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An Unrecorded First Edition of Bunyan.

TO publish a new date for a Bunyan book is a great responsibility. It cannot be undertaken lightly by any one who appreciates the full gravity of the claim. In the case of the discovery of an edition of an accepted date there is little beyond the fact to report. It proves to be as expected, and experts are satisfied. But in the case before us we are confronted by an absolutely new date. The endorsement of it therefore, is felt to be a serious demand upon the faith of the Bunyan student. It necessitates the correction of a bibliography that has been the guide of men for more than two centuries, and it adds the appreciable number of nine years to the period of the book's existence. It is submitted that a claim involving such radical changes cannot be lightly made. The aim, however, of the present article is to show that while no shadow of doubt can be cast upon the genuineness of the copy discovered, there is sufficient laxity in the early records to account for the serious mistake now corrected.

Let me at once state that it is a copy of the first edition of "The Barren Fig-Tree" that has come into my possession. Hitherto there has been no recorded copy in existence. From the earliest time the date has been written down as that of 1682. The first known edition is that of 1688. My newly discovered copy bears date of 1673.¹ The copy is in good condition, being almost faultless, the text is absolutely perfect. Mistake with regard to the date is impossible, it being so clearly defined. The volume must be valued not only as providing the pure text of the author, but as authoritative in giving the true date. It may be too much to say that it is unique; there may or may not be other copies extant; but as a first recorded copy it has that distinction. To call attention to such a discovery is a duty alike

¹ London, Printed for Jonathan Robinson at the Golden Lion in Paul's Church-Yard 1673.

in the interests of the history of literature in general and Bunyan students in particular. The debated question of the existence of a first edition is now finally settled; for a copy in possession is its own sufficient witness; the imprint at the same time infallibly fixes the date.

With reference to a first edition being unknown it will be sufficient to quote two writers, both eminent for patient research and profound knowledge of Bunyan literature; I refer to the late Mr. George Offor, and the Rev. Dr. John Brown (late of Bedford, now of Hampstead). The former writes:—"Although we have sought with all possible diligence, no copy of the first edition has been discovered."² The latter states "that no copy of the first edition is known to exist. The earliest is a re-print made immediately after Bunyan's death in 1688."³ These verdicts have now long been before the public, and no discovery, so far as I am aware, up to the present, has been made to discredit them.

In dealing with the question of the supposed date of 1682, it will be necessary to examine the earliest sources of information available. Happily these are not far to seek. A formal bibliography, quite an unusual item of literary equipment for the times, is in existence. A Mr. Charles Doe, a friend and admirer of Bunyan, drew up this list. His hero-worship issued in a practical service. Soon after our author's decease in 1688 he attempted to produce a collected edition of his whole works, in two volumes folio. A broadside⁴ sheet including his proposals for the first volume was issued. This embraced twenty items, ten in manuscript, and ten which had already been printed in separate form. This was the first list, which however contained no dates.

The "Struggler," which was a kind of second prospectus, contained much curious information respecting Bunyan and his writings; also "thirty sound reasons" why his works should be highly esteemed and therefore purchased; it included also a list of his sixty books. This production was in some cases bound up in the first folio volume, which was published in 1692. Mr. Doe met with difficulties through the existence of copyright claims, hence the second volume was not published until 1736.⁵ The

² The Whole Works of John Bunyan, Blackie & Son, 3 vols. in 6, last issue 1888.

³ John Bunyan: His Life, Times and Work. Isbister, 1885 and subsequent editions.

⁴ A copy in the British Museum. 12 c.1. 3**.

⁵ Two volumes folio, 1736-7, Samuel Wilson. ²¹Containing 47 pieces.

most valuable item in the "Struggler" is, of course, the list of books; "containing the chronological order in which Mr. Bunyan's books were published, and the number of editions they passed through during his life."

