

Repudiable "Bunyan Writings."

DURING his lifetime, and for eighty years after his death, John Bunyan's reputation was jeopardised through books being unscrupulously published as his, bearing authorship initials of "J.B." or else with his full name and—not infrequently—with his portrait as a frontispiece. Among these is one which, in *A Bibliography of the Works of John Bunyan* (Biblio. Soc., 1932) the present writer designated as "repudiable," *Reprobation Asserted*. It bears the imprint "London, Printed for G.L. . . . Turn-Stile-Alley in Holbourn." This quarto pamphlet of forty-eight pages was sold at sixpence. The assumption that "John Bunyan, A Lover of Peace and Truth" was its author is refuted by Dr. John Brown (*Life of Bunyan*, 1928 edition), who remarks that there were also "other books passed off falsely in Bunyan's name." In regard to *Reprobation*, Brown takes "the external evidence first," and, dealing with the above imprint, he says of the initials "G.L." (no doubt intended to represent George Larkin), that "it was this publisher's custom to print his name in full . . . and his place of business was not at Turnstile-Alley, but at the sign of the Two Swans" (without Bishopsgate), and at other addresses. Larkin was the printer of *Grace Abounding*, in 1666, so it seems unlikely that he would have had recourse to another printer for *Reprobation*, the date of which is queried as 1674 in the British Museum Catalogue. A second issue was certainly printed, in 1696, by George Larkin, Junior. But no such statements prove Bunyan's authorship; and for some years after his death any probable or improbable writing issued as his would have commanded a ready sale. Whatever appeal the external evidence here given makes, it is from the contents of the book itself that decision must be made; so a further reference to Dr. Brown's opinion is helpful: "It neither begins nor ends" (Brown asserts) "in Bunyan's characteristic fashion. . . . Let him [Bunyan] write on what subject he may, he writes not long before he either melts with tenderness or glows with fire. This writer [of *Reprobation*] . . . is hard and cold in style, thin in scheme and substance, and he is what Bunyan never was—pitiless in logic, without being truly logical." Robert Philip, in his *Life of Bunyan* (1839), also says: "I venture to reject the claims of the treatise on *Reprobation* to be Bunyan's. . . . They rest on no ground, but their place in Hogg's edition. . . . It is unlike both his [Bunyan's] head and heart. It is not too clever for him; but it is too cold-

blooded." However, despite these two writers' opinions, George Offor (*Works of Bunyan*, 1853) did accept this "valuable tract" as Bunyan's, partly because it was included in Doe's Catalogue in 1698, and more especially as its contents were acceptable to him, for Offor closes his editorial note upon *Reprobation Asserted* with a benediction: "May the divine blessing follow this attempt to spread these important, although to many, unpalatable doctrines."

In 1684 another tract had appeared—" *The Pilgrim's Progress to the Other World*, by J.B., an unworthy labourer in Christ's Vineyard." This was printed for T. Passinger, also of London Bridge. Only one copy is known, catalogued in the Pepysian Library at Cambridge, together with other "Penny Godlinesses." It is but a brief imitation of Bunyan's story, introducing some of his characters and scenes. Three years before Bunyan died, Joseph (or Josiah) Blare, of London Bridge, published in 1685 an eleven-page pamphlet—" *The Saints' Triumph*, by J.B." with a woodcut portrait of Bunyan. There is no evidence of Bunyan having written one word of it.

In 1690 Blare caught the public eye with another publication, bearing a distinctly Bunyan-like title: " *Heart's Ease in Heart's Trouble*," and which was stated to be by "J.B., a Servant of Christ." Its real author was John Bardwood, an ejected minister. The book passed through a number of editions, and, in 1762, Midwinter, Blare's successor, daringly affixed to its title page the name of "John Bunyan." It had a ready sale for many years, and was, no doubt, profitably read.

