

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

The Portraiture of John Bunyan.

OF reliable portraits of John Bunyan two are outstanding; one by Robert White, and the other by Thomas Sadler. The first is in the British Museum and the second is in the National Portrait Gallery, London. These certainly claim attention before all others, for they are authentic.

The portrait drawn in pencil by Robert White (1645-1704) is a small picture of about six inches by four, which, when handled, thrills the beholder—for had not Bunyan himself handled it? White (states Horace Walpole)¹ was distinguished for his "admirable success in likenesses." He followed the example of David Loggan, whose pupil he was and whose art attainments he "nearly equalled," by taking the resemblance in pencil on vellum before engraving it. White, in fact, is considered by experts to be almost as great as Loggan himself was; and the opinions given of White's talent leave no doubt as to the sincerity of his delineation of the sitter.

White's portrait of Bunyan was drawn not long after the first edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* emerged from the press, in 1678, and the features portrayed coincide with the description of Bunyan given by a contemporary writer, who says that Bunyan had "somewhat of a ruddy face, with sparkling eyes, wearing his hair on his upper lip, after the old British fashion; his hair reddish . . . and his mouth moderately large; his forehead somewhat high . . ."; and from Bunyan's intimate friend, John Wilson, of Hitchin, it is learned that Bunyan's countenance was "grave and sedate." It is of interest too to know that Robert White the artist was, as a personal friend, able to study closely the characteristic features of John Bunyan.²

The dainty drawing of Bunyan by White was preserved by Clayton Mordaunt Cracherode, F.R.S. (1730-1799), who, although born in Buckinghamshire, of an Essex family, derived his name from his ancestors at Turvey in Bedfordshire. He lived a bachelor life as a recluse, and added to his storehouse of treasures from his favoured bookshops; and at his death he bequeathed his collection to the British Museum—including the Bunyan portrait.³

¹ *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, 1888.

² Among other portraits White executed were those of Doctor Owen and Bishop Barlow, both of whom figure in Bunyan's career.

³ "The only likeness of Cracherode is a drawing in blacklead."—D.N.B.—which was reproduced by Walpole in his *Anecdotes of Painting in England*.

Another drawing of Bunyan, also executed and engraved by White, was the "sleeping portrait," which appeared as the frontispiece to the third edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Although it has not the fascination of the previous one, it no doubt appealed to the popular fancy of its day—1679. It does not, however, lack charm; for, when looked closely into, the Dreamers' closed eyes and gentle smile betoken peaceful slumber. The surrounding objects show the Pilgrim, with staff in hand, wending his way from the City of Destruction towards the gates of the Celestial City, whilst John Bunyan reclines with his left arm resting on a cave at whose entrance a lion is keeping watch: all of which is suggestive to a receptive imagination. Reproductions, with varying success, have been continuously used, sometimes as steel plates, at other times as rough woodcuts.

There is still one more effort of White's to mention: the full-length picture of Bunyan which forms the scarce folding plate of the first edition of *The Holy War* (1682). The scene depicted is the assault on Mansoul—represented by John Bunyan himself. Robert White was essentially a master of portraiture rather than a creative artist; a fact of which this particular drawing is significant, for it sadly lacks inspiration. In it Bunyan's expression fails to satisfy, and beyond its interpretative value in regard to the story, the drawing repels rather than attracts. But in justice to the artist, he may, perchance, have had to follow the author's instructions. The plate was omitted from the second (1684) and other editions of *The Holy War*, but it reappeared as an illustration in the folio edition of Bunyan's works in 1768, and again in the Cambridge edition of 1905.