Mr. Doe's enthusiastic efforts did not end here. In 1698 he published "The Heavenly Footman"; for under Bunyan's influence he became a preacher, and then, that he might make his works more widely known, a quasi-printer and publisher. The imprint would indicate that he still followed his original vocation, it reads thus:—"London, Printed for Charles Doe, Comb-maker, in the Borough Southwark, near London Bridge, 1698." The little volume is in my possession, and is valuable not only because of its text, but for a lengthy catalogue and notes. It is added at the end of the book and consists of sixteen pages. He thus introduces it:—

Running Reader! I that now help you to this Heavenly Foot-man in Print, (being the Person that first moved and procured the *Printing in Folio*, above Twenty of our Author Bunyan's Pieces) have also now given you here, a Catalogue of all that great Convert's Works, in order of Time, as they succeeded each other in Publication, (as near as I can understand) and I do also love them, and would have you do so too, as they are the Experience and Knowledge of a great Convert, which indeed is a great Monument of the mighty power of Grace, and a fit Fellow-Traveller for a Heavenly Foot-man.

Borough, London.

CHARLES DOE.

March 26, 1698.

On the fourteenth page of this catalogue he records a most important item of information. In his "Struggler," the list includes sixty items. The last four are:—"A Christian Dialogue," "The Heavenly Footman," "A Pocket Concordance," "An account of his Imprisonment." They are described as manuscripts yet unprinted. He now says:—

These four books . . . were never yet Printed except this now of the Heavenly Footman, which I bought in 1691, of Mr. John Bunyan, the eldest son of the Author; and I have now put it into the world in Print, word for word, as it came from him to me.

These notes prove how intimate Mr. Doe was with the Bunyan family, and what opportunities he had of gathering first-hand knowledge. His industry also is placed beyond doubt. Within ten years of the death of Bunyan he had issued three lists of his books, and had caused to be published eleven works from manuscript. He made a brave fight for his friend. Few men have

had so enthusiastic a bibliographer. When his humble origin and slender equipment are considered his achievements excite grateful admiration. His saving clause, "As near as I can understand," is sufficiently flexible to admit of many errors foreboding ill in days to come; but after all is said, he enjoys the distinction of having given to the world the first bibliography of one of its most popular authors.

Much space might be occupied in critical observations upon these lists. It could easily be shown that though they are said to be "chronological," this is not the fact; but these details must be reserved for another occasion. In justice, however, to Mr. Doe it should be recognised that even at this early period it was difficult to get together anything like a complete collection of our author's works. Thus in his quaint autobiography called "A Collection of Experience," dated 1700, Mr. Doe says he had great difficulty in securing copies of some books. His words are:—"That I have proved by trying most London booksellers; and before that given them about twice the price of a book; and I know not how to get another of those sorts for any price whatever." From this statement and other considerations, it may be concluded that original issues of all the books included in his lists had not been seen by him. If so, here is an ample explanation of the incorrect date of the book in question. There can be no doubt that in his opinion it synchronized with the date of the "Holy War." Respecting the perpetuation of the blunder an easy explanation offers itself; in the absence of a copy proving it otherwise, it would be concluded that a personal friend of Bunyan would not make a mistake. The false date has, therefore, been repeatedly printed down to the present time.

At this point, with the co-operation of the printer, I would seek to reproduce, as closely as possible, the title pages of the editions, respectively issued in 1673 and 1688, i.e., without the production of a special block, and in ordinary type:—

THE
Barren Fig-Tree:

OR,

The Doom and Downfall of
 the Fruitless Professor.

Shewing,

THAT THE DAY OF GRACE MAY BE
 PAST WITH HIM LONG BEFORE HIS
 LIFE IS ENDED.

THE SIGNS ALSO BY WHICH SUCH MI-
 SERABLE MORTALS MAY BE KNOWN.

By JOHN BUNYAN.

*And now also the Ax is laid unto the
 root of the trees: therefore every tree
 that bringeth not forth good fruit, is
 hewen down, and cast into the fire;
 Matth. 3. 10.*

LONDON, PRINTED FOR JONATHAN ROBINSON
 AT THE GOLDEN LION IN PAUL'S
 CHURCH-YARD, 1673.

The Barren Fig-Tree:

OR,

THE DOOM & DOWNFAL
OF THE *FRUITLESS PROFESSOR*.

SHEWING, THAT THE DAY OF GRACE
MAY BE PAST WITH HIM LONG
BEFORE HIS LIFE IS ENDED.

THE SIGNS ALSO BY WHICH SUCH MISE-
RABLE MORTALS MY⁶ BE KNOWN.

BY JOHN BUNYAN.

—who being dead, yet speaketh, Heb. ii. 4.

To which is added,

HIS EXHORTATION TO PEACE AND
UNITY AMONG ALL THAT FEAR GOD.

