

A Book for Boys and Girls

Or, Country Rhymes for Children

JOHN BUNYAN

NORTH PASS PRESS

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A Book for Boys and Girls

First Edition

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¹Spelled "lanthorn" in the original edition.

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A Note from the Publisher

John Bunyan's *A Book for Boys and Girls*—later popularized as *Divine Emblems*—was first published in 1686, two years before his death. For over three centuries, however, the majority of printed editions have been based on abridged or heavily edited versions that cut out significant portions of Bunyan's original poetry and his unique pedagogical framework.

This North Pass Press edition is, to our knowledge, the first new edition of the original text since 1686. Unlike the more common *Divine Emblems* editions, which contain only 49 of the original 74 poems, this volume preserves every verse of Bunyan's "homely rhymes." Furthermore, we have included Bunyan's powerful poem, "A Caution to Stir Up to Watch Against Sin," which provides a striking detection of the "devil's sophistry" and serves as a vital companion to the emblems found within. By returning to the source text, we allow the reader to experience the full scope of Bunyan's vision—one that is as much a manual for literacy as it is a treasury of spiritual emblems.

A centerpiece of this restoration is the inclusion of the "Appendix," which Bunyan designed as "An help to

Children to learn to read English.” By preserving the historic alphabets and font classifications exactly as they appeared in 1686, we invite the reader to experience the book as it was first intended: a comprehensive primer for the young and the “childish” alike.

Our edition has been carefully updated for modern readers by standardizing archaic spelling and correcting obvious historical typographic errors. However, to preserve the rhythmic pacing and distinctive character of Bunyan’s poetry, we have strictly retained the original 17th-century punctuation and syntax. Not a single word of the text has been altered or abridged; it has simply been made clean and accessible for today’s audience.

We commend this edition to the attention of all - whether a literal child or a ‘bearded boy’ - who love the unadulterated words of those who walked in the old paths.

North Pass Press

2026

To the Reader

Courteous Reader,
The little page will show, if there thou look,
Who are the proper subjects of this book.
They're boys and girls of all sorts and degrees,
From those of age, to children on the knees.
Thus comprehensive am I in my notions;
They tempt me to it by their childish motions.
We now have boys with beards, and girls that be
Big as old women, wanting gravity.

Then do not blame me, 'cause I thus describe them;
Flatter I may not, lest thereby I bribe them
To have a better judgment of themselves,
Then wise men have of babies on their shelves.
Their antic tricks, fantastic modes, and way,
Show they like very boys and girls, do play
With all the frantic fopp'ries of this age;
And that in open view, as on a stage;
Our bearded men do act like beardless boys;
Our women please themselves with childish toys.

Our ministers, long time by word and pen,
 Deal with them, counting them not boys but men:
 Thunderbolts they shot at them, and their toys:
 But hit then not, 'cause they were girls and boys.
 The better charge, the wider still they shot,
 Or else so high, these dwarfs they touchéd not.
 Instead of men, they found them girls and boys,
 Addict to nothing as to childish toys.

Wherefore good reader, that I save them may,
 I now with them, the very dottril² play.
 And since at gravity they make a tush,
 My very beard I cast behind the bush.
 And like a fool stand fing'ring of their toys;
 And all to show them, they are girls and boys.

Nor do I blush, although I think some may
 Call me a baby, 'cause I with them play:
 I do't to show them how each fingle-fangle,
 On which they doting are, their souls entangle,
 As with a web, a trap, a gin, a snare:
 And will destroy them, have they not a care.

Paul seemed to play the fool, that he might gain
 Those that were fools indeed, if not in grain.
 And did it by their things, that they might know
 Their emptiness, and might be brought unto

²term used for those who imitate or are easily fooled

What would them save from sin and vanity.
A noble act, and full of honesty.

Yet he nor I would like them be in vice,
While by their playthings, I would them entice,
To mount their thoughts from what are childish toys,
To Heav'n, for that's prepared for girls and boys.
Nor do I so confine myself to these,
As to shun graver things, I seek to please,
Those more composed with better things than toys:
Though thus I would be catching girls and boys.

Wherefore if men have now a mind to look;
Perhaps their greater fancies may be took
With what is here; though but in homely rhymes:
But he, who pleases all, must rise betimes.
Some, I persuade me, will be finding fault,
Concluding, here I trip, and there I halt,
No doubt some could these groveling notions raise
By fine-spun terms that challenge might the bays.³
But should all men be forced to lay aside
Their brains, that cannot regulate the tide:
By this or that man's fancy, we should have
The wise, unto the fool, become a slave.
What though my text seems mean, my morals be
Grave, as if fetched from a sublimer tree.

³The bays: A reference to the laurel wreath (bay leaves) traditionally worn by poets and conquerors as a symbol of honor and literary achievement.