John Sturt (1658-1730) also produced a "sleeping portrait," crudely following White's, to which it was by no means a complement.⁴ Sturt was a pupil of Robert White, but this example of his work amply verifies what is said in Redgrave's *Dictionary of Artists*: "His (Sturt's) works had not much art merit." This engraving of Sturt's formed the frontispiece to the first octavo edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, published by Clark, in 1728: hence its interest. Coarse indeed, and almost grotesque, was Sturt's portrait of Bunyan in Doe's Folio of 1692. It justly deserves the brusque comment by Bunyan's eminent biographer, Dr. John Brown, who pronounces it as "harsh and unpleasing." The engraving by Sturt⁵ was "Cut in Copper from an Original

⁴ Two other engravers, contemporary with White and Sturt, who also engraved "sleeping portraits" of Bunyan, were Burnford and William Elder. Their efforts are to be found in the seventh and eleventh editions of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1681 and 1688). Of that in the seventh Dr. Brown remarks, "a new but poor portrait."

⁵ The plate was also the frontispiece of the second (1736) edition of Bunyan's works in folio.



JOHN BUNYAN.
VELLUM PENCIL DRAWING BY ROBERT WHITE.
[Cracherode Collection, British Museum.]



JOHN BUNYAN.
OIL PAINTING BY THOMAS SADLER.
[In the National Portrait Gallery, London.]



Frontispiece to the Third Edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 1670.

"SLEEPING" PORTRAIT OF
JOHN BUNYAN,
BY ROBERT WHITE.

[From Macmillan's "English Literature Series."]

paint, done to the life, by his [Bunyan's] very good Friend, a Limner," states Charles Doe. But Doe, perhaps wisely, does not name the limner. His painting may, however, be some day discovered.

Of supreme importance is the oil-painting of John Bunyan by Thomas Sadler. Sadler's birth and death dates are unknown; but it is asserted that he was acquainted with, and instructed in art, by Sir Peter Lely. This portrait shows Bunyan at fifty-six years of age, wearing a preacher's gown and lace collar, with the three-quarter face in the reverse of White's, so comparison of the two is interesting. Bunyan's countenance in Sadler's portrait painted in 1684, bears traces of further years of anxious care in days of religious and political strife. Judged by this portrait, Redgrave's criticism of the artist is not unjustifiable, when he says of Sadler, that "His heads are well drawn and expressed; not so his hands; simple in colour and low in tone";⁶ and, the critic adds: "the portrait of Bunyan is one of Sadler's best." It certainly attracted the attention of two great mezzotint artists who each executed famous reproductions—Jonathan Spilsbury, whose works appeared between 1760 and 1790, and Richard Houston (1721-1775). Their engravings are sought after by art as well as by Bunyan collectors. Spilsbury's is considered to have been issued about 1763; Houston's came later; and some three years later still, Sadler's portrait was pleasingly engraved by T. E. Haid.⁷ The folio edition of Bunyan's works, in 1767, had as frontispiece a heavily produced representation of Sadler's work by T. Simpson, described as being "Done from an original painting in the possession of Hen^y. Stimson, Gent." But the pose is in exact reverse from Sadler's, and yet it is inscribed "T. Sadler, pinxt."

Thomas Sadler's oil-painting "was purchased in January 1902, from Mary, Countess of Cavan, who inherited it from her father, the Rev. John Olive, rector of Ayot St. Lawrence, Herts. . . . who purchased it (in 1854) from an old woman named Mrs. Sarah Clarke, who was given it in 1806 by her former master, the Rev. Thomas Capron, a dissenting minister near Bedford." This pedigree, kindly supplied to the present writer by the Director of the National Portrait Gallery in 1927, shows how it became a

⁶ The colouring of Sadler's painting may be briefly summarised as follows: Dark auburn hair; fair moustache; hazel eyes; brown clothes (similar in colour to hair); white lace collar; dark leather cover of book with gold-like edges.

⁷ There was a family of engravers named Haid, but search for "T.E." has been futile. A Johann Elias Haid (according to Bryan's *Dictionary of Engravers*) was born at Augsburg in 1710. He produced a number of portraits and may have lived in England as did another member of his family. Dr. Brown, as far back as 1885, mentioned the artist and perhaps confused the first initial.

national treasure. The portrait itself bears the inscription: "John Bunyan An^o AEtat^s 56. T.S. pinxt"; and on the frame—"JOHN BUNYAN / Tinker and Author / of the / 'Pilgrim's Progress' / at the age of 56 / THOMAS SADLER."

