

Paradise Regained

Overture

&

Introduction

Our play picks up the story at line 183 of the First Book.

Milton began by summarising the third chapter of Matthew's Gospel,

telling us how Jesus (who had been living
in his mother's house, private and unobserved)

was baptised by John the Baptist and by the Holy Spirit,

and identified by a voice from Heaven

as 'My beloved Son'.

Then Milton presented the 'celestial machinery', proper to a classical epic poem.

He offered his own freely imagined account
of a debate in Hell among Satan and the Fallen Angels,

and the answering reflections of God
in conversation with the Archangel Gabriel.

You are about to hear the core of the rest of the epic

(in which Milton will expand just eleven verses in the fourth chapter of Matthew's Gospel).

But our performance will begin with the poet's statement of his theme and with his opening prayer
for inspiration –

addressed not to the classical Muses, but to the Holy Spirit.

MILTON

I, who erewhile the happy Garden sung
By one man's disobedience lost, now sing
Recovered Paradise to all mankind,
By one man's firm obedience fully tried
Through all temptation, and the Tempter foiled
In all his wiles, defeated and repulsed,
And Eden raised in the waste Wilderness.

Thou Spirit, who led'st this glorious Eremite
Into the desert, his victorious field
Against the spiritual foe, and brought'st him thence
By proof the undoubted Son of God,

inspire

As thou art wont my prompted song, else mute,
To tell of deeds above heroic, though in secret done,
And unrecorded left through many an age:
Worthy to have not remained so long unsung.

Meanwhile the Son of God, who yet some days
Lodged in Bethabara, where John baptised,
Musing and much revolving in his breast
How best the mighty work he might begin
Of Saviour to mankind,

One day forth walked alone, the better to converse
With solitude, till, far from track of men,
Thought following thought, and step by step led on,
He entered now the bordering Desert wild,
And, with dark shades and rocks environed round,
His holy meditations thus pursued:—

JESUS

O what a multitude of thoughts at once
Awakened in me swarm.

When I was yet a child, no childish play
To me was pleasing; all my mind was set
Serious to learn and know, and thence to do
What might be public good; myself I thought
Born to that end, born to promote all truth,
All righteous things.

Therefore, above my years,
The Law of God I read, and found it sweet;
Made it my whole delight, and in it grew
To such perfection that, ere yet my age

Had measured twice six years, at our great Feast
I went into the Temple, there to hear
The teachers of our Law, and to propose
What might improve my knowledge or their own,
And was admired by all.

Yet this not all
To which my spirit aspired. Victorious deeds
Flamed in my heart, heroic acts—one while
To rescue Israel from the Roman yoke;
Then to subdue and quell, o'er all the earth,
Brute violence and proud tyrannic power,
Till truth were freed, and equity restored:

Yet held it more humane, more heavenly, first
By winning words to conquer willing hearts,
And make persuasion do the work of fear;
At least to try, and teach the erring soul
Not wilfully mis-doing, but unaware
Misled; the stubborn only to subdue.

MILTON

Full forty days he passed,
Nor tasted human food, nor hunger felt,
Till those days ended; hungered then at last
Among wild beasts.

They at his sight grew mild,
Nor sleeping him nor waking harmed; his walk
The fiery serpent fled and noxious worm;
The lion and fierce tiger glared aloof.

But now an agèd man in rural weeds,
Following, as seemed, the quest of some stray ewe,
Or withered sticks to gather, which might serve
Against a winter's day, when winds blow keen,
To warm him wet-return'd from field at eve,
He saw approach; who first with curious eye
Perused him, then with words thus uttered spake:—

SATAN

Sir, what ill chance hath brought thee to this place,
So far from path or road of men, who pass
In troop or caravan? for single none
Durst ever, who returned, and dropt not here
His carcass, pined with hunger and with drouth.

I ask the rather, and the more admire,
For that to me thou seem'st the man whom late
Our new baptising Prophet at the ford

Of Jordan honoured so, and called thee Son
Of God.

I saw and heard, for we sometimes
Who dwell this wild, constrained by want, come forth
To town or village nigh (nighest is far),
Where aught we hear, and curious are to hear,
What happens new; fame also finds us out.

JESUS

Who brought me hither
Will bring me hence; no other guide I seek.

SATAN

By miracle he may,
What other way I see not; for we here
Live on tough roots and stubs, to thirst inured
More than the camel, and to drink go far—
Men to much misery and hardship born.

But, if thou be the Son of God, command
That out of these hard stones be made thee bread;
So shalt thou save thyself, and us relieve
With food, whereof we wretched seldom taste.

JESUS

Think'st thou such force in bread? Is it not written
(For I discern thee other than thou seem'st),
Man lives not by bread only, but each word
Proceeding from the mouth of God, who fed
Our fathers here with manna?

Why dost thou, then, suggest to me distrust
Knowing who I am, as I know who thou art?

