

THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

FROM THIS WORLD TO THAT
WHICH IS TO COME

Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream

PART 1

John Bunyan

*With an Introduction by
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INTRODUCTION

The *Pilgrim's Progress* is a classic of classics. If we exclude sacred texts (the Bible, the Koran, etc.), liturgical texts (*Book of Common Prayer*), and political books that Chairman Mao might take a dim view of your family not owning (political propaganda), *The Pilgrim's Progress* is arguably the best-selling book of all time. It has never been out of print, and has been translated into over 200 languages. If you have not read it, you cannot be said to be educated in Western letters, and if you did not read it *appreciatively*, we might still have our doubts.

The World Around

A little over a decade before the publication of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, London was wracked by the Great Plague, the last outbreak of the Bubonic Plague in England (1665–1666). About a quarter of London's population died in that epidemic, meaning about 100,000 people lost their lives. 1666 was the same year that Bunyan's autobiography, *Grace Abounding*, was printed. The plague was topped off by the Great Fire of London, which destroyed much of the city center—although it did help with the plague by destroying rats along with houses. Given these judgments of “biblical” proportions, it is not hard to see why Bunyan's portrayal of the City of Destruction in 1678 did

seem somewhat realistic. It was an apocalyptic vision, to be sure, but it came shortly after an apocalyptic time.

Charles II was king in 1678, and would remain so until his death in 1685. He was succeeded by James II, who reigned both briefly and poorly (the adverbs are related), and then William and Mary came to the throne in the Glorious Revolution of 1688—the year of Bunyan's death.

Across the water to the east, a woman from Venice became the first woman to receive a university doctorate. Her name was Elena Cornaro Piscopia. 1678 was the year that the first ship was built in America, a ship named *Griffon*, and it was built by Robert LaSalle. In hindsight, there were not a lot of significant events happening around the rest of the world, but the excitement in England made up for it.

About the Author

John Bunyan was born in 1628, and died almost 60 years later in 1688. At the age of sixteen, he joined the Parliamentary Army and served in the English Civil War under Cromwell for about three years. After his stint in the army, he returned to his native Bedford, and took up the trade of tinker, which he had learned from his father. He married a pious young woman (we do not know her name, but an educated guess suggests Mary) and a short time after became intensely interested in religious matters. Although the Bunyans were very poor—according to Bunyan they did not have “so much household stuff as a dish or a spoon betwixt us both”—his wife brought two books into the marriage that would influence Bunyan greatly.¹ They were *The Plaine Man's Path-way to Heaven* by Arthur Dent, and *The Practice of Pietie*, by Lewis Bayly. After Mary died, leaving John with four children (Mary, Elizabeth, John and Thomas), John married again. His

1. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, section 15.

The road between the two cities is marked by many places that typify the experience of many Christians—the Slough of Despond, Vanity Fair, Doubting Castle, the Valley of Humiliation, the Delectable Mountains, along with others. About each it may be said that this is the kind of place where this kind of thing happens.

This road is also a place where Christian encounters many individuals who represent the kind of people we meet in this life. His first sincere companion along the way is Faithful. After Faithful is martyred in Vanity Fair, Hopeful replaces him as Christian's companion. Less helpful among those encountered are Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Talkative, Pliable, the Flatterer, and Atheist. As with the places, it is easy to tell what each man does.

Worldview Analysis

The book is not a suspense, although there is (mysteriously) plenty of suspense in it. It is an allegory related in the circumstances of a dream—a common enough device—and the allegory is about as straightforward as it is possible to get. The City of Destruction is on one end, and the Celestial City on the other. The protagonist is named Christian, and so *that* is cleared up. We don't have to wonder about the character of any individuals we meet—we don't need to concern ourselves, for example, with whether or not Pliable is going to make it. When we first meet him, his doom is written in the name Bunyan gives him. And yet, despite this, the narrative holds our attention. We know *that* Christian is going to make it, but how he is going to make it is the true mystery.

An allegory is a story with two “stories,” stories of another sort. The first story, the ground floor, is the story of the characters or individuals involved. The second story is the floor of abstractions. Talkative on the ground floor is that particular character, occupying *that* particular place in the story. On the second story, he becomes all who share in

those characteristics. On the second story, he is the abstraction of talkativeness.

