

The Celestial Railroad

Going on a Pilgrimage

Not a great while ago, passing through the gate of dreams, I visited that region of the earth in which lies the famous City of Destruction. It interested me much to learn that by the public spirit of some of the inhabitants a railroad has recently been established between this populous and flourishing town and the Celestial City.

Having a little time upon my hands, I resolved to gratify a liberal curiosity to make a trip thither. Accordingly, one fine morning, after paying my bill at the hotel, and directing the porter to stow my luggage behind a coach, I took my seat in the vehicle and set out for the station house.

It was my good fortune to enjoy the company of a gentleman—one Mr. Smooth-it-Away—who, though he had never actually visited the Celestial City, yet seemed as well acquainted with its laws, customs, policy, and statistics as with those of the City of Destruction, of which he was a

native townsman. Being, moreover, a director of the railroad corporation and one of its largest stockholders, he had it in his power to give me all the desirable information respecting the praiseworthy enterprise.

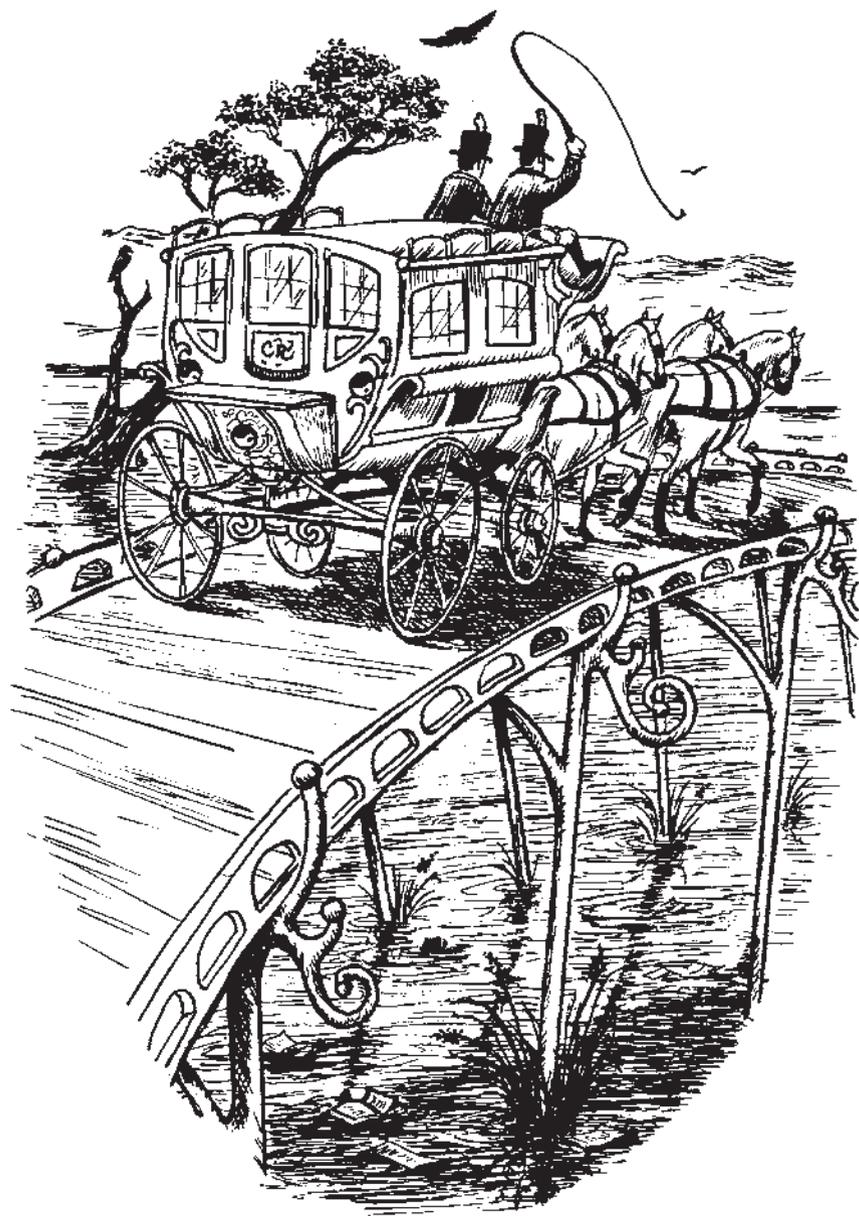
The Slough of Despond

Our coach rattled out of the city, and, at a short distance from its outskirts, passed over a bridge of elegant construction, but somewhat too slight, as I imagined, to sustain any considerable weight. On both sides lay an extensive quagmire, which could not have been more disagreeable either to sight or smell had all the kennels of the earth emptied their pollution there.

“This,” remarked Mr. Smooth-it-Away, “is the famous Slough of Despond—a disgrace to all the neighborhood, and the greater that it might so easily be converted into firm ground.”

“I have understood,” said I, “that efforts have been made for that purpose from time immemorial.¹ Bunyan mentions that above twenty thousand cartloads of wholesome instructions had been thrown in here without effect.”

“Very probably! And what effect could be anticipated from such unsubstantial stuff?” cried Mr. Smooth-it-Away. “You observe this convenient bridge? We obtained a sufficient foundation for it by throwing into the slough some editions of books of morality, volumes of French philosophy and German rationalism, tracts, sermons and essays of modern clergymen, extracts from Plato, Confucius, and various Hindu sages, together with a few ingenious commentaries



upon texts of Scripture—all of which, by some scientific process, have been converted into a mass like granite. The whole bog might be filled up with similar matter.”

It really seemed to me, however, that the bridge vibrated and heaved up and in a very formidable manner; and, in spite of Mr. Smooth-it-Away’s testimony to the solidity of its foundation, I should be loath to cross it in a crowded omnibus, especially if each passenger were encumbered with as heavy luggage as that gentleman and myself.

