

*Signet Classic*

*The  
Pilgrim's Progress*



JOHN BUNYAN



WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY ROGER LUNDIN

JOHN BUNYAN

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Progress*

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A SIGNET CLASSIC

## **SIGNET CLASSIC**

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The son of a tinsmith, **John Bunyan** was born in 1628 near the village of Bedford, England. There he was raised and trained for his father's trade, receiving but scant formal schooling. At seventeen, during the English Civil War, he entered the parliamentary army; by the time of his discharge, two years later, he had developed a deep concern with religion and soon became a preacher in the Nonconformist Fellowship of Bedford. The first of his numerous religious tracts appeared in 1656, but it was not until ten years later that he wrote his first memorable work, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. His religious activity caused him repeated imprisonment throughout his mature life; he may even have begun *The Pilgrim's Progress* in a Bedford jail. Part I was published in 1678 and won instant and enormous popularity; it was followed by Part II in 1684. During this period, Bunyan's two other notable works—*The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680) and *The Holy War* (1682)—were also written. His last years spent as an itinerant preacher, Bunyan died in 1688; his grave is in the Dissenters' burial ground, Bunhill Fields, London—the final resting place of George Fox, Daniel Defoe, and William Blake.

**Roger Lundin** has published widely in the fields of American literature, hermeneutics, and literature and religion. His books include an award-winning biography, *Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief*, as well as *The Culture of Interpretation: Christian Faith and the Postmodern World*, *The Promise of Hermeneutics* (with Anthony C. Thiselton and Clarence Walhout), and *Literature Through the Eyes of Faith* (with Susan V. Gallagher). The Clyde S. Kilby Professor of English at Wheaton College (Illinois), Lundin currently serves as the Director of the American Literature and Religion Project, based at the University of Notre Dame.

## *A Note on the Text*

The present text of *The Pilgrim's Progress* modifies the seventeenth-century text, but the changes are as limited as possible, and those changes that do occur have been made only for the sake of lucidity, simplicity, and consistency. In general, only the spelling and punctuation are different, and they have simply been modernized and clarified; for example, quotation marks have been added to all speeches. Grammar and paragraphing remain unaltered, however, and no passages have been omitted. The Oxford University Press edition of Bunyan's work, edited by James Blanton Wharey in 1928 and revised by Roger Sharrock in 1960, has been a valuable and trusted guide and the final arbitrator of textual authenticity.

For his allegory Bunyan wrote a series of marginal comments, often instructive, often informative. His notes are either citations of biblical references in the body of the work, paraphrases of action, or explanations of meaning. Although simple paraphrases of action have necessarily been deleted, many of the other marginal comments have been kept in another form in the present text: if Bunyan quotes directly from the Bible, the biblical source is given immediately in the main text, enclosed in brackets; if Bunyan uses the Bible indirectly, but relevantly, the biblical source is stated in a footnote; if a marginal comment explicates sense or meaning, it also appears as a footnote, marked with the letter B to indicate Bunyan's authorship.

Two other kinds of information appear in footnotes. Biblical references that Bunyan does not give but that are especially important are there, and if a specific word's meaning has changed since the seventeenth century, its archaic meaning is noted. The Oxford English Dictionary is the source of all definitions; it has seemed redundant to define words the sense of which has not altered.

Miss Eve Zarin, formerly of Hunter College, has been a great help in establishing this modern reading text of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

—CATHARINE STIMPSON

## *Introduction*

Like many other great works of literature, *The Pilgrim's Progress* was born in a prison. Perhaps paradoxically, the human spirit has often found in the barrenness of captivity a fertile source for poetry and prose of the highest order. A list of compelling works written in prison or about imprisonment would run the gamut from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians to Mary Rowlandson's account of her captivity during the seventeenth-century Indian wars of New England, to Martin Luther King's famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's devastating history of *The Gulag Archipelago*. "When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight," Samuel Johnson once observed, "it concentrates his mind wonderfully." For a host of brilliant writers through the ages, the harrowing experience of captivity would seem not only to have concentrated the mind wonderfully but also to have driven the pen furiously.

In some instances, imprisonment largely deepened the insights and enhanced the reputation of writers already firmly established on their own literary merits. Osip Mandelstam was widely considered a major poet by the time Joseph Stalin had him arrested and left to die in a brutal labor camp in the late 1930s, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer had become already a powerful presence in Ger-

man theology when he was jailed and finally martyred in the last days of the Third Reich.

