**KING HAROLD**

When Harold went to Normandy

He said a very foolish thing;

That William should be England’s king

(He had gotten drunk on Burgundy).

And when he woke he held his head

In which a tribe of bees did hum

And by a fear was overcome:

Was that really what he had said??

To William’s cause had favour given

The heirless Edward the Confessor;

(Of all evils Will should be the lesser,

Should his realm by rival earls be riven.)

Then when the old King Edward died

And William cried – “Mine is the crown!”

The turncoat Harold let him down,

To his young head that crown applied.

And William shouted – “Zut alors!

Honnait soit qui mal y pense!

Five thousand men shall soon quit France

To land upon that liar’s shore!

For ‘e ‘as built my ‘opes up ‘igh,

And I ‘ave made a thousand boasts

My rule would span all English coasts.

Now look a norman gorm shall I!”

And stomping up his spiral stairs

He kicked his dog and kicked his cat

And in his servants’ eyes he spat

And yelled – “King ‘arold say thy prayers!”

And standing on a battlement

And drawing forth his heavy sword

In fury bellowed far abroad

- “Thy scurvy braincase shall I dent!!”

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

Now, way up north a Viking horde

Were looking for a place to pillage

But found not one unpillaged village

And, frankly, all were feeling bored…

The sea was calm, to southward fair,

So said one to his Lord Harada,

-“At England launch a great armada,

It won’t take long to paddle there!”

Harada said – “The coast is clear!

I’ve always fancied subjecting

Those English swine as Viking king.

I like it. What a good idea!”

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

So at her shoulders, at her feet

Anglia faced these double dangers

From warlike Norse and Norman strangers…

Their vice might crush her in defeat.

But Harold sat upon his throne

Resplendently as head of state

And all his might did contemplate

Which he could exercise alone.

He could make his men hop on one leg,

Remove a churl’s head at will,

Unfunny jesters’ blood could spill,

Make any man for mercy beg.

(Yet then he thought of King Cnut

Who, showing the limits of his power,

Which could not change the flood tide’s hour,

Did royal absurdities refute.)

Still, as England’s new crowned sovereign

He decided he would have a feast

To celebrate his powers increased;

Yet in the background hovering,

With sable hair and sable beard,

A dark emissary of William,

From Falaise, his domicilium

In Normandy, had just appeared.

When Harold saw this Norman count,

With a sealed parchment in his hand,

With an air of fiercest reprimand,

Of fear he felt a large amount.

Then he recalled that past carousing

And the flapping of his loosened tongue.

Had he offered what should not belong

To Will, thereby his regal hopes arousing?

Or had all been a drunken dream

In which he gave a land away

Whereover he had little sway?

Who could such a pledge esteem?

But when he broke that seal and read

A threat which all his fears confirmed,

Full sweaty on his chair he squirmed

For all his peace of mind had fled.

- “Arold!” – read the Norman text -

“Get thy usurping arse away

From England’s throne this very day,

Or thou shalt feel how we are vexed.”

The count said – “Even now there swarms

On Norman beaches infantry;

In ships a cruel inventory

Of war awaits the bate of storms.

When she lies calm, that narrow sea,

And a sun lies mirrored thereupon,

Then from this isle shall I be gone

To bring my duke thy wise decree -

That thy rump has left this royal dais.

He shall come as conqueror or king;

As first, would devastation bring,

As second, mercy, love and grace.

Thou choosest what my master wears,

His armour or a cloak of ermine,

His apparel here shalt thou determine;

In either would he come, he swears!”

Then Harold looked around the room

Still resounding with this threat,

Where many a follower did fret

To contemplate their sovereign’s doom,

And theirs, for William was renowned

For cruelty and laying waste

To cities not to Norman taste…

As king, they knew, he would be crowned.

When Harold spoke they strained to hear.

His voice was soft but very firm;

No longer squirming like a worm,

He made his quaking disappear.

-“Give thy master this response:

What God instals must God retract!

Till God decides a counter act

Shall this, my throne, my rump ensconce.

It would barely fit Will’s great behind,

This throne, so swine-blown does it swell,

Just like his face. How dost thou tell

If he farts at thee or speaks his mind?

Go hence from here thou silly count,

Go hence and count thy lucky stars

That in my gaol, of iron bars,

Thou dost not count a large amount!