SATAN

'Tis true, I am that Spirit unfortunate
Who, leagued with millions more in rash revolt,
Kept not my happy station, but was driven
With them from bliss to the bottomless Deep—

Yet to that hideous place not so confin'd,
but that oft,
Leaving my dolorous prison, I enjoy
Large liberty to round this globe of Earth,
Or range in the Air; nor from the Heaven of Heavens
Hath he excluded my resort sometimes.

I came, among the Sons of God, when he
Gave up into my hands Uzzéan Job,
To prove him, and illustrate his high worth;

And, when to all his Angels he proposed
To draw the proud king Ahab into fraud,
I undertook that office, and the tongues
Of all his flattering prophets glibb'd with lies
To his destruction, as I had in charge.
For what he bids, I do.

 Though I have lost
Much lustre of my native brightness, lost
To be belov'd of God, I have not lost
To love, at least contemplate and admire,
What I see excellent in good, or fair,
Or virtuous; I should so have lost all sense.

What can be then less in me than desire
To see thee and approach thee, whom I know
Declared the Son of God, to hear attent
Thy wisdom, and behold thy godlike deeds?

Men generally think me much a foe
To all mankind. Why should I? They to me
Never did wrong or violence. By them
I lost not what I lost; rather by them
I gained what I have gained, and with them dwell
Co-partner in these regions of the World.

JESUS

Deservedly thou griev'st, compos'd of lies
From the beginning, and in lies wilt end,
Who boast'st release from Hell, and leave to come
Into the Heaven of Heavens.

 Thou com'st, indeed,
As a poor miserable captive thrall
Comes to the place where he before had sat
Among the prime in splendour, now depos'd,
Ejected, emptied, gazed, unpitied, shunned,
A spectacle of ruin, or of scorn,
To all the host of Heaven.

 The happy place
Imparts to thee no happiness, no joy—
Rather inflames thy torment.

So never more in Hell than when in Heaven.

But thou art serviceable to Heaven's King!
Wilt thou impute to obedience what thy fear
Extorts, or pleasure to do ill excites?

What but thy malice moved thee to misdeem
Of righteous Job, then cruelly to afflict him
With all inflictions? but his patience won.

The other service was thy chosen task,
To be a liar in four hundred mouths;
For lying is thy sustenance, thy food.

Yet thou pretend'st to truth! all oracles
By thee are given, and what confess'd more true
Among the nations?

That hath been thy craft,
By mixing somewhat true to vent more lies.
But what have been thy answers? what but dark,
Ambiguous, and with double sense deluding,
Which they who asked have seldom understood,
And, not well understood, as good not known?

Who ever, by consulting at thy shrine,
Return'd the wiser, or the more instruct
To fly or follow what concerned him most,
And run not sooner to his fatal snare?

Thy coming hither, though I know thy scope,
I bid not, or forbid. Do as thou find'st
Permission from above; thou canst not more.

MILTON

He added not; and Satan, bowing low
His grey dissimulation, disappeared,
Into thin air diffused: for now began
Night with her sullen wing to double-shade
The desert; fowls in their clay nests were couched;
And now wild beasts came forth the woods to roam.

Meanwhile the new-baptised, who yet remained
At Jordan with the Baptist, and had seen
Him whom they heard so late expressly called
Jesus Messiah, Son of God declared,
Now missing him, their joy so lately found,
So lately found and so abruptly gone,
Began to doubt, and doubted many days.

Thus on the bank of Jordan, by a creek,
Where winds with reeds and osiers whispering play,
Plain fishermen (no greater men them call),
Close in a cottage low together got,
Their unexpected loss and complaints outbreathed:—

SIMON

Alas, from what high hope to what relapse
Unlook'd for are we fallen! Our eyes beheld
Messiah certainly now come, so long
Expected of our fathers.

We have heard
His words, his wisdom full of grace and truth.
'Now, now, for sure, deliverance is at hand;
The kingdom shall to Israel be restored:'

Thus we rejoic'd, but soon our joy is turned
Into perplexity and new amaze.
For whither is he gone?

MILTON

Now to his mother Mary, when she saw
Others return'd from baptism, not her Son,
Nor left at Jordan tidings of him none,
Within her breast though calm, her breast though pure,
Motherly cares and fears got head, and raised
Some troubled thoughts, which she in sighs thus clad:—

MARY

Oh, what avails me now that honour high,
To have conceiv'd of God? or that salute,
'Hail, highly favoured, among women blest!'
While I to sorrows am no less advanced
By the birth I bore—

In such a season born, when scarce a shed
Could be obtain'd to shelter him or me
From the bleak air? A stable was our warmth,
A manger his;

yet soon enforc'd to fly
Thence into Egypt, till the murderous king
Were dead, who sought his life, and, missing, fill'd
With infant blood the streets of Bethlehem.

From Egypt home return'd, in Nazareth
Hath been our dwelling many years; his life
Private, unactive, calm, contemplative,
Little suspicious to any king.

But now,
Full grown to man, acknowledged, as I hear,
By John the Baptist, and in public shewn,

Son owned from Heaven by his Father's voice—
But where delays he now?