Emboldened by these ventures, Blare printed, in 1701, " *Meditations on the Several Ages of Man's Life*. By John Bunyan." This, too, had a portrait, but the work must not be ascribed to him as its author. With this (and dated 1700) was included *Scriptural Poems*, also stated to be by John Bunyan. Over these poems controversy is raised. Dr. John Brown maintains that "their genuineness is very doubtful," an opinion not shared by all, for some (including the present writer) contend that they probably are by Bunyan. Dr. Brown considers that if Bunyan wrote the poems the question of his schooling is settled—that he went to Bedford Grammar School. This is mere conjecture. It was far more likely that the boy Bunyan attended the Free School at Houghton Conquest, a school to which he was eligible to go, and which would account for Bunyan's reference in 'To the Reader' the following lines:

For I'm no poet, nor a poet's son,
But a mechanic guided by no other rule
But which I gained in a grammar school,
In my minority . . .

"The use of the words "rule" and "minority" are not without

significance: both words occur in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the first when Bunyan describes the "narrow way" as being "straight as a rule can make it"; the second, when Mr. By-ends and his companions explain that in their "minority" they were school-fellows. (Bedford Edition, 1939/40, pp. 37 and 180).

Although the late Dr. Brown doubted the Bunyan authorship, it is no heresy to believe that Bunyan did write the poems, knowing that when he died his widow and her son, John, disposed of a quantity of unpublished manuscripts, among which may well have been the *Scriptural Poems*. None claim Bunyan to be a poet, despite his rhythmical prose and some acceptable verses in his works.

But an unpardonable piece of effrontery to Bunyan's memory was perpetrated by the same Joseph (or Josiah) Blare when he foisted on an eager public, in 1693, what was stated to be the Third Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The first two parts had been read with avidity, and before the close of the seventeenth century no less than fourteen editions of the First Part (1678) had been printed, and at least five editions of the Second Part (1684). At the end of Part Two Bunyan did say—"shall it be my lot to go that [the Pilgrim] way again, I may give those that desire it an account of what I here am silent about . . ."; indicating his intention of continuing his story. However, when Blare's book was published, a refutation appeared, stating that "The Third Part now abroad was not done by Bunyan. But the true copy left by him will be published by Nat. Ponder." This statement by Ponder was either fact or "bluff." He certainly did not fulfil his promise, for no copy of a "genuine" Third Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is extant.

The verso of the title-page of the thirteenth edition of the First Part bears the following advertisement: "*The Pilgrim's Progress*; The Third Part; in a Dream, Printed in 1692, is an impostor thrust into the world by a nameless author, and would insinuate to the Buyers that 'tis Bunyan's, by adding a false Account of his Life and Death, not compleating the work as is said, etc. The Skeleton of his Design and the main of his Book done by him as a Third Part remains with Nath. Ponder; which when convenient time serves shall be Published." As far back as 1688 Ponder had complained "Of certain ballad sellers about Newgate and on London Bridge, who have put the two first letters [J.B.] of the Author's name and his effigies to their rhimes and ridiculous books, suggesting to the world as if they were his." Strange to relate, as the popularity of Bunyan's writings grew Ponder's worldly condition decreased, until, in 1699, at the age of fifty-nine, his earthly course had ended. Ponder had suffered financial strain to excess and, perchance, he was unable to raise sufficient money

to print the Third Part as he had intended; or, maybe, he had disposed of the "skeleton" of Bunyan's "design" to Blare and Blare had put this into the hands of a literary hack to "dish up." Blare evades the true authorship of this impudent travesty by omitting a name on the title page. In its place—after quoting Bunyan's original title "The / Pilgrim's Progress / from / this World, / to / That which is to come: / The Third Part / Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream."—Blare follows on with a garbled version of its further description, and adds, "The Life and Death of / John Bunyan, / Author of the First and Second Part: this Com- / pleating the whole Progress." Such a cleverly worded title page was, without doubt, conceived to deceive. And it did deceive, for the sale of this spurious work continued until well past the middle of the nineteenth century, when it ceased to be printed. The so-called Third Part had reached its fourth edition by 1700, and its seventeenth in 1757. Professor Wharey states (Clar. Press, 1928) that fifty-nine editions of it had appeared before the end of the eighteenth century.

