

JOHN BUNYAN.

It seems hardly credible that a book which today is recognized as a religious classic, and which, next to the Bible, has been more translated than any other book, should have been written in jail.

It was in the confines of the grim walls of the prison at Bedford, England, in which John Bunyan was incarcerated for 12 years, that he wrote his immortal "Pilgrim's Progress." And equally remarkable was this composition, when the life of the author is considered.

Natural it was that a work so produced should for a long time attract little attention outside of the humbler classes for whom it was really intended. Bunyan was one of their number. It was slow to reach the polite circles, who esteem a written work for its intellectual quality; its literary flavor. Its early vogue was entirely among the poor, the obscure, the unliterary. It was the soul of the converted tinker speaking from the Bedford jail to an audience whose welfare he had at heart, and with whom he thoroughly sympathized. It was written for them by an unliterary man whose trade placed him among the lowliest. In the days of Bunyan a tinker was often no better than a vagrant, a light-handed pilferer whose wandering habits lifted him but little above the gypsies whom the good English yeomen despised.

Early in life Bunyan became fearfully tortured by remorse for his youthful sins. But at length the clouds broke, and from the depths of despair the penitent passed to a state of serious felicity. An irresistible impulse now urged him to impart to others the blessing of which he was himself possessed. He joined the Baptists and became a preacher and a

writer. His education had been that of a mechanic, yet his native force and genius, and his experimental knowledge of all the religious passions, from despair to ecstasy, amply supplied in him the want of learning.

It may be doubted whether any English dissenter had suffered more severely under the penal laws than John Bunyan. But in spite of persecutions, he kept nobly on with the work that he deemed he was called upon to perform. It was often necessary for him to disguise himself as a carter in order to preach undisturbed, and not infrequently he was introduced into meetings through back doors, with a smock frock on his back and a whip in his hand.

To a man who had suffered these things, the disgusting jail pen, into which the zealous authorities of Bedford flung him in 1660 for unlawfully preaching and praying in the streets, had few terrors. While his fingers were busy making shoe laces for his wife and blind daughter to sell in the streets to keep the family, his mind was occupied with the images of the wonderful allegory which was to make his name immortal.

"Pilgrim's Progress" was published in 1678, shortly after its author emerged from his 12 years' imprisonment, and although attracting no notice at the time of its appearance, it pushed its way closer and closer into the hearts of the community, and today it is classed as worthy a place among the hundred best books—this allegory written in a prison by a tinker.—Ex.

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