Some great intent
Conceals him. When twelve years he scarce had seen,
I lost him, but so found as well I saw
He could not lose himself, but went about
His Father's business.

What he meant I mused—
Since understand; much more his absence now
Thus long to some great purpose he obscures.

But I to wait with patience am inured;
My heart hath been a storehouse long of things
And sayings laid up, portending strange events.

MILTON

Thus Mary, pondering oft, and oft to mind
Recalling what remarkably had passed
Since first her Salutation heard, with thoughts
Meekly composed awaited the fulfilling:

The while her Son, tracing the desert wild,
Sole, but with holiest meditations fed,
Into himself descended, and at once
All his great work to come before him set—
How to begin, how to accomplish best
His end of being on Earth, and mission high.

Now to the desert Satan takes his flight,
Where still, from shade to shade, the Son of God,
After forty days' fasting, had remained,
Now hungering first, and to himself thus said:—

JESUS

Where will this end? Four times ten days I have passed
Wandering this woody maze, and human food
Nor tasted, nor had appetite.

But now I feel I hunger; which declares
Nature hath need of what she asks. Yet God
Can satisfy that need some other way,
Though hunger still remain.

MILTON

It was the hour of night, when thus the Son
Communed in silent walk, then laid him down
Under the hospitable covert nigh
Of trees thick interwoven.

There he slept,
And dreamed, as appetite is wont to dream,
Of meats and drinks, nature's refreshment sweet.
Him thought he by the brook of Cherith stood,
And saw the ravens with their horny beaks
Food to Elijah bringing even and morn—
Though ravenous, taught to abstain from what they
brought;

He saw the Prophet also, how he fled
Into the desert, and how there he slept
Under a juniper—then how, awaked,
He found his supper on the coals prepared,
And by the Angel was bid rise and eat,
And eat the second time after repose,
The strength whereof sufficed him forty days.

Thus wore out night; and now the herald lark
Left his ground-nest, high tow'ring to descry
The Morn's approach, and greet her with his song.

As lightly from his grassy couch up rose
Our Saviour, and found all was but a dream;
Fasting he went to sleep, and fasting wak'd.

Up to a hill anon his steps he rear'd,
From whose high top to ken the prospect round,
If cottage were in view, sheep-cote, or herd;
But cottage, herd, or sheep-cote, none he saw—
Only in a bottom saw a pleasant grove,
With chant of tuneful birds resounding loud.

Thither he bent his way, determined there
To rest at noon, and entered soon the shade
High-roof'd, and walks beneath, and alleys brown,
That opened in the midst a woody scene;
Nature's own work it seemed (Nature taught Art),
And, to a superstitious eye, the haunt
Of wood-gods and wood-nymphs.

He view'd it round;
When suddenly a man before him stood,
Not rustic as before, but seemlier clad,
As one in city or court or palace bred,
And with fair speech these words to him addressed:—

SATAN

With granted leave officious I return,
But much more wonder that the Son of God
In this wild solitude so long should bide,
Of all things destitute, and, well I know,

Not without hunger.

Behold,
Nature ashamed, or – better to express –
Troubled, that thou should'st hunger, hath purveyed
From all the elements her choicest store,
To treat thee as beseems, and as her Lord
With honour. Only deign to sit and eat.

MILTON

He spake no dream; for, as his words had end,
Our Saviour, lifting up his eyes, beheld,
In ample space under the broadest shade,
A table richly spread in regal mode,
With dishes piled and meats of noblest sort
And savour—

beasts of chase, or fowl of game,
In pastry built, or from the spit, or boiled,
Grisamber-steamed; all fish, from sea or shore,
Freshet or purling brook, of shell or fin,
And exquisitest name, for which was drained
Pontus, and Lucrine bay, and Afric coast.

Alas! how simple, to these cates compared,
Was that crude Apple that diverted Eve!

And at a stately sideboard, by the wine,
That fragrant smell diffused, in order stood
Tall stripling youths, rich-clad, of fairer hue
Than Ganymed or Hylas;

distant more,
Under the trees now tripp'd, now solemn stood,
Nymphs of Diana's train, and Naiades
With fruits and flowers from Amalthea's horn,
And ladies of the Hesperides, that seemed
Fairer than feign'd of old, or fabled since
Of faery damsels met in forest wide
By knights of Logrës, or of Lyoness,
Lancelot, or Pelleas, or Pellenore.

And all the while harmonious airs were heard
Of chiming strings or charming pipes; and winds
Of gentlest gale Arabian odours fann'd
From their soft wings, and Flora's earliest smells.

Such was the splendour; and the Tempter now
His invitation earnestly renew'd.

SATAN

What doubts the Son of God to sit and eat?
These are not fruits forbidden; no interdict
Defends the touching of these viands pure.

