
DOUBTING CASTLE AND GIANT DESPAIR

WE HAVE ARRIVED at one of the most mind-capturing and memorable scenes in this whole allegory—one that will stick with many of us for the rest of our lives.

Recall that By-path meadow was accessed from the way by a stile or a place of easy entry. The meadow provided a soft, comfortable route that seemed to run parallel to the way, but without the rocky terrain and rough places. It seemed reasonable that our two pilgrims ought to take advantage of this blessing provided them. However, when it got dark and late in the day, they were unable to find a stile back across into the Way. Now they are about to be taken into the clutches of Giant Despair.

Bunyan learned from his own spiritual struggle that a tender conscience (such as his) once out of the revealed will of God would find it exceedingly difficult to recover peace with God, to regain assurance. He saw from Scripture that the tentacles of remaining corruption (Romans 7:14–21) went down deep and were still powerful enough to debilitate and bring darkness into the soul in such a way that one might even suspect any earlier professions of faith.

We must realize that not every man will experience all of the events taking place in this allegory. Some will never grapple with Apollyon; others will never fall into the Slough of Despond. There are also many who won't see the inside of Doubting Castle. Nonetheless, doubt, despair and depression can bring such a state of mind to the soul that has once engaged in premeditated, ongoing sin against the grace of God, that any new attempts to seek for mercy are met in the mind with a flood of previous failures and billows of doubts that God will ever forgive and restore. This is all part of Doubting Castle. Its walls are thick, its towers are high and its owners are implacable. Take note of Christian's despairing comment: "The grave is more easy for me than this dungeon."

The nature of sin is such that it will always seek to take its subject to the farthest extreme if it could. The goal of covetousness would be theft, and likewise the goal of the smallest seed of contempt and hatred would be murder. It also follows that every act of despair would end in suicide if it could go this far. Bunyan realizes this, and thus the pile of bones and skulls in the castle-yard.
