

John Bunyan as A Prose writer

In the domain of Restoration Prose Bunyan alone contests the supremacy of Dryden. And Bunyan stands in a class by himself. The main facts of his life are well known. He himself has given them an imperishable shape in his *Grace Abounding* (1666), a kind of religious auto-biography. Though the statements of this book need not be taken too literally, he seems to have misspent his youth. He draws a horrible picture of his own depravity: but as religious converts are well known to delight in depicting their original wickedness in the darkest colours, this need not be taken too seriously. Bunyan, the son of a tinsmith, was born in Bedfordshire. He was educated at village school, and at the age of sixteen was drafted into the Parliamentary army and saw service in civil war. In 1653 he

joined a local non-conformist sect in Bedford. And shortly after began to preach there. His literary career began in 1656 with two pamphlets on the gospel of and in 1660. He was arrested as an unlicensed preacher. The next twelve years he spent in Bedford gaol and on his release in 1672 he obtained a license and became a pastor of a church in Bedford. This office he held until his death although in 1675 he spent 6 months in gaol when his license was cancelled. In this second period of imprisonment he wrote the first part of the "Pilgrim's Progress" published in 1678 and then came the life and death of Bedlam 1680 and the holy war in 1682 except for grace abandoning all Bunyan's measure work are allegorical, in each case the allegory is worked out with ease, force and clearness. Readers of all ages enjoy the narrative while they follow the double meaning without an effort. The allegorical personage from example Mr. worldly wiseman, Mr. Deffiance, Just despair, Madam Wanton, my bad Kate-god, Mr. Standfast are fresh and apt and are full of an intense interest and real dramatic energy. Their individual adventures combine and react with a variety that keeps the story from monotony.

And yet the simple idea of a forward journey is never lost, the plot working upon the fortunes of the different characters give us the nearest approach the pure novel that had so far been affected. The numerous natural descriptions are simply done but they are full of a great unspoiled ability. Lastly Bunyans style is unique in prose. Though it is undoubtedly based upon the great biblical models. It is quite individual. It is humbly but not vulgar strong but not coarse, Equable but not monotonous. It is sometimes humorous but it is never swelled rarely pathetic but never sentimental. It is remained the pattern of a plain style and is one of the masterpieces of English language. Viewed as a whole this period is seen to be one of transition, the Elizabethan fashion had spent itself and the new classicism was still in the making. Yet the time is important in the development of literary forms and style. The form of the lyric shows little change. In bulk it is considerable for the lyrical spirit is largely in abeyance. Outside Dryden who is the best of the lyrical poets, we have the slight work of the courtiers the earls of Dorset, the earl of Rochester and Sir Charles Sedley there were fashionable men talking the poetry with

fashionable irresponsibility. Their poems which nearly all deal with love the place in an artificial manner, have a decided charm and skill being modelled of the earlier forms that were the mode before the civil war.

Of real originality there is hardly a trace. One more I should mention pre-eminent in this class of poems. His two odes on the oaks on the anniversary of Saint Cecilia's Day and his other ode the death of Mrs. Anne Clewlow are of the best of any period; written in the irregular Pindaric meter. They are full of the life-flavor that gives the artificial medium some real life and energy, we give the opening lines of the Elegiac poem:

Though youngest virgin daughter of the state
made in the best promotion of the state
whose palms, new plucked from paradise
In the spreading branches now sublimely rise
Rich with immortal green above the rest
Whether adopted to some neighboring star
Thou roll'st above us in thy wandering race

or called to more superior bliss.
Thou tread'st with scepter the vast abyss