Yet in other instances, the prison experience appears to have transformed ordinary persons into extraordinary artists. Such was the case with John Bunyan, who lived a modest life far from the centers of power in seventeenth-century England. When first jailed in 1660, Bunyan was an itinerant preacher who had a flair for oratory, a passion for theological argument, and few prospects for lasting fame. When he emerged from prison almost twelve years later, he had begun the writing of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, an allegory of the soul's journey that remains one of the most widely read works in the history of world literature.

Bunyan was born in 1628, near Bedford in central England. His parents were people of modest means, and at an early age he began training in his father's trade as a metal worker. Like most people living in the England of the 1640s, however, young John Bunyan soon found himself swept along by the flood of events during the English Civil War. At sixteen, he joined the Parliamentary army in its battle against the forces of Charles I, and though the historical records of his service are sketchy, he did later describe an episode in which he narrowly missed being killed. "When I was just ready to go," he recounted, "one of the company desired to go in my room; to which, when I had consented, he took my place; and coming to the siege, as he stood sentinel, he was shot into the head with a musket bullet, and died."

As a frightening incident that appears random in its nature yet merciful in its consequences, Bunyan's escape from death in many ways foreshadowed the events that were about to change his life's circumstances and spiritual vision dramatically. After he was mustered out of the army in the late 1640s, Bunyan returned to his home region, took up his father's trade once more, married, and began a family. From the start, however, this new life remained curiously unsettled for him. As was to be the case with Christian at the opening of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan found himself restless and riddled with

guilt. He searched desperately for a means of bringing to an end what he would later call the "great confusion and astonishment" of those days. Eventually he underwent a conversion, which he termed a "merciful working of God upon my soul." Nevertheless, like Christian, Bunyan would learn that passage through the "straight gate" of conversion did not bring an end to his spiritual sorrow. Just as Christian was to face his greatest temptations—at Vanity Fair and elsewhere—and fight his greatest battles—against the likes of the hideous Apollyon—on the other side of the "Wicket Gate," so did Bunyan find himself more anguished after his conversion than before it.

In a later account of his spiritual struggles, Bunyan credited Martin Luther with having directed him at last to the peace he had sought so passionately. He read Luther's commentary on Galatians, and its message of the triumph of grace over law spoke with searing clarity to his own wounding struggles with guilt and despair. Of this encounter with Luther, Bunyan would write, "I found my condition, in his experience, so largely and profoundly handled, as if his book had been written out of my heart."

Countless readers have said the same thing about *The Pilgrim's Progress*—that it reads as if it "had been written out of their own hearts"—and in Bunyan's life, his conversion set in motion the events that led to the writing of that work. He joined a Protestant church in Bedford in 1655 and soon discovered his gifts as a lay preacher and polemicist. He preached widely and effectively in the mid-1650s, but in the words of Richard Greaves, "he regarded himself as unworthy of the task and professed amazement that his preaching produced results."

Converts proved to be only one of the results of Bunyan's preaching, which also eventually led to his persecution and imprisonment. He was a Nonconformist, which meant that he did not subscribe to the *Thirty-nine Articles*, the doctrinal standard of Anglicanism, and would not practice Anglican forms of worship. After having been held in contempt during the years when Cromwell

and the Puritans ruled the realm, those Anglican standards had been brought back with force after the restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660. The once ascendant Nonconformists now found themselves cast down, with many of their religious activities severely limited or prohibited outright. Within months of Charles II's return, Bunyan was arrested for unlicensed preaching in his native Bedfordshire.

The authorities may have anticipated that his stay in jail would be a brief affair and that he would agree to forgo his Nonconformist preaching and conform to Anglican practices. A number of Dissenting preachers had done just that, but Bunyan refused to accept the restrictions. As a result, an incarceration of several days stretched into a twelve-year confinement.

Imprisonment came at a great personal cost to Bunyan. His first wife had died in 1656, leaving him a widower with four young children. In 1659, he remarried, and very shortly after he was jailed the following year, his wife Elizabeth gave birth to a child who died within days. Cut off from his family, deprived of the right to preach, and stripped of the most basic liberties, Bunyan began to wield his pen as a tool of spiritual comfort and a weapon of polemical power. In the more than a decade that he spent in jail, he wrote a number of books, including his autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, and *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He did not publish this latter work until 1678, after he had served a second but much shorter term in prison.