Allegories lend themselves to stiffness, and when it comes to the allegorical part, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is no exception. But the thing that makes it come alive, and indeed to stand out from other allegories, is the *life* in the dialogue. As C.S. Lewis points out, Bunyan had almost perfect pitch when it came to recapturing the kind of conversation that would have occurred every day in the streets of Bedford.

The theology portrayed is Puritan theology, and of the stoutest sort. But we may make the additional observation that it is what we might call blue-collar Puritanism. Bunyan was a genius, but he was not formally educated or a university man. He was the kind of man schools are named after, not the kind of man who goes to them. If you ever read John Bunyan's spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding*, it will be brought home to you that conversion for Bunyan was "agonistic." There was a great deal of *wrestling* involved. This is the way it was for Bunyan himself, and this is the way it is for Christian, the protagonist in his great allegory.

So then, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is the story of Christian's conversion. Christian comes under conviction of sin. He lives in the City of Destruction and he knows for a fact that it is going to be destroyed. He knows that he himself is complicit in the crimes of his city—he has a great burden of sins on his back. These are not the sins of his nation or people—these are his *own* sins, his own contributions to the reason why the City of Destruction is under the wrath of God.

When Christian flees "from the wrath to come," he does so with his own burden on his back. He runs from the city where wrath was going to fall, but the trouble with his flight was that he took the occasion of wrath with him. It is bound tightly to his back, and as fast as he might run, his sin is always right behind him. This is the way it was for Bunyan also—this part of the story is plainly autobiographical.

Bunyan broke with his old sinful and carefree life, and was bent on living differently . . . but his sins still went with him.

Although the burden of sins is carried on this pilgrimage for a time, it is a very short time, not a lifetime. The whole point of the pilgrimage is to come to a resolution—on *that* point at least. Early on in his journey, when he comes to the cross, Christian comes to the point of his decisive conversion. His pilgrimage was underway before that point, but this is where his pilgrimage *really* begins. Prior to the cross, his pilgrimage represents repentance. When he comes to the cross, he is converted (regeneration), and that represents faith. And this is the order we find in the New Testament—repent and believe.

Everything after the cross (regeneration/justification) is a matter of sanctification, which is the pathway to glorification. There may be great struggles and difficulties after that point of conversion, but they are different in kind from what went before. When Christian is shut up in Doubting Castle later on, for example, he does not *know* that he was saved. It is, after all, *Doubting Castle*. But earlier, when he was in the City of Destruction, he knew for a fact that he was *not* saved. At that point he had, you might say, assurance of damnation.

In other words, while he does not always have full and complete assurance of salvation during his time as a pilgrim, during the last portion of his unconverted years, before he came to the cross, he has true assurance that he was genuinely lost. Doubt is one thing and conviction of sin quite another. Once Christian has come to the cross, and the burden of his sins had been rolled away, Bunyan seeks to show us that assurance of salvation is the normal state of affairs. Christian doesn't always have it, but it is clear throughout the book that he is *supposed* to have it.

When he does not possess it, as when he gets off the path and winds up in Doubting Castle, it is clear that he is in these straits because he has disobeyed. The same thing is true when he misplaces his Roll. When he had been forgiven at the cross, one of the things he



THE AUTHOR'S APOLOGY FOR HIS BOOK

When at the first I took my pen in hand
Thus for to write, I did not understand
That I at all should make a little book
In such a mode; nay, I had undertook
To make another; which, when almost done,
Before I was aware, I this begun.

And thus it was: I, writing of the way
And race of saints, in this our gospel day,
Fell suddenly into an allegory
About their journey, and the way to glory,
In more than twenty things which I set down.
This done, I twenty more had in my crown;
And they again began to multiply,
Like sparks that from the coals of fire do fly.
Nay, then, thought I, if that you breed so fast,
I'll put you by yourselves, lest you at last
Should prove ad infinitum, and eat out
The book that I already am about.

Well, so I did; but yet I did not think
To shew to all the world my pen and ink
In such a mode; I only thought to make
I knew not what; nor did I undertake
Thereby to please my neighbour: no, not I;
I did it my own self to gratify.

Neither did I but vacant seasons spend
In this my scribble; nor did I intend
But to divert myself in doing this
From worsè thoughts which make me do amiss.

Thus, I set pen to paper with delight,
And quickly had my thoughts in black and white.
For, having now my method by the end,
Still as I pulled, it came; and so I penned
It down: until it came at last to be,
For length and breadth, the bigness which you see.