JESUS

Shall I receive by gift what of my own,
When and where likes me best, I can command?
I can at will, doubt not, as soon as thou,
Command a table in this wilderness,
And call swift flights of Angels ministrant,
Arrayed in glory, on my cup to attend.
Thy pompous delicacies I condemn,
And count thy specious gifts no gifts, but guiles.

Entracte

&

Transition

Satan now tries another line of attack.

Clearly, Jesus' heart is 'set on high designs'.
But 'great acts require great means of enterprise'.

In short, Jesus will need money:

'Money brings honour, friends, conquest, and realms.
Get riches first, get wealth, and treasure heap.
Those whom I favour thrive in wealth amain,
While Virtue, Valour, Wisdom sit in want.'

Jesus dismisses the efficacy of wealth
as a *means* to the end of conquest:

'Yet wealth without these three is impotent
To gain dominion, or keep it gained.'

Then he condemns the *end* of conquest itself:

"With like aversion I reject
Riches and realms."

MILTON

So spake the Son of God; and Satan stood
A while as mute, confounded what to say,
What to reply, confuted and convinc'd
Of his weak arguing and fallacious drift.

At length, collecting all his serpent wiles,
With soothing words renew'd, him thus accosts:—

SATAN

I see thou know'st what is of use to know,
What best to say canst say, to do canst do.

These godlike virtues wherefore dost thou hide?
Affecting private life, or more obscure
In savage wilderness, wherefore deprive
All Earth her wonder at thy acts, thyself
The fame and glory—

glory, the reward

That sole excites to high attempts the flame
Of most erected spirits, most temper'd, pure,
Aethereal, who all pleasures else despise,
All treasures and all gain esteem as dross,
And dignities and powers, all but the highest?

Thy years are ripe, and over-ripe.
Quench not the thirst of glory, but augment.

Great Julius, whom now all the world admires,
The more he grew in years, the more inflam'd
With glory, wept that he had liv'd so long
Inglorious. But thou yet art not too late.

JESUS

Thou neither dost persuade me to seek wealth
For empire's sake, nor empire to affect
For glory's sake, by all thy argument.
For what is glory but the blaze of fame,
The people's praise, if always praise unmix'd?

And what the people but a herd confus'd,
A miscellaneous rabble, who extol
Things vulgar, and, well weigh'd, scarce worth the praise;
They praise and they admire they know not what,
And know not whom, but as one leads the other;

And what delight to be by such extoll'd,
To live upon their tongues, and be their talk,
Of whom to be disprais'd were no small praise?

The intelligent among them and the wise
Are few; and glory scarce of few is raised.

This is true glory and renown—when God,
Looking on the Earth, with approbation marks
The just man, and divulges him through Heaven
To all his Angels, who with true applause
Recount his praises.

They err who count it glorious to subdue
By conquest far and wide, to overrun
Large countries, and in field great battles win,
Great cities by assault.

What do these worthies
But rob and spoil, burn, slaughter, and enslave
Peaceable nations, neighbouring or remote,
Made captive, yet deserving freedom more
Than those their conquerors, who leave behind
Nothing but ruin wheresoe'er they rove,
And all the flourishing works of peace destroy;

Then swell with pride, and must be titled Gods,
Great Benefactors of mankind, Deliverers,
Worshipp'd with temple, priest, and sacrifice?
One is the son of Jove, of Mars the other;
Till conqueror Death discover them scarce men,
Rowling in brutish vices, and deform'd,
Violent or shameful death their due reward.

MILTON

So spake the Son of God; and here again
Satan had not to answer, but stood struck
With guilt of his own sin—for he himself,
Insatiable of glory, had lost all.

Yet of another plea bethought him soon:—

SATAN

Of glory, as thou wilt, so deem:
Worth or not worth the seeking, let it pass.

But to a Kingdom thou art born—ordain'd
To sit upon thy father David's throne,
By mother's side thy father, though thy right
Be now in powerful hands, that will not part
Easily from possession won with arms.

Judaea now and all the Promised Land,
Reduced a province under Roman yoke,
Obeys Tiberius, nor is always rul'd
With temperate sway: oft have they violated
The Temple, oft the Law, with foul affronts.

And think'st thou to regain
Thy right by sitting still, or thus retiring?

JESUS

But what concerns it thee when I begin
My everlasting Kingdom? Why art thou
Solicitous? What moves thy inquisition?

Know'st thou not that my rising is thy fall,
And my promotion will be thy destruction?

SATAN

Let that come when it comes. All hope is lost
Of my reception into grace; what worse?

For where no hope is left, is left no fear.

If there be worse, the expectation more
Of worse torments me than the feeling can.

I would be at the worst; worst is my port,
My harbour, and my ultimate repose,
The end I would attain, my final good.

My error was my error, and my crime
My crime, whatever, for itself condemn'd;
And will alike be punish'd, whether thou
Reign or reign not—

though to that gentle brow
Willingly I could fly, and hope thy reign
(From that placid aspect and meek regard),
Rather than aggravate my evil state,
Would stand between me and thy Father's ire
(Whose ire I dread more than the fire of Hell)
A shelter and a kind of shading cool
Interposition, as a summer's cloud.

