

PLEASANT HOURS

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FOOTPRINTS OF BUNYAN.*

BY THE EDITOR.

TO the present writer the foremost memory in traversing the beautiful county of Bedford, was that of John Bunyan. Many places were passed hallowed by the footprints of the immortal dreamer—Finchley Common, where he spoke bold words on behalf of religious freedom; Dallow Farm, in a loft of which he took refuge when pursued because of the truths he had spoken; the Village of Elstow, in which he was born, and where, in his reckless youth, he led a dissolute life; Elstow Church, a venerable pile, the notes of whose bells had often been wafted on the air as he pulled the ropes; and then Bedford, where he was imprisoned, and within the walls of the old gaol wrote "The Pilgrim's Progress to the Celestial City."

Strange spell of genius, which makes the name of the Bedford tinker a household word in every land. No writer of the English tongue has won so world-wide a fame, and no book has been printed in so many editions and translated into so many foreign languages.

Bunyan was born at Elstow, near Bedford, in 1628, and was



ELSTOW CHURCH.

brought up, like his father before him, "a mender of pots and kettles, vulgarly called a tinker." He lived in the most stormy period of English history—the turbulent reign of the first Charles—with the long intestine war and its memorable battles of Edgehill, Naseby, and Marston Moor.

"Like many of the Lord's heroes," says Dr. Punshon, "he was of obscure parentage, and, not improbably, of gipsy blood. His youth was spent in excess of riot. He was an adept and teacher in evil. In his seven-

teenth year we find him in the army—an army where wickedness abounded. The description best answers certainly to Rupert's roystering dragoons."

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 stuff as a dish or a spoon between us." 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,

overcame this wicked habit. In the quaint old church of Elstow is still shown the carved seat in which Bunyan sat. The old Norman door, with its dog tooth moulding, dates back probably six centuries or more. Above the door is a carved representation of Christ, having St. Peter with his keys on the right and St. John the Evangelist on the left. In the door is a wicket, which may have suggested the wicket-gate of the allegory.

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. The word was attended with power and with converting grace. In 1660 he was indicted under

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

* Through the courtesy of Messrs. John Walker & Co., of London, England, we are enabled to illustrate this article by engraving from their admirable Elstow Edition of the Pilgrim's Progress. Every copy of the book has both covers made from veritable Elstow oak, guaranteed to be from the roof of the Church whose bells Bunyan loved to ring—which was reconstructed in 1880. The edition is limited, and while it lasts copies may be procured through the publisher of this paper, for \$3.50 each.



OLD NORMAN DOOR, ELSTOW CHURCH



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