Well, when I had thus put mine ends together,
I shewed them others, that I might see whether
They would condemn them, or them justify:
And some said, Let them live; some, Let them die;
Some said, JOHN, print it; others said, Not so;
Some said, It might do good; others said, No.

Now was I in a strait, and did not see
Which was the best thing to be done by me:
At last I thought, Since you are thus divided,
I print it will, and so the case decided.

For, thought I, some, I see, would have it done,
Though others in that channel do not run:

To prove, then, who advised for the best,
Thus I thought fit to put it to the test.

I further thought, if now I did deny
Those that would have it, thus to gratify.
I did not know but hinder them I might
Of that which would to them be great delight.

For those which were not for its coming forth,
I said to them, Offend you I am loth,
Yet, since your brethren pleased with it be,
Forbear to judge till you do further see.

If that thou wilt not read, let it alone;
Some love the meat, some love to pick the bone.
Yea, that I might them better palliate,
I did too with them thus expostulate:—

May I not write in such a style as this?
In such a method, too, and yet not miss
My end—thy good? Why may it not be done?
Dark clouds bring waters, when the bright bring none.
Yea, dark or bright, if they their silver drops
Cause to descend, the earth, by yielding crops,
Gives praise to both, and carpeth not at either,
But treasures up the fruit they yield together;
Yea, so commixes both, that in her fruit
None can distinguish this from that: they suit
Her well when hungry; but, if she be full,
She spews out both, and makes their blessings null.

You see the ways the fisherman doth take
To catch the fish; what engines doth he make?
Behold how he engageth all his wits;

Also his snares, lines, angles, hooks, and nets;
 Yet fish there be, that neither hook, nor line,
 Nor snare, nor net, nor engine can make thine:
 They must be groped for, and be tickled too,
 Or they will not be catch'd, whate'er you do.

How does the fowler seek to catch his game
 By divers means! all which one cannot name:
 His guns, his nets, his lime-twigs, light, and bell:
 He creeps, he goes, he stands; yea, who can tell
 Of all his postures? Yet there's none of these
 Will make him master of what fowls he please.
 Yea, he must pipe and whistle to catch this,
 Yet, if he does so, that bird he will miss.

If that a pearl may in a toad's head dwell,
 And may be found too in an oyster-shell;
 If things that promise nothing do contain
 What better is than gold; who will disdain,
 That have an inkling of it, there to look,
 That they may find it? Now, my little book,
 (Though void of all these paintings that may make
 It with this or the other man to take)
 Is not without those things that do excel
 What do in brave but empty notions dwell.

'Well, yet I am not fully satisfied,
 That this your book will stand, when soundly tried.'

Why, what's the matter? 'It is dark.' What though?
 'But it is feigned.' What of that? I trow?
 Some men, by feigned words, as dark as mine,
 Make truth to spangle and its rays to shine.

'But they want solidness.' Speak, man, thy mind.
'They drown the weak; metaphors make us blind.'

Solidity, indeed, becomes the pen
Of him that writeth things divine to men;
But must I needs want solidness, because
By metaphors I speak? Were not God's laws,
His gospel laws, in olden times held forth
By types, shadows, and metaphors? Yet loth
Will any sober man be to find fault
With them, lest he be found for to assault
The highest wisdom. No, he rather stoops,
And seeks to find out what by pins and loops,
By calves and sheep, by heifers and by rams,
By birds and herbs, and by the blood of lambs,
God speaketh to him; and happy is he
That finds the light and grace that in them be.

Be not too forward, therefore, to conclude
That I want solidness—that I am rude;
All things solid in show not solid be;
All things in parables despise not we;
Lest things most hurtful lightly we receive,
And things that good are, of our souls bereave.

My dark and cloudy words, they do but hold
The truth, as cabinets enclose the gold.

The prophets used much by metaphors
To set forth truth; yea, who so considers Christ,
his apostles too, shall plainly see,
That truths to this day in such mantles be.

Am I afraid to say, that holy writ,
Which for its style and phrase puts down all wit,
Is everywhere so full of all these things—
Dark figures, allegories? Yet there springs
From that same book that lustre, and those rays
Of light, that turn our darkest nights to days.

Come, let my carper to his life now look,
And find there darker lines than in my book
He findeth any; yea, and let him know,
That in his best things there are worse lines too.