If I, then, to the worst that can be haste,
Why move thy feet so slow to what is best?
Happiest, both to thyself and all the world,
That thou, who worthiest art, shouldst be their King!

But consider,
Thy life hath yet been private, most part spent

At home, scarce viewed the Galilean towns,
And once a year Jerusalem, few days'
Short sojourn; and what thence could'st thou observe?

The world thou hast not seen, much less her glory,
Empires, and monarchs, and their radiant courts—
Best school of best experience, quickest insight
In all things that to greatest actions lead.

The wisest, unexperienced, will be ever
Timorous, and loth, with novice modesty,
Irresolute, unhardy, unadventurous.

But I will bring thee where thou soon shalt quit
Those rudiments, and see before thine eyes
The monarchies of the Earth, their pomp and state—
Sufficient introduction to inform
Thee, of thyself so apt, in regal arts,
And regal mysteries; that thou may'st know
How best their opposition to withstand.

MILTON

With that (such power was given him then), he took
The Son of God up to a mountain high.

It was a mountain at whose verdant feet
A spacious plain outstretched in circuit wide
Lay pleasant;

from his side two rivers flowed,
The one winding, the other straight, and left between
Fair champaign, with less rivers intervein'd,
Then meeting joined their tribute to the sea.

To this high mountain-top the Tempter brought
Our Saviour, and new train of words began:—

SATAN

Well have we speeded, and o'er hill and dale,
Forest, and field, and flood, temples and towers,
Cut shorter many a league.

Here thou behold'st
Assyria, and her empire's ancient bounds,
Araxes and the Caspian lake; thence on
As far as Indus east, Euphrates west,
And oft beyond; to south the Persian bay,
And, inaccessible, the Arabian drouth.

Here, Nineveh,
There Babylon, the wonder of all tongues,
As ancient, but rebuilt by him who twice
Judah and all thy father David's house
Led captive, and Jerusalem laid waste,
Till Cyrus set them free;

Persepolis,
His city, there thou seest, and Bactra there;
Ecbatana her structure vast there shews,
And Hecatompylos her hundred gates.

There Susa by Choaspes, amber stream,
The drink of none but kings; and there ,
Artaxata, Teredon, Ctesiphon,
Turning with easy eye, thou may'st behold.

All these the Parthian under his dominion holds;
And just in time thou com'st to have a view
Of his great power; for now the Parthian king
In Ctesiphon hath gathered all his host
Against the Scythian.

See, though from far,
His thousands, in what martial equipage
They issue forth, steel bows and shafts their arms,
Of equal dread in flight or in pursuit—
All horsemen, in which fight they most excel.

MILTON

He looked, and saw what numbers numberless
The city gates outpour'd, light-armèd troops
In coats of mail and military pride.

He saw them in their forms of battle rang'd,
How quick they wheeled, and flying behind them shot
Sharp sleet of arrowy showers against the face
Of their pursuers, and overcame by flight;
The field all iron cast a gleaming brown.

Nor wanted clouds of foot, nor, on each horn,
Cuirassiers all in steel for standing fight,
Chariots, or elephants indors'd with towers
Of archers;

nor of labouring pioneers
A multitude, with spades and axes arm'd,
To lay hills plain, fell woods, or valleys fill,
Or where plain was raise hill, or overlay
With bridges rivers proud, as with a yoke:

Mules after these, camels and dromedaries,
And waggons fraught with útensils of war.

Such forces met not, nor so wide a camp,
When Agrican, with all his northern powers,
Besieged Albracca, as romances tell,
The city of Gallaphrone, from thence to win
The fairest of her sex, Angelica,
His daughter, sought by many prowest knights,
Both Paynim, and the peers of Charlemane.

Such and so numerous was their chivalry.

SATAN

Hear and mark
To what end I have brought thee hither.

Thy kingdom, though foretold
By Prophet or by Angel, unless thou
Endeavour, as thy father David did,
Thou never shalt obtain. Prediction still
In all things, and all men, supposes means;
Without means used, what it predicts, revokes.

But say thou wert possess'd of David's throne,
How couldst thou hope long to enjoy it quiet and secure
Between two such enclosing enemies,
Roman and Parthian?

Therefore one of these
Thou must make sure thy own: the Parthian first,
By my advice.

JESUS

Much ostentation vain of fleshly arm
And fragile arms, much instrument of war,
Long in preparing, soon to nothing brought,
Before mine eyes thou hast set, and in my ear
Vented much policy, and projects deep
Of enemies, of aids, battles, and leagues,
Plausible to the world, to me worth naught.

Means I must use, thou say'st; prediction else
Will unpredict, and fail me of the throne!

My time, I told thee (and that time for thee
Were better farthest off), is not yet come.

When that comes, think not thou to find me slack
On my part aught endeavouring, or to need
Thy politic maxims, or that cumbersome
Luggage of war there shewn me—argument
Of human weakness rather than of strength.

