VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
The Pilgrim’s Progress – A Bunyan Sequence

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PLEASE EXCUSE ANY FORMATTING OR SPELLING ODDITIES IN THIS SCANNED BOOKLET.
WHEN JOHN BUNYAN (1628-1688) married at nineteen, the only ‘portion’ he received from his wife was two religious books which she induced him to read. He attended church regularly with her, but still indulged in the morris-dancing, drinking and Sunday afternoon sports frowned upon by ‘good’ Puritans. Once during these sports he heard a ‘voice from heaven’ urging him to repent; but his real agent of redemption was a woman of ‘disreputable character’ who, hearing him blaspheming, scolded him severely. Reproof from such a quarter chastened Bunyan in earnest; in 1653 he became a Baptist, and after the Restoration, when laws against dissenters became stringent, he was imprisoned for twelve years. He was allowed the use of his Bible and writing equipment, but only produced his best-known work — *The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to That which is to Come* — during his second term of imprisonment (1678).

How did a poor tinker with no learning or literary ancestry come to compose one of the greatest allegories in the English language? We might as well ask how a composer of Vaughan Williams’s vast erudition and experience — no lack of technical learning or musical ancestry there — could set the words of Bunyan’s shepherd-boy to music of such inspired simplicity (‘The Shepherd’, No V of the present work). However it came into being, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* has long been a national treasure, a common possession, truthful and timeless, a saga of universal experience. Man’s life will always be a ‘pilgrimage’, he will always encounter friends and foes, dangers and delights. But if he is lucky he who comes from Paradise at last returns to Paradise, having conquered his adversaries and trampled down all the terrors that beset him. We perceive this tale as part of the primitive instinct of man.

Vaughan Williams knew and loved Bunyan all his life, and setting him to music occupied him on and off for over forty years. (According to Ursula Vaughan Williams, her husband found Bunyan’s vivid portrayal of his minor characters somewhat reminiscent of Borrow’s picaresque novel *Lavengro*, a great favourite of his.) The chronology is roughly as follows:


(b) 1922: *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*, a ‘pastoral episode’ after Bunyan for six soloists, women’s chorus (off-stage) and small orchestra.

(c) 1938-43: Symphony No 5 in D major, whose ‘absorbed tranquillity’ (Ursula Vaughan Williams) discloses many important thematic links with (e) below.
(d) 1942: the work here recorded, the incidental music for a BBC production-adaptation of the complete Pilgrim’s Progress by Edward Sackville-West, with John Gielgud as Christian. Sir Adrian Boult conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. There were 38 episodes, including a Prologue and Epilogue based on ‘York’ (as in (a) above and (e) below) and a Finale derived from (b) above. Most of this material, much altered and elaborated, went into the making of:

(e) 1951: the opera (or ‘morality’) The Pilgrim’s Progress, Prologue, four acts and Epilogue. According to Michael Kennedy this work had been steadily germinating over the years (i.e. from 1909 on). He surmises, for instance, that much of Acts I and II was written in 1925 to 36, while the bulk of the work was carried out between 1944 and 1949.

Clearly we must regard (e) as the definitive outcome of VW’s Bunyan ‘quest’ or ‘pilgrimage’. However, it would be wrong to claim that the radio version is in all respects superseded by the opera. The former is, at least in my view, perfectly capable of standing on its own feet, (i) because it is conceptually different from the opera and therefore offers a different ‘Bunyan experience’; (ii) because it contains music missing from the opera; and (iii) it has provided an opportunity for Sir John Gielgud to preserve on record one of the outstanding performances of his broadcasting career (he has admitted that the role of Christian is one with which he strongly identifies). Further to (i) we notice immediately the much smaller role allotted to the chorus and solo singers, and the proportionately greater importance of the orchestra. Certain moments — notably the fight with Apollyon and the death march in ‘The Trial’ (the ‘marche au supplice’ as VW called it, after Berlioz) — seem even to benefit from the sharper focus and directness of their purely orchestral setting. Where there is voice-over-music the speaking voice is treated with as much loving care and attention as a solo singing voice or instrument (‘The Kingdom’ and ‘The Palace Beautiful’ are moving examples). Did this trait in VW stem from his old family practice of reading aloud? Certainly there are few works more skilful in their handling of the speaker-and-music idiom than the Oxford Elegy (after Matthew Arnold) and the Song of Thanksgiving (after the Bible, Shakespeare et al).

