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Dramatic Publishing

THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

Adapted by
TOM KEY

From the book
by
JOHN BUNYAN



Dramatic Publishing

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THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

A Play Delivered Under the Similitude of a Dream

PREFACE

These introductory production notes and scripted stage directions are based primarily on the premiere production of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (then titled simply *Pilgrim*) which I adapted and directed in 1976 at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, as part of my master's thesis project. They are included as footnotes for future productions. If other directors want to incorporate all of these elements, then it is hoped they will be helpful guides to a successful production. Or, they could certainly just be treated optionally or not at all. Some parts of the script indicate when topical names, places or things may be inserted in the text to make the production relevant to a time or place. The script itself should be followed exactly in order to dramatize this particular adaptation of Bunyan's classic. It has been a constant and heartening surprise that after more than thirty years have passed, I have continued to receive requests for this script from theatermakers who had seen or heard of it from one of the excellent productions it had received in its early life. Jeannette Clift George of A.D. Players; Kenny Gannon then at Shorter College; Harold Hunt at Samford University; Scott and Pam Nolte of Taproot Theater; and Robert Smyth of Lambs Players Theater were all incredibly passionate and accomplished at creating theatrical combustion with this adaptation. Their contribution is sweeter to me now than ever. When I first tried to have this script

published in the early 1980s I was repeatedly told, “It is too religious for theater audiences and too sophisticated for religious audiences.” I’m glad that categorization of audience capacities has evidently passed and I am extremely grateful that Gayle Sergel and the good people of Dramatic Publishing have now made it available—perhaps this means that religious audiences wanted to be delivered from the boredom of watching what they already knew and that theater audiences have demanded a dramatic vision of the human condition that includes the religious. Perhaps this is progress.

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CHARACTERS

PILGRIM - the only actor playing one role

CHORUS - Following is a suggestion of how to break down these roles for six players. All the narration is delivered by these actors, and it is left to the discretion of the director how to assign these speeches. One adjective has been chosen for each actor as a guide to the dominate character/personality quality needed.

ACTOR 1 Evangelist, Traveler 1, Demon 1, Merchant,
Envy, Hopeful (direct)

ACTRESS 1 Help, The Beautiful Lady, Ignorance,
Angel 3, Prudence (bubbly)

ACTRESS 2 Worldly Wisewoman, Superstition,
Diffidence, Charity, Angel 2 (seductive)*

ACTRESS 3 Wife of Pilgrim, Talkative, Discretion,
Juror, Angel 1 (friendly)

ACTOR 2 Pliable, Muse, Demon 2, Faithful,
Giant Despair, Demas, Traveler 2 (wistful)*

ACTOR 3 . . . Obstinate, Apollyon, Judge/Pickthank, Atheist,
Porter (intense)

*ACTRESS 2 and ACTOR 2 should ideally be accomplished dancers to interpret PILGRIM's dream in Scene 12. A choreographer, original music and live musicians would also be the ideal way to realize that sequence. Of course, there are adagios in the public domain which would serve the moment beautifully.

PERFORMANCE TIME: One and one half hours (no intermission).

The Pilgrim's Progress could be performed on a simple platform with a minimum of six stools and two candelabra as the essential set. Costumes are pieces of seventeenth century dress over blue jeans and sneakers. In the allegory, the Narrator reminds the reader throughout the book that it is a dream being recounted; in the play, actors breaking character to address the audience, anachronistic props, or a mix of periods in costume could serve the same function of jolting the audience back to realizing that they are watching a dream.

PROPS/COSTUMES

PROPS:

4 prop boxes	2 books representing Bible
2 daggers	2 candelabra
4 hand mirrors	6 tall white candles
Toy bubble maker	Crown
Trophy	Treasure box with jewels
3 apples	Musical triangle
Homemade-looking loaf of bread	Moon pie
Large war-like club	2 R.C. Cola (cans)
Vial on a necklace	

COSTUMES:

Pilgrim: blue jeans, sneakers, shirt of rags, white period shirt, belt, army knapsack (his burden), neck-chain medallion

