visions, and grimmer thoughts, he continued to indulge in until the age of seventeen, when he entered the Parliamen-
tarian army, which by that time had taken the field against Charles I. Here he continued for about two years, not appa-
rently gaining much credit as a soldier, being considered by his officer awkward in the use of arms. At the siege of Leicester in 1645, according to one account, he was so clumsy and back-
ward that another man thrust himself forward in his place and was killed. Bunyan’s own statement is, that the man volunteered to go in his room; and he afterwards came to regard the fact as a direct providential interposition on his behalf. Shortly after his return from the army, and consequently when he was only about nineteen, Bunyan, with the hearty concurrence of his friends, who hoped that he would thereby be cured of his horrid habit of swearing, married a sensible and virtuous young woman, whose only legacy, left by a pious parent, was a couple of books entitled, “The Plain Man’s Pathway to Heaven,” and “The Practice of Piety.” These she persuaded Bunyan to read, and though, as he him-
self expresses it, “they did not reach my heart, to awaken it about my sad and sinful state, yet they did beget within me some desires to reform my vicious life, and to fall in very eagerly with the religion of the times.” At his wife’s desire too, he went to church twice each Sunday, but without much profit. He still continued his bell-ringing, tip-cat, and swear-
ing. One day, however, while at his favourite game, a voice seemed to address him from heaven, and to the astonishment of his companions, in the very act of striking the cat he sud-
denly paused, and with terror-stricken visage, gazed with awe and wonder into the serene space from which the dread question, “Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell?” came. But though this strange delusion startled and perplexed him, it did not cure him of his swearing. This, strange to say, was effectually done some short time after, by a reproof from a woman of questionable virtue.