As for (ii), a fairly long list could be made of moments in the radio version not destined to be re-lived in the opera. Here are a few:

(1) The extensive paraphrasing of the ‘Tallis’ music, which involves not merely strings (as in the original Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis) but also full orchestra and even chorus: see ‘Prologue’, ‘The Kingdom’, ‘The Trial’ and ‘The
Delectable Mountains’. The Tallis tune (‘Third Mode Melody’) seems always to have been associated in VW’s mind with The Pilgrim’s Progress. He knew it at least as early as 1906 when he included it in The English Hymnal (of which he was musical editor-in-chief). Here it was set to the words of Addison’s hymn ‘When rising from the bed of Death’ with its troubled vision of the Soul confronting the Redeemer on the Day of Judgment (cf. Christian’s first exchange with Evangelist in the first movement of the present work). VW must have been working on the Fantasia (1910) at the same time as on the Reigate Priory Pilgrim’s Progress (1909).

(2) The roaring and snarling of the lions at the start of ‘The Palace Beautiful’.

(3) The wild dervish-like dance in ‘Vanity Fair’, prophetic of the particular type of unpleasantness we are later to encounter in the Symphony No 6 — a major musical incident here, less so in the opera.

(4) The marvellous fugato for brass (more pre-echoes of the E minor Symphony) which depicts the great lumbering footsteps of Giant Despair walking in his garden and apprehending Christian as an interloper. There was no room for the Doubting Castle scene in the opera.

Of course the 1942 finale — the Delectable Mountains, the River of Death and the entry into Paradise — takes the Shepherds as its starting point and covers much of the distance between that and the fully-realised version we know in the opera; it is a kind of halfway-house between the two. Curiously, in the radio version there are hardly any references to the ‘Bunyan’ motifs in the Fifth Symphony: for example the beautiful cor anglais melody in the ‘Romanza’ of the latter, which in the opera depicts Christian kneeling at the foot of the Cross (‘He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death’) is not to be found here, and different music accompanies the scene (‘The Way’). This may have been because the Symphony and the radio score were closely contemporaneous and the composer at this point wanted to keep them separate.

In turning this work into a primarily musical entity I was compelled to inflict (with great reluctance) huge violence on Bunyan: I stripped his text down to the bare bones, retaining only what was needed for minimal narrative continuity. Sir John Gielgud speaks only the part of Christian, with Richard Pasco taking his interlocutor Evangelist and most of the others (on this recording Ursula Howells makes special ‘guest’ appearances as a ‘Ministering Angel’). Crossing over from one medium to another entailed selecting, cutting and making a number of adjustments to the music, most of them minor. Only ‘Vanity Fair’ needed to be in part re-shaped and re-scored — what was originally
‘background’ music, designed to be faded in and out around dialogue and crowd noise had to be made into ‘foreground’. But even here every note is authentic Vaughan Williams.

*The Pilgrim’s Progress* occupies a special place in the affections of most of those who love VW’s music, as it did in the composer’s own. Others, who might find the prospect of a full-blown Bunyan opera daunting, may well find themselves catered for by this shorter, and in a sense more accessible, alternative.

CHRISTOPHER PALMER ©1991

*The Pilgrim’s Progress from this World to That which is to Come: 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.*

by John Bunyan

1 PROLOGUE

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. 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. 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:

What shall I do? What shall I do to be saved?

Wherefore, Christian, dost thou cry?

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

If this be thy condition, why standest thou still?