- Chorus:
1. Blue jeans and sneakers - everyone
 2. short white robes - all women
 3. long black robes of religious character - everyone
 4. medallions worn on neck-chains, Actors 1 and 2
 5. upper-class 17th century costume pieces - Actor 1 and Actress 2
 6. middle-class 17th century costume pieces - Actresses 1 and 3, Actor 3
 7. low-class 17th century costume pieces - Actor 2
 8. Ignorance - clerical robe and collar
 9. Apollyon - heavily-jeweled 17th century overshirt and velvet robe

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SCENE 1

AT RISE: *The candles in the candelabra are burning and the stools are arranged in a semicircle concave to the audience. Four prop boxes, one at each corner, rest on the floor next to the platform. Lighting is soft and the candelabra decorate the upper portion of the platform.*

Processional, formal harpsichord music is heard as six chorus actors enter wearing long impressive robes of religious nature. These robes do not cover the white tennis shoes, however, so that the look is neither completely formal or informal. The actors are holding tall, white candles which they light from the candles in the candelabra. When the music is over and they are seated, NARRATOR 1 speaks:

NARRATOR 1. As I walked through the wilderness of this world...

NARRATOR 2. I lighted on a certain place where was a den...

NARRATOR 3. and I laid me down in that place to sleep and as I slept...

ALL WOMEN. I dreamed...

NARRATORS (*in unison*). a dream... (*whispering*) a dream. (*PILGRIM enters from an unlikely spot above or*

behind the audience—perhaps the control booth—making a great deal of noise. To PILGRIM:) Shh! *(To audience)* a dream. *(PILGRIM continues on to the stage apologizing for being late as he goes. He stands DL unaware that he is being described as a figure in a dream.)* And behold, I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book *(a NARRATOR slams a book in PILGRIM's stomach trying to get his attention. PILGRIM is happily waving to the audience)* in his hand, and a G-R-R-R-E-E-E-A-A-T *(the NARRATORS have to hold out "great" until one of them runs over to PILGRIM and points out that the knapsack on his back is supposed to be the burden. The NARRATORS continue)* burden *(PILGRIM collapses on the stage with the weight of the burden—he's "in")* upon his back, I looked *(PILGRIM is now completely involved in his role and his first action is to prevent the NARRATORS from continuing so that they can take part in the dream with him. He blows out their candles and this causes the NARRATORS to take off their robes disclosing 17th-century costuming underneath. They run to various corners of the platform and focus on PILGRIM as they continue the dialogue. Each "I looked" is delivered louder than the last by those NARRATORS with a candle still burning. It's a painful transition into the dream and the last one to go screams "I looked" as though she were about to parachute for the first time. After the first "I looked" PILGRIM blows out one candle.)* I looked *(one more candle out)* I looked *(a third candle out)* I looked *(two candles out)* I looked, *(last candle goes)* 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 broke out WITH A LAMENTABLE CRY—SAYING!

PILGRIM. What shall I do?

ALL WOMEN (*mockingly*). What shall I do?

ALL CHORUS MEN (*disgusted at PILGRIM's fanaticism*). What shall I do?

(*WIFE OF PILGRIM enters.*)

PILGRIM (*almost violently pulling her with him*). O my dear wife, 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 wife, shall miserably come to ruin; except the which yet I see not, some way of escape can be found, whereby we may be delivered.

WIFE OF PILGRIM (*angry and embarrassed*). I am sore amazed. My dear husband, some frenzied distemper of mind is working its way in your thoughts and I shall hear no more of it lest it is encouraged. Either you return with me at once, to recover in bed; or stay on the street, to humiliate your wife, your children, and your church.

PILGRIM. You do not believe me?

WIFE OF PILGRIM. O God!

PILGRIM (*to NARRATOR 3 for help*). What shall I do to be saved?

NARRATOR 3 (*disgusted, turns away*). What shall I do to be saved?

CHORUS (*all except PILGRIM and EVANGELIST take up this line as a whispered chant to one another and con-*

tinue to grow louder and more sarcastic underneath the following dialogue). What shall I do to be saved?

EVANGELIST (*stepping out of the crowd and toward PILGRIM. EVANGELIST is so in love with being an evangelist that he is slow to get PILGRIM's point*). Wherefore doest thou cry?

PILGRIM. Sir, I perceive, by the book in my hand, that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment; and I find that I am not willing to do the first, nor able to do the second.

EVANGELIST. Why not willing to die, since this life is attended with so many evils?