The phenomenal success of the story of Christian's pilgrimage to the Celestial City prompted Bunyan to undertake the writing of a second part. This section accounted for the fate of Christian's wife, Christiana, and their children, whom he had left behind when he undertook his own journey. Bunyan's personal situation and the public circumstances of the Nonconforming churches had changed radically since he had written Christian's story. He was no longer an isolated prisoner but a public minister and church administrator, and across England, the early harshness of the Anglican restoration had yielded to a spirit of relative toleration. The story of

Christiana and her children registered these changes. Where Christian's escapades had been frenetic and his story filled with dangerous trials, the account of his family's sojourn is leisurely and saturated with discourse rather than conflict.

The fame of *The Pilgrim's Progress* has continued unbroken for more than three centuries. Bunyan's allegory has been translated into at least seventy languages and may be the bestselling book in the English language, after the Bible. Though it is a work of sectarian Protestant piety, Bunyan's fiction has acquired readers across the myriad branches of the Christian faith, as well as in Islam and beyond the boundaries of any faith traditions, among agnostics and Marxist materialists alike.

To understand the breadth of Bunyan's appeal, one must consider the depth of his beliefs and their remarkable representative power for his age. W. H. Auden once observed that Franz Kafka "is the author who comes nearest to bearing the same kind of relationship to our age as Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe bore to theirs." Missing from Auden's list of representative writers is anyone from the tumultuous Protestant world of the seventeenth century, and here the choice would have to be John Bunyan. Though he did not possess the philosophic and poetic sophistication of Dante, the sheer linguistic brilliance and exuberance of Shakespeare, or the encyclopedic breadth of Goethe, Bunyan was their equal in giving imaginative embodiment to the most terrifying fears and exhilarating longings of his era. No one else has captured in fiction the glories and torments of the Protestant experience as convincingly as this itinerant pastor did in his prison-generated account of a pilgrim's journey to the heavenly city.

In *The Courage to Be*, the twentieth-century Protestant theologian Paul Tillich offers an argument useful for understanding the peculiar power of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He suggests that in 2000 years of Christian history, there have been three major forms of human anxiety, each of which has dominated a different era. The first century, he argues, was marked by inordinate fears of death and deep uncertainties about immortality,

while anxiety over the loss of meaning has gripped the modern age. According to Tillich, during the sixteenth century, the third principal manifestation of anxiety—the anxiety of condemnation—broke upon the western world with overwhelming force.

The early modern European mind, that is, feared neither the death of God nor the loss of meaning. Such dilemmas were to be twentieth-century inventions and would have been unimaginable to the people of that earlier era, for whom belief in God was natural and unbelief unthinkable. At the advent of Protestantism and the dawn of the modern world, Luther, Bunyan, and others neither doubted that God was a person nor feared that their souls were mortal. Instead, they were assailed by dreadful uncertainties about where they stood with God and whether they would spend their eternity with Him in heaven or with the devil in hell.

Those anxieties frequently drove the people of the early modern era to lofty heights of self-examination and abysmal depths of self-laceration. Luther's famous question puts the matter succinctly: "How can I find a gracious God?" Implicit here is the assumption that the search is a matter not only of the God who is to be found but also of the seeker who does the finding. "What kind of person must I become," the question seems to ask, "if I am to know that God will look mercifully upon me, a sinner?" With its focus upon the self, Protestantism helped to usher in the modern age of inwardness. "From the seventeenth century onwards," historian Lawrence Stone observes, "there bursts onto paper a torrent of words about intimate thoughts and feelings set down by large numbers of quite ordinary English men and women."

John Bunyan was one of those "ordinary English men" who possessed an extraordinary gift for giving voice to what Charles Taylor has called that "inexhaustible inner domain" of the self that was discovered in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and remains under exploration in the twenty-first. To map that inner domain and to chart a course out of its mazes, Bunyan recast the allegorical method as it had been employed

in the medieval Catholic tradition. There, in its supreme embodiment in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, allegory was effectively laid over the human story from above; the reinterpretation of Aristotle by Thomas Aquinas supplied the system and structure, and Dante provided the incomparable poetic ability to house the whole of human experience within every nook and cranny of that structure.

Bunyan, in contrast, did not work from a system above human experience but out of the subterranean regions beneath it. The whole of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a dream in which the hero, Christian, meets his inner states embodied as a series of temptations, demons, and perils. Christian falls into the Slough of Despond, a miry pit like the one that had captured John Bunyan in the depression that followed in the wake of his conversion; along the way, he must contend with Pliable, Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, and Mr. Legality, all of them representing tempting dispositions that Bunyan knew intimately; Christian must make his way perilously through the enticing booths of Vanity Fair, just as Bunyan himself had struggled terrifically with the allurements of the world; and he and Hopeful must endure imprisonment in Doubting Castle at the hands of Giant Despair, a tormenting power that Bunyan believed to be without its equal on earth.

