bunyan’s genius, and is a book of power. It was intended to be a companion picture to that of his dream, as the one set forth the progress of a Christian from this world to glory, the other was to present the life and death of the ungodly and their travel through this world to perdition. It is constructed on a different plan, in dialogue form, and furnishes a picture of low English life as Bunyan saw it with his own eyes in a country town, in the degraded days of Charles, and, as such, it has its historical values.

The amount of actual good accomplished by Bunyan’s writings it would be difficult to estimate. No man since the days of the Apostles has done more to draw the attention of the world to the matters of supremest value, nor painted the beauty of holiness in more alluring colours, nor spoken to the universal heart in tenderer sympathy or with more thrilling tone.

Although The Pilgrim’s Progress became immediately popular, and was the only book to be found on the shelf of many a rustic dwelling, save the Bible, the humble origin and riotous youth of its author long prevented its circulation among the politer classes of the land. At length, long the darling of the populace, it became the study of the learned. Critics went down into its treasure chambers and were astonished at their wealth and beauty, and what had been described as “the tinker’s dream” became a national classic.

Bunyan’s death took place on the 31st of August, 1688, at the house of his friend John Strudwick, who kept a grocer’s and chandler’s shop at the sign of the Star, Holborn Bridge, two months before he had completed his sixtieth year. He was the father of six children, four by his first wife, and two by the second. His eldest child Mary
JOHN BUNYAN

the blind child (born in 1650), of whom he writes with exquisite tenderness in *Grace Abounding*, died before her father. His heroic wife survived him only by a year and a half, and died early in 1691. The only known representatives of Bunyan are the descendants of his youngest daughter Sarah. In 1686, two years before her father’s death, she had married her fellow parishioner, William Browne, and her descendants form a rather numerous and widespread clan.

Bunyan left a number of works in manuscript, which were given to the world by his devoted friend, Charles Doe, who has been described as a good, simple-minded comb-maker by London Bridge. Soon after Bunyan’s death Doe undertook the production of a folio edition of his collected works as “the best work he could do for God.” The first volume appeared in 1692, and contained ten of the posthumous works, most of which had been prepared for the press by Bunyan himself. These were followed by *The Heavenly Footman*, one of the most characteristic of Bunyan’s works, which was published by Doe in 1698, and by *The Account of his Imprisonment*, an invaluable supplement to his biography, which was not given to the world until 1765. Doe’s second intended folio was never published. The first complete edition of Bunyan’s works, containing twenty-seven in addition to the twenty previously published by Doe, appeared in 1736, edited by Samuel Wilson. A third issue of the collected works, in two folio volumes, with a preface by George Whitfield, was issued in 1767. Other editions of the complete works are: by Alexander Hogg, in 6 volumes, 8vo, 1780; by George Offor in 2 volumes, 8vo, 1853, and again in 1862; and by H. Stebbing in 4 volumes, 8vo, 1859. The most authoritative life of Bunyan is that by John Brown, Minister of the Bunyan Church, Bedford, *John Bunyan, his life, times, and work*, which first appeared in 1885, and has been several times reprinted. A new and thoroughly revised and enlarged edition is promised. Many other biographies have been published, the more important of which are by: Robert Southey, James Anthony Froude, Lord Macaulay, George Offor, and Canon Venables.

The following is a *Chronological List of Bunyan’s Works*, for which we are indebted, as for much other information, to the article by Canon Venables in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, which was based on that drawn up by Charles Doe and published in the first issue of the *Heavenly Footman*, 1698:

---
3. "A few Sighs from Hell, or the Groans of a Dammed Soul," 1658.
6. "I will pray with the Spirit and with the Understanding also," 1663.
17. "Peaceable Principles and True" (a rejoinder to attacks on no. 16), 1674.
20. "Instruction for the Ignorant or a Salve to heal the great want of knowledge which so much reigns in Old and Young" (a catechism for children), 1675.
22. "The Strait Gate, or the Great Difficulty of going to Heaven," 1676.
23. "The Pilgrim's Progress," 1678. (Two editions.)
28. "The Barren Fig Tree, or the Doom and Downfall of the Fruitless Professors," 1682.
31. A tract on the propriety of women meeting separately for prayer, etc., without their men, ?1683.
33. "A Caution to stir up to Watch against Sin" (a broadside), 1684.
37. "A Book for Boys and Girls, or Country Rhymes for Children," 1686. (Later editions were issued under the title "Devine Emblems, or Temporal Things Spiritualised.")
42. "Solomon’s Temple spiritualised, or Gospel-light fetched out of the Temple of Jerusalem," 1688.
43. "The Acceptable Sacrifice, or the Excellency of a Broken Heart," 1688. (The proofs of this little volume were corrected by the Author on his death-bed, and published after his death.)
44. This Last Sermon on John i. 13 preached on 19 August, 1688, about twelve days before his death, 1688.

The following (45 to 54) are POSTHUMOUS PUBLICATIONS, ten of which were included in the folio edition of Bunyan’s Works, of 1692, which had been prepared for the press by Bunyan himself:—

47. "Paul’s Departure and Crown," 1692. (An expansion of a sermon on 2 Tim. iv. 6-8.)
48. "Israel’s Hope encouraged," 1692. (A discourse on Ps. cxxx. 7.)
49. "The Desires of the Righteous granted," 1692. (A sermon on Prov. x. 24 and xi. 23.)
52. "The Saint’s Knowledge of Christ’s Love," 1692. (An exposition of Ephes. iii. 18-19.)
53. "The House of the Forest of Lebanon," 1692. (A discourse on 1 Kings vii. 2.)

Other posthumous works follow, some of which are lost, or remain still to be recovered.

55. "The Heavenly Footman," 1698. (A discourse on 1 Cor. ix. 24.)
58. "The Pocket Concordance." (57-58 are enumerated by Charles Doe, but have never since been discovered.)
59. "The Scriptural Poems," 1700. (A versification of the histories of Joseph Samson, Ruth, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Epistle of St. James. Regarded by some authorities as spurious, because they were apparently unknown to Doe.)