Because I know not whither to go.

Do you see yonder wicket-gate?

No.
Do you see yonder shining light?
I think I do.
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.

[2] THE KINGDOM

Neighbours, wherefore are you come?
To persuade you to go back with us.
That can by no means be; you dwell in the City of Destruction (the place also where I was born); I seek an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; and it is laid up in heaven, and safe there, to be bestowed on them that diligently seek it.
If what the good Christian says is true, the things he looks after are better than ours. Tell us now further what the things are, and how to be enjoyed, whither we are going?
There is an endless kingdom to be inhabited, and everlasting life to be given us, that we may inhabit that kingdom for ever. There are crowns of glory to be given us; and garments that will make us shine like the sun in the firmament of heaven. There shall be no more crying nor sorrow; for He that is the owner of the place will wipe all tears from our eyes. There we shall be with seraphims and cherubims, creatures that will dazzle your eyes to look on them: there also we shall meet with thousands and ten thousands that have gone before us to that place; none of them are hurtful, but loving, and holy: everyone walking in the sight of God, and standing in His presence with acceptance for ever. There we shall see the elders with their golden crowns: there we shall see the holy virgins with their golden harps: there we shall see men that by the world were cut in pieces, burned in flames, eaten of beasts, drowned in the seas, for the love that they bare to the Lord of the place, all well, and clothed with immortality as with a garment.

[3] THE GATE

What dost thou here, Christian? Art not thou the man that I found crying without the walls of the City of Destruction?
Yes, dear sir, I am the man.
Thou art the man that art running into misery; thou hast begun to reject the counsel of the most High, and to draw back thy foot from the way of peace, even almost to the hazarding of thy perdition.
Woe is me, for I am undone!

_Thy sin is very great, for thou hast forsaken the way that is good, to tread in forbidden paths._
_Yet will the Man at the Gate receive thee, for he has good-will for men. Only take heed that thou turn not aside again, lest thou perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little. God speed._

He that will enter in must first without
Stand knocking at the gate; nor need he doubt
That is a knocker but to enter in;
For God can love him, and forgive his sin.

May I now enter here? Will he within
Open to sorry me, though I have been
An undeserving rebel? Then shall I
Not fail to sing his lasting praise on high.

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**THE WAY**

_Who is there? Whence come ye? What would ye have?_

Here is a poor burdened sinner, journeying towards Mount Zion, that I may be delivered from the wrath to come. I am informed that by this gate is the way thither, and I am emboldened by your grave demeanour, sir, to ask if you are willing to let me in?

_An open door is set before thee, and no man can shut it. Come a little way with me, good Christian, and I will teach thee about the way thou must go. Look before thee; dost thou see this narrow way?_

_That is the way thou must go. It was cast up by the patriarchs, prophets, Christ, and his apostles; and it is as straight as a rule can make it. This is the way thou must go._

_Up this way therefore did burdened Christian run, till he came to a place somewhat ascending. And upon that place stood a Cross, and a little below in the bottom, a Sepulchre._

He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death. I will kneel here and give thanks to God.

_Thus far did I 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!

5  THE SHEPHERD

I beheld then that he came to the foot of the hill Difficulty, where he fell from running to going,
and from going to climbing upon his hands and knees, because of the steepness of the place.
Now about the midway to the top of the hill was a pleasant arbour, made by the Lord of the Hill,
for the refreshing of weary travellers. Thither therefore Christian got, where also he sat down to
rest him, thus pleasing himself awhile.

He that is down needs fear no fall,
He that is low, no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.

I am content with what I have,
Little be it or much;
And, Lord, contentment still I crave,
Because Thou savest such.

This shepherd boy lives a merrier life and wears more of that herb called heartsease in his
bosom than he that is clad in silk and velvet . . .
But I am weary and will take a little ease. The song lulls me . . .

Fulness to such a burden is
That go on pilgrimage:
Here little, and hereafter bliss,
Is best from age to age.