Anent the forementioned mezzotint engravings, after Sadler, Mrs. S. C. Hall, in 1850, in *Pilgrimages to English Homes*, tells of a Mrs. Sanigear, of Islington, who declared herself to be a great-great-granddaughter of John Bunyan. Mrs. Hall says: "We paid her a visit . . . and she pointed to the portrait of her ancestor with evident pride. 'It is not an original,' she said, 'but copied from an original that was painted on glass.'" From this statement arises the question—Was there any other portrait of John Bunyan on glass, except the one at Bedford Public Library (in the Mott Harrison Collection)? This is a Houston or Spilsbury mezzotint transferred to glass and coloured by a method in vogue in the late eighteenth century; and, as one of the actual engravings dates from about 1763, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the coloured picture here referred to—in its old black frame with gilt inset margin—would have been in existence for many years before Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Sanigear met. The picture at Bedford is so effective that it has the appearance of an oil colour portrait.

In the same collection at Bedford Public Library there is a curious and fanciful etching, signed "J.H. (fecit) 1756." It presents Bunyan "with a fierce countenance and wearing a skull cap, and a broad collar over his gown; and abundant locks of hair flowing over his shoulders. "John Bunyan" is imprinted on the plate, otherwise the features have but little or no resemblance to those of his reputed portraits."⁸

A painting of John Bunyan, which is of considerable interest, and dated 1673, is that known as the Plimpton Portrait. It is in New York, and owned by Mr. G. A. Plimpton, who, in 1930, thus wrote of it: "The history of the picture is as follows: Robert Louis Stevenson inherited it from his father. He was very fond of it, and when out in Samoa he had the picture sent to him." Judged from a photograph of it, Bunyan is at three-quarter face, looking to the right, wearing a broad white collar. From its date it precedes White's pencil drawing by several years.

The Regent's Park Baptist College, at Oxford, also possesses an oil painting of Bunyan, which is honourably claimed as contemporary. The artist's name is not known, but it was engraved in a somewhat ostentatious manner by William Sharp (1749-1824) in 1819; and again, in a smaller size, and dated 1825, by Samuel Freeman (1773-1857). Both engravings express with intensity this Bunyan portrait, which was at the time owned by "George

⁸ Brown's *Life of Bunyan*, 1928 edition, p. 414.



London Printed for Dorman Newman at the Kings Armes and Benj: Allop at the Angell and Bible in the Routway ..

FULL-LENGTH PORTRAIT OF JOHN BUNYAN,
BY ROBERT WHITE.

Frontispiece to the First Edition of *The Holy War*, 1682.
[From the Cambridge Edition of "*The Holy War*," 1905.]



THE "PLIMPTON" PORTRAIT OF
JOHN BUNYAN

[From a photograph in the Bedford Public Library.]



THE OIL PAINTING OF
JOHN BUNYAN;

*Presented to Regent's Park College, Oxford,
by John Fenwick, Esq., of Newcastle, in 1866.*

Phillips, Esq." Each engraver elaborates it into a picture, with details including a Bible on which Bunyan's left hand rests; a copy of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*; and on the wall a picture of Pilgrim bearing his Burden. Bunyan's pose is arresting; with the fingers of his right hand uplifted denoting movement, and his expression "genial but earnest."

The late Mr. John Beagarie, of Hitchin, for many years owned what was considered an original painting of Bunyan; but its close resemblance to Sadler's leads one to suspect the possibility of it being a copy. Dr. John Brown, however, when he was first shown the old picture commended it favourably. It now belongs to the Beagarie family, to whom it is naturally a treasured relic.