And if some better handle can a fly,
Then some a text, why should we them deny
Their making proof, or good experiment,
Of smallest things great mischiefs to prevent?

Wise Solomon did fools to piss-ants⁴ send,
To learn true wisdom, and their lives to mend.
Yea, God by swallows, cuckoos, and the ass;
Shows they are fools who let that season pass,
Which he put in their hand, that to obtain
Which is both present, and eternal gain.

I think the wiser sort my rhymes may slight
But what were I! The foolish will delight
To read them, and the foolish, God has chose.
And doth by foolish things, their minds compose,
And settle upon that which is divine:
Great things, by little ones, are made to shine.

I could, were I so pleased, use higher strains.
And for applause, on tenters stretch my brains,
But what needs that? The arrow out of sight,
Does not the sleeper, nor the watchman fright.
To shoot too high doth but make children gaze;
'Tis that which hits the man, doth him amaze.

⁴Piss-ants: An archaic term for common wood ants (also called pismires), named for the sharp, pungent scent of formic acid they produce.

And for the inconsiderableness
Of things, by which I do my mind express;
May I by them bring some good thing to pass,
As Sampson, with the jaw-bone of an ass;
Or as brave Shamgar with his ox's goad,
(Both things not manly, nor for war in mode)
I have my end, though I myself expose
To scorn; God will have glory in the close.

Thus much for artificial babes; and now
To those who are in years but such, I bow
My pen to teach them what the letter be,
And how they may improve their A, B, C.
Nor let my pretty children them despise;
All needs must there begin, that would be wise.

Nor let them fall under discouragement,
Who at their hornbook stick,⁵ and time hath spent
Upon that A, B, C while others do
Into their primer, or their psalter go.
Some boys with difficulty do begin,
Who in the end, the bays and laurel win.

– J. B.

⁵Hornbook: A primary educational tool consisting of a wooden paddle covered by a translucent sheet of animal horn to protect the printed lesson. It represents the most basic level of instruction.

A Book for Boys and Girls

Upon the Ten Commandments

1. Thou shalt not have another God than me:
2. Thou shalt not to an image bow thy knee,
3. Thou shalt not take the Name of God in vain:
4. See that the Sabbath thou do not profane.
5. Honour thy father and thy mother too:
6. In act or thought see thou no murder do.
7. From fornication keep thy body clean:
8. Thou shalt not steal, though thou be very mean:⁶
9. Bear no false witness, keep thee without spot:
10. What is thy neighbour's see thou covet not.

The Awakened Child's Lamentation

When Adam was deceived,
I was of Life bereaved;
Of late (too) I perceived,
I was in sin conceived.

⁶Mean: Poor or impoverished.

And as I was born naked,
I was with filth bespaked,
At which when I awakèd,
My soul and spirit shakèd.

My filth grew strong, and boiled,
And me throughout defiled,
My pleasures me beguiled,
My soul! how art thou spoiled!

My joys with sin were painted,
My mind with sin is tainted,
My heart with guilt is fainted,
I wa'nt⁷ with God acquainted.

I have in sin abounded,
My heart therewith is wounded,
With fears I am surrounded,
My spirit is confounded.

I have been often called,
By sin as oft enthralled,
Pleasures hath me forestalled.
How is my spirit galled!

As sin has me infected,
I am thereof detected:

⁷wasn't

Mercy I have neglected,
I fear I am rejected.

The Word I have misused
Good council too refused;
Thus I myself abused;
How can I be excused?

When other children prayed,
That work I then delayed,
Ran up and down and played;
And thus from God have strayed.

Had I in God delighted,
And my wrong doings righted;
I had not thus been frightened,
Nor as I am benighted.

Oh! That God would be pleased,
T'wards me to be appeased;
And heal me thus diseased,
How should I then be eased!

But Truth I have despised,
My follies idolized,
Saints with reproach disguised,
Salvation nothing prized.

O Lord! I am ashamed,
When I do hear thee named;

'Cause thee I have defamed,
And lived like beasts untamed!

Would God I might be savèd,
Might have an heart like David;
This I have sometimes cravèd,
Yet am by sin enslavèd!

Vanity I have loved,
My heart from God removed;
And not, as me behoved,
The means of grace improved.

O Lord! if I had cried
(When I told tales and lied)
For mercy, and denied
My lusts, I had not died!

But Mercy's Gate is locked,
Yea, up that way is blocked;
Yea some that there have knocked,
God at their cries hath mocked.

'Cause him they had disdained,
Their wicked ways maintained,
From godliness restrained,
And on his Word complained.

I would I were converted
Would sin and I were parted,

For folly I have smarted;
God make me honest-hearted!

I have to grace appealed,
Would 'twere to me revealed,
And pardon to me sealed,
Then should I soon be healed!

