

In his twentieth year he married a wife "whose father was counted godly." "We came together as poor as poor could be," he writes, "not having so much household stuffe as a dish or a spoon between us." As his wife's only marriage portion he received two books which her father had cherished—"The Practice of Piety" and "The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven." "These books," he says, "though they did not reach my heart, did light in me some desire to religion." He went with his wife to church twice a day, "yet retaining," he writes, "his wicked life." One Sunday afternoon, while playing ball on Elstow Green, "a voice," he says, "did suddenly dart from heaven into my soul, which said, 'wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell?'" Conscience keenly upbraided, but he hardened his heart against the voice of God. "I can but be damned," he said to himself, and I had as good be damned for many sins as for few," and he plunged again into excess of riot. One day, as he was swearing recklessly, "a woman of the place," he records, "herself a loose and ungodly wretch, protested that I swore and cursed at such a rate that she trembled to hear me." This reproof, like an arrow, pierced his soul, and he struggled against and overcame this wicked habit. But he wallowed long in the Slough of Despond before he reached the solid ground of assured confidence. Dancing, Sunday games, and bell-ringing, which was often accompanied with drinking, were his special besetments. As he hung wistfully about the belfry-door, the thought would haunt his mind, he says, "if the bells should fall and crush me!" Then the terror lest the steeple itself should fall made him flee for fear.

One day Bunyan overheard "three or four poor women sitting at a door in the sun, talking of the things of God." Their pious talk sank into his soul, "shaking it as if his breast-bone were split asunder."

A godly "Master Gifford," who, in his youth, had been a reckless Royalist trooper, was the pastor of a little Baptist flock in Bedford. He was the "Evangelist" of Bunyan's dream, who first pointed the immortal dreamer to the wicket-gate of mercy. Bunyan joined his church, and was formally baptized in the River Ouse, near Bedford Bridge. Soon he began to preach in burning words the great salvation he had experienced. "I preached what I felt," he says; "what I smartingly did feel—even that under which my soul did groan and tremble with astonishment." The word was attended with power and with converting grace. In 1660 he was indicted under the wicked laws of the time "as a common upholder of unlawful meetings and conventicles, and as devilishly and pertinaciously abstaining