Bid Willy stay within his fiefdom

With what he holds be satisfied;

To threaten us with regicide

Shows a lack of Norman wisdom.”

And then to hoots of great derision

The count turned smartly on his heel

And shouted – “Harold thou shalt feel

The mischief of thy rash decision” –

- “How durst thou thee and thou a king!

Thou naughty count, take this thy lord,”

Said Harold, scooping from a board,

A dog-turd in his face to fling.

The count replied – “I prophesy

As you survey our massing force,

Of cavalry, each skirted horse,

By Norman archers shalt thou die.”

His words resembled tumbling bolts

Which in the breathless air did twirl…

They pinned each scoffing, laughing earl

And turned them all to silent dolts,

Who watched the count in trepidation

Turn and leave King Harold’s palace,

Where hung an air of lurking malice,

Dark wraith of William’s reputation.

Then Harold broke the yoke of fear

In which all standing there were caught,

Had wines and roasted viands brought

To fill all churning guts with cheer.

And when the revelry had ended,

Midst greasy bones of swans and geese,

Harold’s toastman called for peace

As their monarch from his seat ascended

And said – “Even now my men patrol

The coast of Sussex, coast of Kent,

Their beaches in their full extent,

To watch which might be William’s goal.

As soon as they decry a sail,

High on any horizon, square,

This news shall bonfires soon declare.

Our gathering army shall not fail

To make a banquet he might like,

To tempt the gizzard of the duke,

So sharp he shall his innards puke

On fare of arrow, sword and pike!”

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

Those Vikings in the far north-east

Did coastal villages attack

And found a monastery to sack,

Did on its swine and oxen feast,

Drank gallons of the abbot’s ales

Which dutifully the monks had brewed,

So issued forth in manner lewd

Of wind and laughter hearty gales.

The awful news came riding south

That Vikings swigged with great abandon,

Would soon be swaggering to London.

That wiped the smile from Harold’s mouth.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

On the farther shore Duke William waited

To hear what news his man might bring

Of Harold, fool, pretentious king,

Which then the count, returned, related;

Though William stood in heavy mail

And armour, helmet weighed a ton

He leapt madly up and down upon

A crab and cried – “Allons! Set sail!”

And all the archers, soldiers, knights

With bows and arrows, bludgeons, lances

And horses doing pretty prances,

On Angleterre set steady sights.

And cheering, singing, full of pride,

On soft breezes, sweet as maidens’ breath,

To glory sailed - or vicious death -

Upon that most propitious tide.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

Should Harold now divide his force?

No! Yet what a choice he had to make

On which his kingdom was at stake;

To fight the Normans first or Norse?

Poor Harold knew he had to choose

A course, and took a silver coin

To tell which battle first to join;

Said – “Tails they win, and heads I lose!”

But no-one smiled or liked the joke

So Harold span the coin once more;

Where it had landed on the floor

No-one looked; and no-one spoke.

- “Let Viking heads roll in the Humber!

Let Norman tails flee Sussex sand!”

And a soldier, looking, at his command,

Said – “Viking heads shall we encumber!”

And like a rock unstoppable

Careering down a snowy bank

King Harold’s horde filled flank to flank

And hurtled north to stem the trouble

Sown by Harada, Viking chief,

Joined by Tostig, Harold’s sibling…….

On Stamford Bridge, blood dribbling,

Was sealed the fate of their mischief.

(A massive man had blocked the bridge

Slicing all who tried to pass,

Till from below straight up his arse

A pike was thrust to make him budge.)

Then falling on the Danes, Norwegians

He made the river run with gore,

King Harold, till all battle-sore

His foes submitted to his legions.

Tostig and Harada fell,

Were lying bleeding side by side

And one to t’other, ere they died,

Said – “Weren’t a bad day out. Ah well….”

“Ha-ha, Harada! Serves thee right”!

Said Harold – “Ha-ha-ha indeed,

It is a treat to watch thee bleed

Thou wert a loathsome silly wight.”

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

Despatching thus the Viking threat,

King Harold turned his army round

And southward gobbled up the ground

To William for their tête-à- tête,

Who, he had heard, had crossed the sea

And landed on the Sussex coast

Together with his warlike host

At a place called Pevensey.

Now, having slaughtered one dread foe,

And full of fire a victory brings,

And finding William camped at Hastings,

He was dying to strike another blow.