Other "originals" include one catalogued, in 1937, by a well-known antiquarian bookseller. He briefly described it as a seventeenth century portrait of John Bunyan, in allegorical style, "in oils on copper, half length, seated at table"; and in *The Times* there was advertised, in 1909, a "Very interesting contemporary portrait, John Bunyan, aged 56, . . . painted by 'J.K.', 100 guineas." Another claimant to an original portrait was a lady at Blackpool, who sought help from the present writer as to its value; but her meagre information was of little avail. "It must be very old," she wrote, "because it has had a new piece of canvas marvellously put in. . . . My father had the picture left to him in a will and he left it to me in his will." The only suggestion to be offered was to seek its value at Sotheby's salerooms!

Acknowledgment is due here to the Venerable Archdeacon of Lewes (the Rev. F. H. D. Smythe, M.A.), for brief information about a small oval portrait of John Bunyan, about fourteen inches by ten, which was offered for sale over twenty years ago by a London dealer. Recent enquiry, however, precludes further investigation as the shop has apparently changed hands and stock. It would be gratifying to know more about the picture, for the Archdeacon himself is a reliable judge of art. Further information would also be acceptable of a Bunyan portrait said to have belonged to Sir Richard Philip in the year 1861, the year in which George Offor, one of Bunyan's most enthusiastic biographers and collector of relics and early editions of his books—had in his possession "a whole length picture of John Bunyan as a travelling tinker"; but its whereabouts is unknown. Offor also had two old indian-ink drawings with the inscription—"Mr. and Mrs. Bunyan," and in ordinary ink, "Fecit anno 1675." They must be those which latterly became the property of the late Mr. S. Howard Whitbread, of Southill Park, Bedfordshire, and through whose kindness the sketches were, in 1932, exhibited at Shire Hall, Bedford. Accepting the inscription as genuine, the figures de-

lineated are those of John Bunyan and his (second) wife, Elizabeth.

Mention was made by John Timbs, in his *Curiosities of London*, of a Bunyan portrait in oils at Stationers' Hall—"presented by Mr. Hobbs, the singer"; and it is also referred to by John George Nicholls in his book on the Stationers' Hall. But upon inspection the portrait proved to be quite unlike Bunyan; and furthermore, on the back of the picture is the name "T. Marsden," whose portrait it must be. A London daily paper gave publicity to this relic, but did not mention Marsden's name. It would be unworthy of a place in this article save to deter further statements about it. This remark applies also to a so-called miniature of "Bunyan as a Boy," which was offered for sale some years ago. Although of the specified period, and beautifully painted on silver, and elaborately framed, it certainly did not represent John, the son of Thomas Bunyan the Tinker of Elstow; for, be it remembered, Greatheart, when he dilated upon the Shepherd's Boy, described him as wearing "more of that herb called heart's-ease in his bosom, than he that is clad in silk and velvet." Unthinkable, indeed, is it to imagine the boy, John Bunyan, clothed otherwise than were the village lads of his day.

Of course, there were portraits of Bunyan in his books, either direct drawings or copied from existing ones. Two deserve mention in this record. One, as the frontispiece to *A Discourse upon the Pharisee and Publican*, has the following words engraved around the author's head: "Vera effigies Johannis Bunyan ætatis suæ 57." The portrait, therefore, belongs to the year of the book's appearance—1685. Three years later a steel-engraved portrait of "John Bunnyon" frontispiced *The Advocateship of Jesus Christ*, 1688, and was the work of a Dutch artist, Fredrick Hendrick Van Hove (1630-c. 1715), who lived in London and engraved among other portraits, those of Sir Matthew Hale, the sympathetic chief justice to whom Elizabeth Bunyan appealed on behalf of her husband, and of Hanserd-Knollys, who most probably had contact with Bunyan.

Innumerable portraits of the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress* have been used as frontispieces to his works: some excellent or good, others varying from fair to bad. But the best are always of interest to those who have affection for his writings. They are, too, of historical value; for do they not identify John Bunyan with his ministerial period, and portray him as a servant of Christ who endured hardships as a pioneer of nonconformity at a time of hostile persecution?

FRANK MOTT HARRISON.