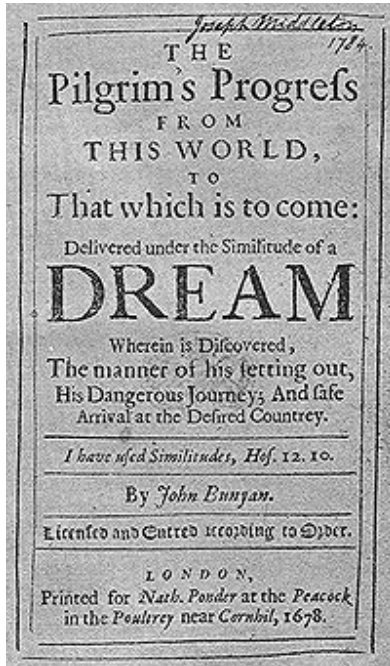


John Bunyan

What is the best-selling book of all time? Second on the list is *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, better known as *The Little Red Book*. It has sold 900 million. It was **compulsory** for Chinese communists to buy this book (*Put simply, it was: Buy or die!*) The number one book on the list of best sellers is *The Holy Bible*. It has sold 6 billion and has been printed in more than 2,000 languages and



dialects (even though many times, *to put it simply, it was: Buy and die!*) However, for many, many years, the second most widely read book was an allegory written by an uneducated prisoner in an English jail. The book is *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the author is John Bunyan. It has been said, "*Pilgrim's Progress* has sold more copies, in more languages than any other non-biblical book ... no other book except the Bible has been translated into so many languages, passed through so many editions, commanded so many millions of readers, or been useful to the spiritual welfare of such multitudes."

Bunyan wrote scores of essays and books. But his name is inseparably linked with the story of Christian's journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. Although *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* is Bunyan's autobiography, in many ways, *Pilgrim's Progress* is also autobiographical, illustrating numerous experiences through which the author passed. While it is not surprising that Bunyan would want to share his struggles and the account of his conversion with others, what is surprising is that a mere tinker (a mender of pots and pans), with no formal education, should be able to write a book that has such enduring charm and lasting appeal. His characters are immortal: Mr. Valiant-for-Truth,

Mr. Stand-fast, Hopeful, Christiana, Faithful, Evangelist, Obstinate, Pliable, Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Mr. Legality, The Interpreter, Timorous, Talkative, the three brothers Faint-heart, Mistrust, and Guilt, Mr. Hold-the-world, Mr. Money-love, Mr. Save-all, Simple, Sloth, Presumption, Piety, Prudence, and Charity. Equally famous are the place-names skillfully sown throughout the book: the Land of Vain-Glory, the City of Destruction, Mount Zion, Immanuel's Land, the Valley of Humiliation, Vanity Fair, the town of Fair-speech, Broad-way Gate, Dead Man's Lane, the Slough of Despond, and countless other people and places based on Biblical and eternal realities.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said he had read *Pilgrim's Progress* one hundred times. He gives us the key to Bunyan's genius: "Read anything of his, and you will see that it is almost like reading the Bible itself. He had studied the Bible; he had read it till his very soul was saturated with Scripture and...he cannot give us his *Pilgrim's Progress* — that sweetest of all prose poems — without continually making us feel and say, 'Why, this man is a living Bible!' Prick him anywhere; his blood is Bimeline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his very soul is full of the Word of God."

John Owen, Oxford's Puritan theologian par excellence, who declined Harvard's offer of its presidency, would take every opportunity to hear Bunyan preach. When King Charles II expressed surprise at this, Owen responded "I would willingly exchange all my learning for the tinker's power of touching men's hearts."

Robert Browning put it this way: "... 'Tis my belief, God spake: no tinker has such powers."

Two scenes, especially, stand out in this book of memorable scenes. The first is:

CALVARY

“Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go, was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation. Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said, with a merry heart, 'He hath given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death.' Then he stood still awhile to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him, that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks. Now, as he stood looking and weeping, behold three Shining Ones came to him and saluted him with 'Peace be unto thee.' So the first said to him, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee'; the second stripped him of his rags, and clothed him with change of raiment; the third also set a mark on his forehead, and gave him a roll with a seal upon it, which he bade him look on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the Celestial Gate. So they went their way ... Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on singing,

*'Thus far I did come laden with my sin; nor could aught ease the grief that I was in
Till I came hither: What a place is this! Must here be the beginning of my bliss?
Must here the burden fall from off my back? Must here the strings that bound it to me crack?
Blest cross! blest sepulchre! blest rather be the Man that there was put to shame for me!'*”

HEAVEN

The second unforgettable scene is at the end of the book, as Christian enters the Celestial City (Heaven):

“Now I saw in my dream that these two men went in at the gate: and lo, as they entered, they were transfigured, and they had raiment put on that shone like gold. There was also that met them with harps and crowns, and gave them to them -- the harps to praise withal, and the crowns in token of honour. Then I heard in my dream that all the bells in the city rang again for joy, and that it was said unto them, 'Enter ye into the joy of your Lord.' I also heard the men themselves, that they sang with a loud voice, saying, 'Blessing and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.' Now, just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them, and, behold, the City shone like the sun; the streets also were paved with gold, and in them walked many men, with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps to sing praises withal. There were also of them that had wings, and they answered one another without intermission, saying, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord.' And after that they shut up the gates; which, when I had seen,



shut up the gates; which, when I had seen,

I wished myself among them.”