6  THE PALACE BEAUTIFUL

Is thy strength so small? Fear not the lions, for they are chained: and are placed there for trial
of faith where it is: and for discovery of those that have none. Keep in the midst of the path, and
no hurt shall come unto thee.
Sir, what house is this? And may I lodge here tonight?
This house was built by the Lord of the Hill, and he built it for the relief and security of pilgrims. It is the Palace Beautiful, and I am Watchful the Porter. Whence come you, and whither are you going?

I am come from the City of Destruction, and am going to Mount Zion.

Come in thou blessed of the Lord; this house was built by the Lord of the Hill, on purpose to entertain such pilgrims in.

This place is beautiful indeed. The sight of all that fair countryside under the setting sun rests mine eyes.

Look through that window — towards the South. At a great distance are the Delectable Mountains. It is a most pleasant country, beautified with woods, vineyards, fruits of all sorts; flowers also, with springs and fountains, very delectable to behold.

It is Immanuel's land, and it is as common as this hill is, for all pilgrims. And when thou comest there, from thence thou mayest see to the Gate of the Celestial City, as the shepherds that live there will make appear.

Where am I now? Is this the love and care
Of Jesus for the men that pilgrims are!
Thus to provide! That I should be forgiven!
And dwell already the next door to heaven!

Thou shalt lie in a large upper chamber, whose window opens towards the sunrising. And the name of the chamber is Peace.

APOLLYON

The next day they took him in to the armoury, where they harnessed him from head to foot with proof lest perhaps he should meet with assaults in the way. He being therefore thus accoutred went down into the valley of Humiliation. Here poor Christian was hard put to it, for he had gone but a little way before he espied a foul fiend coming over the field to meet him. His name is Apollyon. Now the monster was hideous to behold. He was clothed with scales like a fish; he had wings like a dragon, feet like a bear, and out of his belly came fire and smoke, and his mouth was as the mouth of a lion. When he was come up to Christian, he broke out into a grievous rage, and fell upon him.

Apollyon, beware what you do, for I am in the King's highway, the way of holiness, therefore take heed to yourself.
I am void of fear in this matter. Prepare thyself to die; for I swear by my infernal den, that thou shalt go no further. Here will I spill thy soul.

Ah! My strength is almost spent. I will here give thanks to Him that hath delivered me out of the mouth of the lion, to Him that did help me against Apollyon.

Then there came to him a hand, with some of the leaves of the Tree of Life, the which Christian took, and applied to his wounds, and was healed immediately. He also sat down in that place to eat bread, and to drink of the bottle that was given him a little before; so being refreshed he addressed himself to his journey.

Then I heard sounds of merriment and junketing, and presently saw a town before me; and the name of that town is Vanity; and at the town there is a Fair kept, called Vanity Fair. It is kept all the year long, and all that is sold there is vanity. Now the way to the Celestial City lies just through this town.

Then I met with one whose name was Wanton, that had like to have done me a mischief. She lay at me hard to turn aside with her, promising me all manner of carnal and fleshly content. I shut my eyes, because I would not be bewitched with her looks; then she railed on me, and I went on my way.

At last things came to an hubbub and great stir in the fair, insomuch that all order was confounded. Now were Christian and Faithful, about whom the fair was almost overturned, brought to examination; then, when the time was come, they were brought before their enemies and arraigned. The judge's name was Lord Hategood.

These men, Christian and Faithful, of the Heavenly Jerusalem, are enemies to, and disturbers of our trade. They have made commotions and divisions in the town by their own most dangerous opinions, in contempt of the law of our Prince.

I have only set myself against that which hath set itself against Him that is higher than the highest. And as for disturbance, I make none, being myself a man of peace; and as to the King you talk of, since he is Beelzebub, the enemy of our Lord, I defy him and all his angels.