Long before his imprisonment, Bunyan had known bondage. His struggles with guilt and his fear of condemnation had driven him to understand that inner torment could outweigh the whole of the outer world. After he came to believe in the forgiveness of sins through the sacrificial death of Christ, Bunyan nevertheless found himself wrestling more intensely than ever with demons of the spirit. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian comes to the cross early in his journey, but when his burdensome pack of sin falls from his shoulders, his trials have just begun.

Christian can win his release only by pressing forward and confronting every temptation and terror that Bunyan can imagine. The dangers he combats vary widely, but in one form or another they all have to do with learning how to make his way out of what Nietzsche

once called "the prison house of language." Repeatedly, Christian is afflicted by his inability to interpret signs, whether they come to him from the pages of a book or in the passageways of his journey. He needs Evangelist to point him to the "straight gate" leading to salvation; once on the way he must stop at the House of the Interpreter to receive copious explanations for many baffling spiritual realities and emotional challenges; and at different points during his pilgrimage, Christian must lean heavily on Faithful and Hopeful, whose interpretive skills and moral encouragement strengthen him on his solitary way. On Christian's journey, every attractive surface conceals a potentially abominable depth, and he requires all the help he can muster to read the signs and divine what lurks behind them.

In theory, Christian was not supposed to require assistance of this nature. Driven by the revolution of the printing press, the Reformation had placed an unprecedented emphasis upon the capacity of individuals to read texts and, by so doing, to discern and determine their own destinies. Where medieval Catholicism had placed final teaching and interpretive authority within the magisterium of the Church, Protestantism shifted the freedom and the burden of interpretation to the individual. "We are all priests as long as we are Christians," Martin Luther proclaimed, and it is as his own priest that Christian strides and staggers to the Celestial City.

Yet experience modified the theory for Bunyan. His own psychological and spiritual travails had taught him that one who wished to escape from the prison house of language first had to be freed from the bondage of the will. He knew deception and bondage not only as forces that subject us from without. To be sure, as a Protestant Dissenter who was imprisoned for his beliefs, Bunyan understood that dimension of injustice and suffering. Yet in the main, he remained convinced that the deepest sources of enslavement and destruction lay coiled within the mazy recesses of the human heart.

For Bunyan, God would have to invade that imprisoned world and snatch the sinner lost and bound within the self. It is this divine visitation of the human realm,

known in the Christian faith as the doctrine of the Incarnation, that Bunyan's Christian must never stop recalling. And in remembering it, he must rest in the promises made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As he and Hopeful await their seemingly certain death in the Doubting Castle, Christian cries out, "What a fool, am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty. I have a key in my bosom, called promise, that will open any lock in Doubting Castle." With that, he and Hopeful walk out of their prison and leave their despair behind them at last.

Though it was born in the agonies of imprisonment, *The Pilgrim's Progress* matured into a fable of indescribable release. Whether or not they have shared Bunyan's specific religious beliefs, innumerable readers have taken comfort from Christian's triumph over terror and have found in his discovery of freedom from bondage a message of abiding hope for all who journey as pilgrims in a perilously beautiful world.

—Roger Lundin

## *Contents*

<i>A Note on the Text</i>	vii
---------------------------	-----

<i>Introduction</i>	ix
---------------------	----

### THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

The Author's Apology for His Book	3
-----------------------------------	---

The Pilgrim's Progress: In the Similitude of a Dream	11
---	----

The Conclusion	155
----------------	-----

### THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS: THE SECOND PART

The Author's Way of Sending Forth His Second Part of <i>The Pilgrim</i>	159
--	-----

The Pilgrim's Progress: In the Similitude of a Dream: The Second Part	166
--	-----

<i>Selected Bibliography</i>	301
------------------------------	-----

*The  
Pilgrim's Progress  
from  
This World  
to  
That Which Is to Come*

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*Delivered Under the Similitude  
of a Dream  
Wherein Is Discovered  
the Manner of His Setting Out,  
His Dangerous Journey,  
and  
Safe Arrival at the Desired Country*

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by John Bunyan

“I have used similitudes.” Hosea 12:10

