

His twelve years imprisonment is not hard to account for. The Protectorate of Cromwell had passed away, and with the Restoration came the revival of the Act of Uniformity. To worship in any other than parish churches made the offender liable, first to three months in jail, then, if persisted in, to banishment, and even to death.

Bunyan would not be silenced, nor would he consent even to evasion to escape the hand of law. When he was arrested in 1660, Bible in hand, the magistrate, Wingate, leaned to leniency, and would have discharged him from custody if he would have promised "not to call dissenters together," which might mean anything or nothing, as he pleased. But Bunyan was God's witness, too earnest to keep still when bidden to preach, too honest to hide behind an equivocation; and so he went to jail, and as the door shut upon him said: "Were I out of here to-day I would preach again to-morrow." He might have been pardoned out in 1661, but pardon could avail nothing for a man who would repeat the offense as soon as he was out of jail; and so he stayed in his prison, with but one brief respite of release about midway in his long experience of confinement.

What a blessing in dark disguise was that twelve years in jail! The talking tongue is generally the foe of the thinking brain. Here he could talk but little, and he had leisure to think. Reason and imagination had time for a new creation, and the ripest product of these years of meditation was this immortal allegory.

The popularity of "Pilgrim's Progress" probably exceeds that of any other book. Even those who do not read the Bible read this, and the charms of the book are many. First of all it is a story, a continuous narrative, full of plots and counter-plots, characters and incidents, interesting to the very close.

Again, it is robed in the dress of the marvelous. It is like a fairy tale, fascinating the reader with the superhuman and supernatural, giants and goblins, dragons and demons, good angels and fallen spirits; and withal these fictions are facts for vividness and realistic effect.

Again, the allegory charms. Under the guise of parable lies the mighty moral meaning. The very names are the keys that unlock the fable. Great Heart, Fickle Mind, Obstinate and Hateful tell their own story. The House of the Interpreter, the Valley of Humiliation, the Hill Difficulty, Beulah Land—who does not at once know what they represent! And what wit and wisdom are comprised in the allegory!

Most of all this story, marvelous, mythical, allegorical, is a mirror of the human heart. The reader sees himself, and a mirror has a strange charm even to the homeliest of us. The very ugliness of our deformity attracts us by the exactness of its reflection. Even those who are repelled by Bunyan's theology are attracted by his accurate dissection of the heart of man.