Away with such a fellow from the earth: might I have all the world given me I could not be reconciled to him; therefore let us forthwith bring him in guilty of death.
Thus came Faithful to his end. Now, I saw behind the multitude, a chariot and a couple of horses, waiting for Faithful, who (so soon as his adversaries had despatched him) was taken up into it, and straightway was carried up through the clouds, the nearest way to the Celestial Gate. Alleluia.

GIANT DESPAIR

But he that over-rules all things so wrought it about that Christian for that time escaped his tormentors, and went on his way; and that night being weary, lay down to sleep. Now there was not far from the place where he lay, a castle, called Doubting Castle, the owner whereof was Giant Despair.

And this same Giant in the morning early, walking up and down in his fields, caught Christian asleep in his grounds. He trounced him along to Doubting Castle, to his dungeon, dark and stinking.

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, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle. I perceive God is with me, though in this dark and dismal state; He hath turned the shadow of death into the morning.

THE DELECTABLE MOUNTAINS

I went then, till I came to the Delectable Mountains. So I went up to the mountains, to behold the gardens and orchards, the vineyards, and fountains of water; where also I drank, and washed myself, and did freely eat of the vineyards. And standing by the Highwayside were shepherds feeding their flocks.

Welcome to the Delectable Mountains.

This is Enchanted Ground. The air is very sweet and pleasant; yea, we hear continually the singing of birds; the flowers appear in the earth, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land. In this country there is abundance, and the sun shineth night and day.

You are upon the borders of heaven, within sight of the City.

I hear voices from out of the City, the loud voices of the Shining Ones.

Say ye to the daughter of Zion: behold thy salvation cometh, and his reward is with him.
All the temptations and dangers hast thou passed; but thou hast but one difficulty more to meet with, and then you are within the City. Behold, betwixt you and the Gate is the river of death, but there is no bridge to go over, and the river is very deep.

I sink in deep waters, the billows are over my head, all his waves go over me.

I hear a Voice saying, “When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.”

We are ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those that shall be heirs of Salvation. You are going now to the Paradise of God, wherein you shall see the tree of Life, and eat of the never fading fruits thereof: and when you come there you shall have white robes given you, and your walk and talk shall be every day with the King, even all the days of eternity.

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the Tree of Life and may enter in through the gates into the City.

Alleluia!

Enter now into the glory of the Lord. Blessing and glory, honour and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and with the Lamb, for ever and ever. Holy is the Lord.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

EPILOGUE

Now, listener, I have told my dream to thee.
See if thou canst interpret it to me.
Put by the curtains, look within my veil;
Turn up my metaphors, and do not fail:
There, if thou seekest them, such things to find
As will be helpful to an honest mind.

What of my dross thou findest there, be bold
To throw away, but yet preserve the gold.
What if my gold be wrapped up in ore?
None throws away the apple for the core.
But if thou shalt cast all away as vain,
I know not but 'twill make me dream again.
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VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
A Bunyan Sequence
for three speakers, treble solo, chorus and orchestra.
Text and music adapted by Christopher Palmer from the 1942 radio version of
The Pilgrim's Progress

0 Prologue [5'17]
0 The Kingdom [3'17]
0 The Gate [2'59]
0 The Way [4'24]
0 The Shepherd [3'40]
  AIDAN OLIVER treble  DAVID RIX clarinet

0 The Palace Beautiful [4'52]
0 Apollyon [5'03]
0 Vanity Fair [6'11]
0 The Trial [7'19]
0 Giant Despair [4'43]
0 The Delectable Mountains [14'20]
  CHRISTINE BARRATT soprano  JOYA LOGAN alto  JOHN BOWEN tenor

0 Epilogue [1'41]

Christian SIR JOHN GIELGUD
Evangelist and others RICHARD PASCO
Ministering Angel URSULA HOWELLS
Shepherd Boy AIDAN OLIVER treble*

CORYDON SINGERS
THE CITY OF LONDON SINFonia
ALISON KELLY leader

MATTHEW BEST conductor

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