LONDON;

PRINTED FOR J. ROBINSON, AT THE GOLDEN
LION IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD 1688.

⁶ My—as printed (for may, of course).

Here then are distinct differences. The variations also are emphasised when the title-pages are placed in juxtaposition. The first is enclosed by a fine metal rule, the second by a broad black border, such as was used for funeral sermons. This dissimilarity has suggested a theory; I introduce it with diffidence; it is, that the copy from which the 1688 edition was set up was faulty in the title page. Why should the most fitting text be exchanged for one that would apply equally well to any work posthumously printed? It is clear that in 1688 a printed copy of the book, or the original manuscript must have been available; and the former is more likely than the latter.

A further point is also raised at this time. We now know the first edition is not dated 1682; but are we to conclude that there was or was not an edition of that date? An authority in these matters thinks we must accept it as a fact, except we can prove the contrary, because it has been so stated. I confess I am not of this opinion. I think that the date 1682 is given in mistake for the first, and not in addition to it. Moreover, though the issue of 1688 bears no description of an edition, yet that of 1692 is described as only the third.

If I am not too tedious may I point out two other scraps of bibliographical information. In the edition of 1688, an additional piece is added, called "An Exhortation to Peace and Unity." It was the opinion of Robert Robinson, a Baptist minister of Cambridge, that it was the work of another hand. This was endorsed by Mr. Offor, and Dr. John Brown indicated several reasons in support of the conclusion. Such a combination detracts from the simple aim of the publication and perhaps of the publisher. But subsequently the volume of "The Fig-Tree" reverted to its original form in everything except size of sheet. It was printed alone, the black border was abandoned, the original text restored, and it became again one of the few superior looking books bearing Bunyan's name. I venture, therefore, to suggest that it was printed from a newly found copy of the first edition. The original date nowhere appears, but it is a distinct reversion to type.

One effect of the discovery of the new date is the transference of this book to quite a new group of companions. It is now brought nearer to "Grace Abounding" than the "Holy War"; and the "Confession of Faith, etc.," and "Peaceable Principles" are its close associates. In composition and spirit it has much more in common with "Grace Abounding," than either the "Pilgrim," or the "Holy War." It is an introspective, earnest, terribly solemn book, full of faithful warnings, and portentous threatenings. Dr. John Brown shows that his long imprisonment

ended in 1672. There is every reason, therefore, to suppose it to be a prison book, i.e., composed in prison. It has all the marks of due deliberation and careful development upon it. High rank amongst Bunyan's many productions will be granted to it by all appreciative readers.

Few books carry with them more distinctly the confirmation of their own date. And as it is a responsible undertaking to correct a bibliography of such long standing I gladly call attention to the circumstance. On the last leaf of the address to the reader which is without pagination, there is a list of books, six in number, advertised; the heading being, "Books lately printed for Jonathan Robinson." Of these I possess two dated 1672, and I have verified that three others were of the same date. It may be concluded, therefore, that it was published quite early in 1673.

That I might secure the verdict of the greatest living Bunyan expert, I sought an interview with Dr. John Brown, which was graciously granted. I referred to the fact in "The British Weekly," of February 4. This veteran Bunyanite, had no explanation of the recorded false date, but immediately gave his adherence—when he had seen the book—to the one conclusion here affirmed, that at last the genuine first edition had been found. It is imperative therefore that henceforth this book shall be known by a new date, namely, 1673.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

The Barren Fig-tree: or, The Doom and Downfal of the Fruitless Professor. London, Printed for Jonothan Robinson at the Golden Lion in Paul's Church-yard, 1673.

Collation:—Title 1, l. To the Reader 4, l. 1. Signatures A to I. p p. 192. 24, mo.' First Ed', 1673.

Do. To which is added His Exhortation to Peace and Unity, etc., 1688. (No description of Edition.)

Do. 1692. (Described as third edition.)

Do. 1695. Fourth Edition.

Do. 1709. Sixth Edition. (In my possession.)

I have not seen a *fifth* edition. All these from 1688 include the "Exhortation." The sixth has a front. The author is resting his arm on a skull; there is an open mouthed beast with flames issuing therefrom, representing hell; and a barren tree in the background. It has the broad black border.

A copy dated 1728 is in my possession. The original title is reproduced; the treatise makes up the entire book; it is on good paper and well printed. No edition is indicated.

JOHN C. FOSTER.