PILGRIM. Because I fear that this burden will sink me lower than the grave, and I shall fall to Hell. And sir, if I be not fit to go to prison, I am not fit (I am sure) to go to judgment, and from thence to execution; and the thoughts of these things make me cry.

EVANGELIST. If this be thy condition, why standest thou still?

PILGRIM (*shouting*). BECAUSE! (*CHORUS stops the chanting of "What shall I do to be saved."*) I know not whither to go.

EVANGELIST (*finally focused on PILGRIM*). Fly from the wrath to come!

CHORUS. Fly from the wrath to come! Fly from the wrath (*a pause as EVANGELIST pushes PILGRIM DR toward the Way*) TO COME!

PILGRIM (*dashes out an audience aisle, does a take, runs back on stage to ask*). Whither must I fly? (*CHORUS groans.*)

EVANGELIST. Do you see younger Wicket Gate?

PILGRIM. NO.

EVANGELIST. Do you see yonder shining light?

PILGRIM. I think I do!

EVANGELIST. Then, keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto, so shalt thou see the Gate at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.

PILGRIM (*to the CHORUS, he is mad with enthusiasm*).
Life, Life Eternal Life,

A CHORUS MEMBER (*sarcastically*). Terrific

PILGRIM (*running through and out the theatre house with incredible energy and joy*). Life, Life Eternal Life,

ALL WOMEN (*teasing, running upstage and each taking a stool*). Life, Life, Eternal life!

ALL CHORUS MEN (*disgusted and also taking all stools upstage*). LIFE, LIFE, ETERNAL LIFE!

ALL CHORUS (*backs to audience, drop stools in a straight row on upstage edge of platform*). LIFE! (*Couples turn and face one another.*) LIFE! (*Everyone sits facing the audience and finishes this speech soberly as if they were sorry to have been left behind.*) Eternal life.

SCENE 2

(*PLIABLE and OBSTINATE take their places kneeling, backs to audience DL.*)

PILGRIM (*bursting back in through audience with more shouts of "LIFE! LIFE ETERNAL LIFE!" until he gets to the stage and speaks as one who is desperate for companionship*). Neighbours, wherefore are you come?

OBSTINATE (*all three begin a stage walk of right knee to left knee, to right foot, to left foot, and back to right knee. They should do it all in the same step and travel from DL to UL to UC to C by PILGRIM's line "NO! Not I, I have laid my hand to the plough!"*). To persuade you to go back with us.

PILGRIM. That can by no means be. You dwell in the City of Destruction (the place also where I was born), I see it to be so; and dying there, sooner or later, you will sink lower than the grave, into a place that burns with fire and brimstone; be content, good neighbours, and go along with me!

PLIABLE. What! And leave our friends and our comforts behind us!

PILGRIM. Yes, because, that all which you shall forsake is not worthy to be compared with a little of that that I am seeking to enjoy, and if you will go along with me, and hold it, you shall fare as I myself; for there where I go is enough and to spare; come away, and prove my words.

OBSTINATE. What are the things you seek, since you leave all the world to find them?

PILGRIM (*too enthusiastic*). I seek an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; and it is laid up in Heaven and fast there, to be bestowed at the time appointed, on them that diligently seek it. (*Pushing the Bible at them.*) Read it so if you will, in my book.

OBSTINATE (*PLIABLE and OBSTINATE stop "walking"*). Tush, away with your book; will you go back with us, or no?

PILGRIM. NO! not, I because I have laid my hand to the plough.

OBSTINATE (*a groan of disgust over PILGRIM's enthusiasm*). Come then, neighbour.

PLIABLE. Don't revile; if what the good Pilgrim says is true, the things he looks after are better than ours; my heart inclines to go with my neighbour.

OBSTINATE (*standing to go and pulling PLIABLE with him L*). What! More fools still? Be ruled by me and go back. Who knows whither such a brain-sick fellow will lead you? Go back, go back, and be wise.

PILGRIM (*standing and pulling PLIABLE R*). Come with me, neighbour PLIABLE, there are such things to be had which I spoke of, and many more glories besides.

PLIABLE (*breaking loose from their hold, aggravated at all this pressure on him*). My good companion, do you know the way to this desired place?

PILGRIM. I am directed by a man whose name is EVANGELIST, to speed me to a little Gate that is before us, where we shall receive instruction about the way.

PLIABLE. Come then! Let us be going.