My brethren, as thou call'st them, those Ten Tribes,
I must deliver, if I mean to reign
David's true heir, and his full sceptre sway
To just extent over all Israel's sons!
But whence to thee this zeal?

As for those captive tribes, themselves were they
Who wrought their own captivity, fell off
From God to worship calves, the deities
Of Egypt, Baal next and Ashtarothe,
And all the idolatries of heathen round.
Should I of these the liberty regard?
No; let them serve
Their enemies who serve idols with God.

MILTON

So spake Israel's true King, and to the Fiend
Made answer meet, that made void all his wiles.
So fares it when with truth falsehood contends.

Perplex'd and troubled at his bad success
The Tempter stood, nor had what to reply,
Discovered in his fraud, thrown from his hope
So oft, and the persuasive rhetoric
That sleek'd his tongue, and won so much on Eve,
So little here, nay lost.

But as a swarm of flies in vintage-time,
About the wine-press where sweet must is poured,
Beat off, returns as oft with humming sound;

Or surging waves against a solid rock,
Though all to shivers dash'd, the assault renew,
(Vain battery!) and in froth or bubbles end—

So Satan, whom repulse upon repulse
Met ever, and to shameful silence brought,
Yet gives not o'er, though desperate of success,
And his vain importunity pursues.

He brought our Saviour to the western side
Of that high mountain, whence he might behold
Another plain, long, but in breadth not wide,
Wash'd by the southern sea, and on the north
To equal length back'd with a ridge of hills
That screen'd the fruits of the earth and seats of men
From cold Septentrion blasts.

There in the midst an Imperial City stood,
With towers and temples proudly elevate
On seven small hills, with palaces adorn'd,
Porches and theatres, baths, aqueducts,
Statues and trophies, and triumphal arcs,
Gardens and groves presented to his eyes.

And now the Tempter thus his silence broke:—

SATAN

The city which thou seest no other deem
Than great and glorious Rome, Queen of the Earth
So far renown'd, and with the spoils enrich'd
Of nations. There the Capitol thou seest,
Above the rest lifting his stately head
On the Tarpeian rock, her citadel
Impregnable;

 and there Mount Palatine,
The imperial palace, compass huge, and high
The structure, skill of noblest architects,
With gilded battlements, conspicuous far,
Turrets, and terraces, and glittering spires.

Thence to the gates cast round thine eye, and see
What conflux issuing forth, or entering in:
Praetors, proconsuls to their provinces
Hasting, or on return, in robes of state;
Lictors and rods, the ensigns of their power;
Legions and cohorts, turms of horse and wings;

Or embassies from regions far remote—
From India and the Golden Chersoness,
And utmost Indian isle Taprobane,
Dusk faces with white silken turbants wreathed;
From Gallia, Gades, and the British west;
Germans, and Scythians, and Sarmatians north
Beyond Danubius to the Tauric pool.

All nations now to Rome obedience pay—
To Rome's great Emperor, whose wide domain,
In ample territory, wealth and power,

Civility of manners, arts and arms,
And long renown, thou justly may'st prefer
Before the Parthian.

These two thrones except,
The rest are barbarous, and scarce worth the sight,
Shared among petty kings too far remov'd;
These having shewn thee, I have shewn thee all
The kingdoms of the world, and all their glory.

Entracte

&

Transition

Satan becomes specific.

He urges Jesus to 'expel from his throne' the hated Emperor Tiberius, now 'easily subdued'.

He insists that:

‘To me such power
Is given, and by that right I give it thee.’ -

Jesus, 'unmoved', dismisses the advice, asserting that 'of my kingdom there shall be no end' when 'my season comes to sit on David's throne'.

Satan becomes 'impudent'.
He repeats his offer of the 'kingdoms of this world',
but now makes the offer a *conditional* one:

‘... yet with this reserve, not else,
On this condition:— if thou wilt fall down,
And worship me as thy superior lord.’

Jesus replies 'with disdain':

'I never liked thy talk, thy offers less;
Now both abhor, since thou hast dared to utter

The abominable terms, impious condition.'

And his rebuke ends with the command:

'Get thee behind me ! '

JESUS

Get thee behind me ! Plain thou now appear'st
That Evil One, Satan for ever damn'd.

SATAN

Be not so sore offended, Son of God—
The trial hath indamag'd thee no way,
Rather more honour left and more esteem;
Me naught advantag'd, missing what I aim'd.

Therefore let pass, as they are transitory,
The kingdoms of this world; I shall no more
Advise thee; gain them as thou canst, or not.

And thou thyself seem'st otherwise inclined
Than to a worldly crown, addicted more
To contemplation and profound dispute;

As by that early action may be judg'd,
When, slipping from thy mother's eye, thou went'st
Alone into the Temple, there wast found
Among the gravest Rabbis, disputant
On points and questions fitting Moses' chair,
Teaching, not taught.

The childhood shews the man,

As morning shews the day.