Whose nature God hath mended,
Whose sinful course is ended,
Who is to life ascended,
Of God is much befriended.

Oh! Were I reconciled
To God, I, though defiled,
Should be as one that smiled,
To think my death was spoiled.

Lord! thou wast crucified
For sinners, bled and died,
I have for mercy cried,
Let me not be denied.

I have thy Spirit grieved;
Yet is my life reprieved,
Would I in thee believed,
Then I should be relieved.

Were but repentance gained,
And had I faith unfeigned,

Then joy would be maintained
In me, and sin restrained.

But this is to be noted,
I have on folly doted,
My vanities promoted,
Myself to them devoted.

Thus I have sin committed,
And so myself outwitted;
Yea, and my soul unfitted,
To be to Heav'n admitted.

But God has condescended,
And pardon has extended,
To such as have offended,
Before their lives were ended.

O Lord! do not disdain me,
But kindly entertain me;
Yea in thy faith maintain me,
And let thy love constrain me!

Meditations Upon An Egg

The egg's no chick by falling from the hen;
Nor man a Christian, till he's born again.
The egg's at first containèd in the shell;

Men afore grace, in sins, and darkness dwell.
The egg when laid, by warmth is made a chicken;
And Christ, by grace, those dead in sin doth quicken.
The egg, when first a chick, the shell's its prison;
So's flesh to th' soul, who yet with Christ is risen.
The shell doth crack, the chick doth chirp and peep;
The flesh decays, as men do pray and weep.
The shell doth break, the chick's at liberty;
The flesh falls off, the soul mounts up on high.
But both do not enjoy the self-same plight;
The soul is safe, the chick now fears the kite.⁸

But chicks from rotten eggs do not proceed;
Nor is an hypocrite a saint indeed.
The rotten egg, though underneath the hen,
If cracked, stinks, and is loathsome unto men.
Nor doth her warmth make what is rotten sound,
What's rotten, rotten will at last be found.
The hypocrite, sin has him in possession,
He is a rotten egg under profession.

Some eggs bring cockatrices; and some men
Seem hatched and brooded in the viper's den.
Some eggs bring wildfowls; and some men there be
As wild as are the wildest fowls that flee.
Some eggs bring spiders; and some men appear
More venom than the worst of spiders are.

⁸Kite: A bird of prey.

Some eggs bring piss-ants; and some seem to me
 As much for trifles as the piss-ants be.
 Thus divers eggs do produce diverse shapes,
 As like some men as monkeys are like apes.
 But this is but an egg, were it a chick,
 Here had been legs, and wings, and bones to pick.

Upon the Lord's Prayer

Our Father which in Heaven art;
 Thy name be always hallowèd;
 Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done;
 Thy Heav'nly path be followèd.
 By us on Earth as 'tis with thee,
 We humbly pray;
 And let our bread us given be
 From day to day.

Forgive our debts, as we forgive
 Those that to us indebted are:
 Into temptation lead us not;
 But save us from the wicked's snare.
 The Kingdom's thine, the power too,
 We thee adore;
 The glory also shall be thine
 For evermore.

Meditation Upon Peep of Day

I oft, though it be peep of day, don't know,
Whether 'tis night, whether 'tis day or no.
I fancy that I see a little light;
But cannot yet distinguish day from night.
I hope, I doubt, but steady yet I be not,
I am not at a point, the sun I see not.
Thus 'tis with such, who grace but now possessèd,
They know not yet, if they are cursèd or blessèd.

Upon the Flint in the Water

This flint, time out of mind, has there abode,
Where crystal streams make their continual road;
Yet it abides a flint as much as 'twere,
Before it touched the water, or came there.

Its hard obdurateness is not abated,
'Tis not at all by water penetrated.
Though water hath a soft'ning virtue in't.
This stone it can't dissolve, 'cause 'tis a flint:

Yea, though it in the water doth remain;
It doth its fiery nature still retain.
If you oppose it with its opposite,
At you, yea, in your face its fire 'twill spit.

COMPARISON

This flint an emblem is of those that lie,
 Like stones, under the Word, until they die.
 Its crystal streams hath not their nature changed,
 They are not from their lusts by grace estranged.

Upon the Fish in the Water

The water is the fish's element:
 Take her from thence, none can her death prevent.
 And some have said, who have transgressors been,
 As good not be, as to be kept from sin.

The water is the fish's element:
 Leave her but there, and she is well content.
 So's he who in the path of life doth plod,
 Take all, says he, let me but have my God.

The water is the fish's element:
 Her sportings there to her are excellent.
 So is God's service unto holy men,
 They are not in their element till then.

Upon the Swallow

This pretty bird, oh! how she flies and sings!
 But could she do so if she had not wings?