OBSTINATE (*shouting at the two converts*). And I will go back to my place—I will be no companion of such misled fantastical fellows.

(*OBSTINATE exits; NARRATOR 1 enters.*)

NARRATOR 1. Now I saw in my dream, that when OBSTINATE was gone back, and PILGRIM and PLIABLE went talking over the plain; and thus they began their discourse:

(PILGRIM is so burdened with the weight on his back that he must travel at an excruciatingly slow pace. They are both gobbling up the promises of the Bible with such dubious motive and overt ecstasy that their faces are practically buried in the book's pages. It is this carelessness which prevents them from seeing the oncoming Slough of Despond. During the following speeches PLIABLE and PILGRIM begin another in-step mime walk which is stylized to give the impression a lot of territory is being covered by the two travelers.)

PLIABLE. Come, neighbour PILGRIM, since there is none but us two here, tell me now further, what the things are, and how to be enjoyed, whither we are going.

PILGRIM. I can better conceive of them with my mind, than speak of them with my tongue; but yet since you are desirous to know, I will read of them in my book. There is an endless Kingdom to be inhabited, and everlasting life to be given us; that we may inhabit that Kingdom forever.

PLIABLE. Well said, and what else?

PILGRIM. There are crowns of glory to be given us; and garments that will make us shine like the sun in the firmament of Heaven.

PLIABLE. Well said, this is excellent, and what else?

PILGRIM. There shall be no more crying, nor sorrow, for he that is owner of the place will wipe all tears from our eyes.

PLIABLE. And what company shall we have there?

PILGRIM. There we shall be with Seraphims, and Cherubims, creatures that will dazzle your eyes to look on them. There we shall see men that by the world (*not no-*

ting the change in subject matter) were cut in pieces, burnt in flames, eaten of beast, drowned in the seas, for the love that they bare of the Lord. (Stopping and realizing what he just read so happily.) Oh! (Leaping on the next discovery as though a painless end makes for a painless means.) Ah! They will be clothed with immortality as with a garment.

PLIABLE. The hearing of this is enough to ravish one's heart; but are these things to be enjoyed? How shall we get to be sharers hereof?

PILGRIM. The Lord, the governor of that country, hath recorded that in this book the substance of which is, if we be truly willing to have it, he will bestow it upon us freely.

PLIABLE. Well, my good companion, glad am I to hear of these things: come on, let us mend our pace.

PILGRIM. I cannot go so fast as I would by reason of this burden that is upon my back. (*PLIABLE gives a boost to the heavy burden and they start their walking again.*)

(NARRATOR 1 speaks while PILGRIM and PLIABLE continue the previous action without speaking.)

NARRATOR 1. Now I saw in my dream, that just as they had ended this talk, they drew near to a very miry Slough that was in the midst of the plain, and they being heedless, did both fall suddenly into the bog. (*PILGRIM and PLIABLE fall flat on their faces. The CHORUS shouts "SPLAT" as they land.*) The name of the Slough was Despond. (*NARRATOR 1 exits.*)

SCENE 3

PLIABLE (*with his face flat on the floor*). Ah, neighbour PILGRIM, where are you now? Is this the happiness you have told me all this while of? If we have such ill speed at our first setting out, what may we expect, 'twixt this, and our journey's end? (*Tries to gesture toward the "end" but he cannot lift his hand off the stage. Finally, with not a little effort, he slides backward, reaches harder ground, and manages to stand. While he speaks to PILGRIM, PLIABLE mimes removing all the mire which has covered him in the Slough.*) Well, PILGRIM, I see that your burden will prevent your sliding from here with your life. So, it has fallen to you the great and good privilege of possessing the brave country alone for me.

(*PLIABLE exits. PILGRIM makes several attempts to pull away from the mud, and eventually all fails. HELP enters.*)

HELP (*stepping carefully through the Slough*). What are you doing in there? (*She is entirely cheerful and naïve.*)

PILGRIM (*speaking with his face in the floor*). Madame, I was bid go this way, by a man called EVANGELIST, who directed me also to yonder Gate, that I might escape the wrath to come; and as I was going thither, I fell in here.

HELP. But why did you not look for the steps?

PILGRIM (*still able to move only his mouth*). Fear followed me so hard, that I fled the next way, and fell in.

HELP. Give me thy hand. (*HELP lifts PILGRIM out.*)