The Station House

Nevertheless, we got over without accident, and soon found ourselves at the station house. This very neat and spacious edifice is erected on the site of the little wicket gate that formerly, as all old pilgrims will recollect, stood directly across the highway, and by its inconvenient narrowness was a great objection to the traveler of liberal mind and expansive stomach.

The reader of John Bunyan will be glad to know that Christian’s old friend Evangelist, who was accustomed to supply each pilgrim with a mystic² roll, now presides at the ticket office. Some malicious persons, it is true, deny the identity of this reputable character with the Evangelist of old times, and even pretend to bring competent evidences of an imposture.³ Without involving myself into a dispute, I shall merely observe that, as far as my experience goes, the square pieces of pasteboard now delivered to passengers are much more convenient and useful along the road than the antique

roll of parchment. Whether they will be as readily received at the gate of the Celestial City, I decline giving an opinion.

A large number of passengers were already at the station house awaiting the departure of the cars. By the aspect and demeanor of these persons, it is easy to judge that the feelings of the community had undergone a very favorable change in reference to the celestial pilgrimage. It would have done Bunyan's heart good to see it. Instead of a lonely and ragged man with a huge burden on his back, plodding along sorrowfully on foot, while the whole city hooted after him, here were parties of the first gentry and most respectable people in the neighborhood setting forth towards the Celestial City as cheerfully as if the pilgrimage were merely a summer tour. Among the gentlemen were characters of deserved eminence—magistrates, politicians, and men of wealth by whose example religion could not but be greatly recommended to their meaner brethren. In the ladies' apartment, too, I rejoiced to distinguish some of those flowers of fashionable society who are so well fitted to adorn the most elevated circles of the Celestial City.

There was much pleasant conversation about the news of the day, topics of business, politics or the lighter matters of amusement, while religion, though indubitably⁴ the main thing at heart, was thrown tastefully into the background. Even an infidel would have heard little or nothing to shock his sensibility.

One great convenience of the new method of going on pilgrimage I must not forget to mention. Our enormous burdens, instead of being carried on our shoulders, as had been the custom of old, were all snugly deposited in the