May we but stand before impartial men,
To his poor one I dare adventure ten,
That they will take my meaning in these lines
Far better than his lies in silver shrines.
Come, truth, although in swaddling clouts, I find,
Informs the judgement, rectifies the mind;
Pleases the understanding, makes the will
Submit; the memory too it doth fill
With what doth our imaginations please;
Likewise it tends our troubles to appease.

Sound words, I know, Timothy is to use,
And old wives' fables he is to refuse;
But yet grave Paul him nowhere did forbid
The use of parables; in which lay hid
That gold, those pearls, and precious stones that were
Worth digging for, and that with greatest care.

Let me add one word more. O man of God,
Art thou offended? Dost thou wish I had
Put forth my matter in another dress?

Or, that I had in things been more express?
Three things let me propound; then I submit
To those that are my betters, as is fit.

1. I find not that I am denied the use
Of this my method, so I no abuse
Put on the words, things, readers; or be rude
In handling figure or similitude,
In application; but, all that I may,
Seek the advance of truth this or that way
Denied, did I say? Nay, I have leave
(Example too, and that from them that have
God better pleased, by their words or ways,
Than any man that breatheth now-a-days)
Thus to express my mind, thus to declare
Things unto thee that excellentest are.

2. I find that men (as high as trees) will write
Dialogue-wise; yet no man doth them slight
For writing so: indeed, if they abuse
Truth, cursed be they, and the craft they use
To that intent; but yet let truth be free
To make her sallies upon thee and me,
Which way it pleases God; for who knows how,
Better than he that taught us first to plough,
To guide our mind and pens for his design?
And he makes base things usher in divine.

3. I find that holy writ in many places
Hath semblance with this method, where the cases
Do call for one thing, to set forth another;
Use it I may, then, and yet nothing smother

Truth's golden beams: nay, by this method may
Make it cast forth its rays as light as day.

And now before I do put up my pen,
I'll shew the profit of my book, and then
Commit both thee and it unto that Hand
That pulls the strong down, and makes weak ones stand.

This book it chalketh out before thine eyes
The man that seeks the everlasting prize;
It shews you whence he comes, whither he goes;
What he leaves undone, also what he does;
It also shows you how he runs and runs,
Till he unto the gate of glory comes.

It shows, too, who set out for life amain,
As if the lasting crown they would obtain;
Here also you may see the reason why
They lose their labour, and like fools do die.

This book will make a traveller of thee,
If by its counsel thou wilt ruled be;
It will direct thee to the Holy Land,
If thou wilt its directions understand:
Yea, it will make the slothful active be;
The blind also delightful things to see.

Art thou for something rare and profitable?
Wouldest thou see a truth within a fable?
Art thou forgetful? Wouldest thou remember
From New-Year's day to the last of December?
Then read my fancies; they will stick like burs,
And may be, to the helpless, comforters.

This book is writ in such a dialect
As may the minds of listless men affect:
It seems a novelty, and yet contains
Nothing but sound and honest gospel strains.

Wouldst thou divert thyself from melancholy?
Wouldst thou be pleasant, yet be far from folly?
Wouldst thou read riddles, and their explanation?
Or else be drowned in thy contemplation?
Dost thou love picking meat? Or wouldst thou see
A man in the clouds, and hear him speak to thee?
Wouldst thou be in a dream, and yet not sleep?
Or wouldst thou in a moment laugh and weep?
Wouldst thou lose thyself and catch no harm,
And find thyself again without a charm?
Wouldst thou read thyself, and read thou knowest not what,
And yet know whether thou art blest or not,
By reading the same lines? Oh, then come hither,
And lay my book, thy head, and heart together.

JOHN BUNYAN



THE CITY OF DESTRUCTION

As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a Den, and I laid me down in that place to sleep: and, as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold, I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back.¹ I looked, and saw him open the book, and read therein; and, as he read, he wept, and trembled; and, not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, “What shall I do?”²

In this plight, therefore, he went home and refrained himself as long as he could, that his wife and children should not perceive his distress; but he could not be silent long, because that his trouble increased. Wherefore at length he brake his mind to his wife and children; and thus he began to talk to them: “O my dear wife, said he, and you the children of my bowels, I, your dear friend, am in myself undone by reason of a burden that lieth hard upon me; moreover, I am for certain informed that this our city will be burned with fire from heaven; in which fearful overthrow, both myself, with thee my

1. Isa. 64:6; Luke 14:33; Ps. 38:4; Hab. 2:2; Acts 16:30,31

2. Acts 2:37