

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

Pilgrim's Progress is a Christian allegory written by John Bunyan. He was placed in prison in 1660 for the "crime" of holding unauthorized religious services. The book was first published in 1678 and is regarded as one of the most significant works of English literature. It has been translated into over 200 different languages and has never been out of print.

The first part features "Christian" journeying from his home town to the celestial city. Since he cannot persuade his wife and children to go with him, he goes alone. Obstinate and Pliable follow him with the hope of persuading him to turn back. Obstinate gives up and turns back, but Pliable continues until they come to the Slough of Despond. When both fall into this dangerous bog, Pliable abandons Christian to save himself. Christian struggles to the other side and Help hears his cry and comes to his rescue.

There are many characters in the book to whom every Christian pilgrim can relate. We begin with Christian, Evangelist, Obstinate, Pliable, Help and Hypocrisy and continue to Mr. Worldly Wisdom, Mistrust, Wanton, and Superstition. These, and many other easily recognizable characters represent both the positive and the negative influence we all experience on our own pilgrimage to the celestial city.

Part II, which appeared in 1684, is much more than a mere sequel to the earlier volume. The beam of Bunyan's spotlight is now broadened to include Christian's family and other men, women, and children. The incidents and accidents of everyday life are more numerous. The joys of the pilgrimage tend to outweigh the hardships. Charity is added to the faith and hope of Part I. The two parts in reality constitute the whole. The difference in tone between the two is at least partially explained by the fact that Bunyan was released from 12 years in prison in 1672. He then spent an additional 6 months in prison in 1675. Since Part II did not appear until 1684 the years of

freedom no doubt helped him to write from a different point of view.

Scholars have identified at least 21 locations in the book that correspond to the geographical realities that Bunyon encountered on his regular journeys from Bedford to London. The Bedford Plain, for example gives way to miry deposits of clay used to make bricks in London. (Slough of Despond). Mt. Sinai would be the high hill on the way to the village of Morality, and Wicket Gate the wooden gate to the Elstow Parish Church, etc.

Be that as it may, all Christians can relate to the reality of Christian's struggles and temptations. Eight miles west of Bedford is a weather beaten statue that looks much like a person sized pillar of salt. It was a stark reminder to this persecuted child of God to not look back. Bunyon did not dream that his epistle from prison would every become popular. He wrote in the prologue: ". . . *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 mine own self to gratifie."

The opposition these puritanical believers faced from Catholicism is reflected in this passage describing a giant Christian faced at the end of the Valley of the Shadow of Death: "*Now I saw in my Dream, that at the end of this Valley lay blood, bones, ashes, and mangled bodies of men, even of Pilgrims that had gone this way formerly: And while I was musing what should be the reason, I espied a little before me a Cave, where two Giants, Pope and Pagan, dwelt in old times, by whose Power and Tyranny the Men whose bones, blood ashes, &c. lay there, were cruelly put to death. But by this place Christian went without much danger, whereat I somewhat wondered; but I have learnt since, that Pagan has been dead many a day; and as for the other, though he be yet alive, he is by reason of age, and also of the many shrewd brushes that he met with in his younger*

dayes, grown so crazy and stiff in his joynts, that he can now do little more than sit in his Caves mouth, grinning at Pilgrims as they go by, and biting his nails, because he cannot come at them.”

“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;” (1 Pet 2:11)