Be famous, then,
By wisdom; as thy empire must extend,
So let extend thy mind o'er all the world
In knowledge; all things in it comprehend.
All knowledge is not couch'd in Moses' law,
The Pentateuch, or what the Prophets wrote;

The Gentiles also know, and write, and teach
To admiration, led by Nature's light;
And with the Gentiles much thou must converse,
Ruling them by persuasion, as thou mean'st.

Look once more, ere we leave this specular mount,
Westward, much nearer by south-west; behold
Where on the Aegean shore a city stands,
Built nobly, pure the air and light the soil—

Athens, the eye of Greece, mother of arts
And eloquence.

See there the olive-grove of Academe,
Plato's retirement, where the Attic bird
Trills her thick-warbled notes the summer long.

There thou shalt hear and learn the secret power
Of harmony, in tones and numbers hit
By voice or hand, and various-measured verse;

And his who gave them breath, but higher sung,
Blind Melesígenes, thence Homer called,
Whose poem Phoebus challeng'd for his own.

Thence what the lofty grave Tragedians taught
In chorus or iambic, teachers best
Of moral prudence, with delight received
In brief sententious precepts, while they treat
Of fate, and chance, and change in human life,
High actions and high passions best describing.

Thence to the famous Orators repair,
Those ancient, whose resistless eloquence
Wielded at will that fierce democracy.

To sage Philosophy next lend thine ear,
From heaven descended to the low-roof'd house
Of Socrates—see there his tenement—
Whom, well inspired, the Oracle pronounced
Wisest of men;

from whose mouth issu'd forth
Mellifluous streams, that watered all the schools
Of Academics old and new, with those
Surnamed Peripatetics, and the sect
Epicurean, and the Stoic severe.

These here revolve, or, as thou lik'st, at home,
Till time mature thee to a kingdom's weight:
These rules will render thee a king complete
Within thyself, much more with empire join'd.

JESUS

Think not but that I know these things.

He who receives
Light from above, from the Fountain of Light,
No other doctrine needs, though granted true;

But these are false, or little else but dreams,
Conjectures, fancies, built on nothing firm.

The first and wisest of them all profess'd
To know this only, that he nothing knew.

Alas! what can they teach, and not mislead,
Ignorant of themselves, of God much more,
And how the World began, and how Man fell,
Degraded by himself, on grace depending?
Much of the Soul they talk, but all awry;

And in themselves seek virtue; and to themselves
All glory arrogate, to God give none;
Rather accuse him under usual names,
Fortune and Fate, as one regardless quite
Of mortal things. Who, therefore, seeks in these
True wisdom, finds her not.

Many books
(Wise men have said) are wearisome.

Who reads
Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
(And what he brings, what needs he elsewhere seek?)
Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
Deep-versed in books and shallow in himself,
Crude or intoxicate, collecting toys
And trifles for choice matters, worth a sponge,
As children gathering pebbles on the shore.

Or, if I would delight my private hours
With music or with poem, where so soon
As in our native language can I find
That solace?

All our Law and Story strewed
With hymns, our Psalms, with artful terms inscribed,
Our Hebrew songs and harps, declare
That rather Greece from us these arts derived—
Ill imitated while they loudest sing
The vices of their deities, and their own.

Their orators, then—
The top of eloquence ! Statists indeed,
And lovers of their country, as may seem;
But herein to our Prophets far beneath,
As men divinely taught, and better teaching
The solid rules of civil government,
In their majestic, unaffected style,
Than all the oratory of Greece and Rome.

In them is plainest taught, and easiest learnt,
What makes a nation happy, and keeps it so,
What ruins kingdoms, and lays cities flat;
These only, with our Law, best form a king.

MILTON

But Satan, now, to the Wilderness
Brought back the Son of God, and left him there,
Feigning to disappear.

Darkness now rose,
As daylight sunk, and brought in louring Night.

Our Saviour, meek, and with untroubled mind,
Hungry and cold, betook him to his rest,
Wherever, under some concourse of shades,
Whose branching arms, thick intertwined, might shield
From dews and damps of night his sheltered head;

But, shelter'd, slept in vain; for at his head
The Tempter watch'd, and soon with ugly dreams
Disturb'd his sleep.

And either tropic now
'Gan thunder, and both ends of heaven; the clouds
From many a horrid rift abortive poured
Fierce rain with lightning mixed, water with fire,
In ruin reconciled;

nor slept the winds
Within their stony caves, but rushed abroad
From the four hinges of the world, and fell
On the vex'd wilderness, whose tallest pines
(Though rooted deep as high) and sturdiest oaks
Bow'd their stiff necks, loaden with stormy blasts,
Or torn up sheer.

Ill wast thou shrouded then,
O patient Son of God, yet only stood'st
Unshaken!

Thus passed the night so foul, till Morning fair
Came forth with pilgrim steps, in amice grey,
Who with her radiant finger stilled the roar
Of thunder, chased the clouds, and laid the winds,
And grisly spectres, which the Fiend had raised
To tempt the Son of God with terrors dire.