It was George Offor's intention to include Blare's Third Part in the Hanserd-Knollys edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, published in 1847; but the Council of the Hanserd-Knollys Society decided otherwise, as "upon examination the extreme indelicacy, or more properly indecency, of some parts, and the absurdity of others," precluded its insertion. To modern readers its exclusion on such grounds seems perhaps absurd; yet the Society's decision was right and proper, because as literature it is far beneath the standard of Bunyan's writings; although, as Dr. Brown remarks, the work is "not without a certain amount of interest and literary power." Admittedly, it possesses a few touches that are Bunyanesque despite its diction generally and its fanciful details being foreign to the genius of John Bunyan. That readers should have accepted it as from his pen is amazing: its contents alone are sufficient proof of its unguineness, and its opening sentence denotes a fraudulent intent: "After the two former Dreams concerning *Christian*, and *Christiana* his wife . . . I fell asleep again, and . . . I dreamed another Dream . . ." As Dr. Brown truly declares—"It was a piece of sharp practice . . . and was evidently intended in an unworthy way to trade upon Bunyan's reputation." (*Life of Bunyan*, 1928 ed.)

No trace of its real authorship has so far been found. But in justice to Blare it should be remembered that Ponder—as he boasts of—did procure the "skeleton" of Bunyan's intended Third Part; and, accepting his statement as fact, it is not impossible, nor perhaps improbable, that Ponder's impecuniosity compelled him to dispose of the manuscript; and, if so, why not to Blare? But Bunyan's own part in it was assuredly slight.

As above stated, the public accepted the "Third Part" as a fresh book by John Bunyan, although many who read it must have detected its inferiority and doubted its genuineness. To-day it is of interest to, and is included as a "Bunyaniana" item by, collectors who, however, place no especial value, commercially, on any but the very early editions—and then only up to the tenth (1722). The earliest editions are somewhat scarce and are sought after.

It is difficult and perhaps useless to discuss its contents. It is tedious to read and it entirely fails to "grip." Its diction does not stir up the reader's imagination, nor does it satisfy in other ways. The book is decidedly dull, and, excepting where it faintly resembles Bunyan, it contains situations that are supremely ridiculous. Its reference to the "Holy Apostle Paul"; a "magic crutch"; and a "Chamber of Magic," together with its pedantic and sometimes unseemly language, rule out all thought of Bunyan as its author. The absurd introduction of a Convent, and a discourse on ascetic diet—propagating vegetarianism—with such expressions as "proportionably subservient" and "ignis-fatuus" are not consistent with the simple style of Bunyan. Neither could the argument put forth on the "Virgin Birth," nor the reference to "the Holy Jesus," be accepted as Bunyan's mode of expression. A few conversational parts have the flavour of Bunyan's pen, especially those which are bodily lifted or paraphrased from the First and Second Parts of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, some of which are unnecessarily vulgarised; but the following passage might be claimed as Bunyan's:

Spiritual Man: Your curiosity is dangerous, and may cost you dear; therefore pray be persuaded to turn away your ears from hearing of Vanity and Delusions. You have run well hitherto, do not halt so near your Journey's End.

These last two words may well introduce another publication which is—or is not—a record of Bunyan utterances: it is a book entitled "*Rest for a Wearied Soul, or The Pilgrim at his Journey's End, being the last Legacy of Mr. John Bunyan, Preacher of the Gospel in Bedfordshire, containing his dying Exhortations to his Children, and their duty to God, their Mother, and to one another. . . . His Godly Meditations when he lay upon his Death-Bed.*" This is an eight-page pamphlet, with Bunyan's portrait on the title page. It was issued from London and York in or about the year 1700.

A number of other books were printed in the eighteenth century which were alleged to be by John Bunyan. But they may be summarily dismissed.

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