And now the sun with more effectual beams
Had cheer'd the face of earth, and dried the wet

From drooping plant, or dropping tree; the birds,
Who all things now behold more fresh and green,
After a night of storm so ruinous,
Clear'd up their choicest notes in bush and spray,
To gratulate the sweet return of morn.

Nor yet, amidst this joy and brightest morn,
Was absent, after all his mischief done,
The Prince of Darkness; glad would also seem
Of this fair change, and to our Saviour came;
Yet with no new device (they all were spent).

SATAN

Fair morning yet betides thee, Son of God,
After a dismal night...

JESUS

Desist (thou art discerned,
And toil'st in vain), nor me in vain molest.

SATAN

Then hear, O Son of David, virgin-born!
For Son of God to me is yet in doubt.

Of the Messiah I have heard foretold
By all the Prophets; of thy birth, at length
Announced by Gabriel, with the first I knew,
And of the angelic song in Bethlehem field,
On thy birth-night, that sung thee Saviour born.

From that time seldom have I ceased to eye
Thy infancy, thy childhood, and thy youth,
Thy manhood last, though yet in private bred;
Till, at the ford of Jordan, whither all
Flocked to the Baptist, I among the rest
(Though not to be baptised), by voice from Heaven
Heard thee pronounc'd the Son of God belov'd.

Thenceforth I thought thee worth my nearer view
And narrower scrutiny, that I might learn
In what degree or meaning thou art call'd
The Son of God, which bears no single sense.

The Son of God I also am, or was;
And, if I was, I am; relation stands:
All men are Sons of God; yet thee I thought
In some respect far higher so declared.

Therefore I watch'd thy footsteps from that hour,
And follow'd thee still on to this waste wild,
Where, by all best conjectures, I collect
Thou art to be my fatal enemy.

Therefore, to know what more thou art than man,
Worth naming the Son of God by voice from Heaven,
Another method I must now begin.

MILTON

So saying, he caught him up, and, without wing
Of hippogrif, bore through the air sublime,
Over the wilderness and o'er the plain,
Till underneath them fair Jerusalem,
The Holy City, lifted high her towers,

And higher yet the glorious Temple rear'd
Her pile, far off appearing like a mount
Of alabaster, topt with golden spires:

There, on the highest pinnacle, he set
The Son of God, and added thus in scorn:—

SATAN

There stand, if thou wilt stand. To stand upright
Will ask thee skill. I to thy Father's house
Have brought thee, and highest placed: highest is best.

Now shew thy progeny: if not to stand,
Cast thyself down. Safely, if Son of God;
For it is written, 'He will give command
Concerning thee to his Angels; in their hands
They shall uplift thee, lest at any time
Thou chance to dash thy foot against a stone.'

JESUS

Also it is written,
'Tempt not the Lord thy God.'

MILTON

He said, and stood.

But Satan, smitten with amazement, fell—
Fell whence he stood to see his victor fall.

And, as that Theban monster that proposed
Her riddle, and him who solved it not devoured,
That once found out and solv'd, for grief and spite
Cast herself headlong from the Ismenian steep,

So, strook with dread and anguish, fell the Fiend,
And to his crew of rebel angels brought
Joyless triumphals of his hoped success,
Ruin, and desperation, and dismay,
Who durst so proudly tempt the Son of God.

So Satan fell; and straight a fiery globe
Of Angels on full sail of wing flew nigh,
Who on their vans receiv'd our Saviour soft
From his uneasy station, and upbore,
As on a floating couch, through the blithe air;

Then, in a flowery valley, set him down
On a green bank, and set before him spread
A table of celestial food, divine,
Ambrosial fruits fetch'd from the Tree of Life,
And from the Fount of Life ambrosial drink.

And, as he fed, Angelic quires
Sung heavenly anthems of his victory
Over temptation and the Tempter proud:—

ANGELS

True Image of the Father, whether thron'd
In the bosom of bliss, and light of light
Conceiving,
or, remote from Heaven, enshrin'd
In fleshly tabernacle and human form,
Wandering the wilderness, still expressing
The Son of God, with Godlike force endued
Against the attempter of thy Father's throne
And thief of Paradise!

Him long of old
Thou didst debél,
and down from Heaven cast
With all his army; now thou hast aveng'd
Supplanted Adam, and, by vanquishing
Temptation, hast regained lost Paradise,

For, though that seat of earthly bliss be fail'd,
A fairer Paradise is founded now
For Adam and his chosen sons, whom thou
A Saviour art come down to re-install,
Where they shall dwell secure, when time shall be,
Of tempter and temptation without fear.

Hail, Son of the Most High,
Heir of both Worlds,

Queller of Satan! On thy glorious work
Now enter, and begin to save Mankind.

MILTON

Thus they the Son of God, our Saviour meek,
Sung victor, and, from heavenly feast refreshed,
Brought on his way with joy.

He, unobserved,
Home to his mother's house private returned.

Finis