Though hot, unslept and battle-sore,

Though feet were chafed and rubbed to blisters,

His soldiery and free enlisters

Were keen to smell the Norman’s gore.

At first the battle-day went well;

Although in tactics somewhat cruder

Outnumbering the new intruder

The Saxons’ axing, piking swell

Squeezed and squashed and finally broke

The Norman ranks and back they fell

And running down the hill pêle- mêle

Were chased by whooping Saxon folk.

Now, William saw the crown he cherished

More firmly fitting Harold’s head

And drawing out his sword he said

- “By tonight I shall ‘ave perished

Unless we turn that Saxon tide!”

And ordering out his cavalry

He sent them into rivalry

With those pursuers and soon espied

That Saxon soldiers, separated,

Hither, thither, in their chase,

To swords more vulnerable in space,

Were dropping, slain, eviscerated.

Their lack of sense and discipline

Just as a victory was near

Would make the triumph disappear

Would let the Norman conqueror win.

And Harold saw with trepidation

The Normans gain the upper hand;

He turned and gazed around his land

And feared the losing of his nation…

And a final, frenzied battle-cry

Froze upon his pallid lips

As one of many arrow-tips

Tumbled, plunging in his eye.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

The day belonged to Will the Bastard

And coast and land, the very air;

And towns in trembling, dread despair

Knew his dire revenge, the dastard.

Had Harold gone by alphabet

Had conquered, fresh, the Normans first

And then the Norsemen’s dreams had burst,

Had clung our tongue Germanic yet.

**SODOM AND GOMORRAH**

God doomed Sodom and Gomorrah.

He warned them sternly – NOW, STOP SINNING!

- "God, we will…we will...tomorrow…."

YOU SHALL OBEY, OBEY!

- "Norra chance!”

- “Sinning’s nice…Come on God….chill!

- “You know you would not cause us sorrow."

OH YES, OH YES, OH YES I WILL!

REPENT, REPENT YOUR WILFUL HORROR!

And He cracked the ground beneath their feet,

And blew upon the placid sea,

Till breakers rolled in every street

And brought to each calamity.

And drunken, naked citizens

Were running out of clubs and inns -

Still clutching dice from gambling dens -

And fleeing multitudes of sins.

One lifted sweaty hands in prayer

Protesting

- "God it wasn’t me

It wasn’t me, I would not dare

To disobey you wilfully."

BUT I WATCHED YOU SINNING, YES I DID

- "No, it must have been my double!

Of him not me You should be rid.

Don’t bury me in muck and rubble!"

FROM DUST AND ROCK I SET THEE FREE

BREATHED LIFE IN THEE - WHAT DIDST THOU DO?

CHOSE WICKEDNESS AND TURPITUDE…

ONE COVERED UP A RABBI’S LOO

WITH CELLOPHANE! AN ACT PROFANE!

And a lad stood up in tears and said

- "It were me God, but I shan’t again."

I KNOW - FOR SOON THOU SHALT BE DEAD

And all the mightiest buildings shook

And statues crumbled, pillars fell

And sinners lavas undertook

And ferried them direct to Hell.

The Gomorrah’ns blamed the Sodomites

For setting such a bad example,

Desecrating sacred sites

Eating dinners more than ample

Getting fat and hugging sofas.

To this the latter took exception

- "Them Gomorons are the idlest loafers

Compared to them we are perfection…."

SILENCE roared the Lord I’M SICK

OF HEARING ALL YOUR LOATHSOME BLEATING

At which a Negotiator slick

Asked Yahweh to a summit meeting.

SPEAK FROM THERE, FROM WHERE YOU STAND

I HEAR THEE WELL ENOUGH FROM HERE.

BUT TRICKERY AND SLEIGHT OF HAND

WILL NOT BAMBOOZLE ME, NO FEAR!

- "Look. I’ll bring each side together

And try to narrow down the gap….

You, God, now have lost your tether

And want two cities off the map.

They, God, desire a bit of fun….

So, let’s ban sinning in the week

Then when the weekend has begun

Weak mortals may some pleasure seek!"

THOU DREADFUL MAN! And a lightening flash

Sizzled him, for he had sinned

And turned him into sorry ash

Dispersèd by the streaming wind.

Then stepped up a Politician

Who saw his chance to save the day.

- "Why not make a …bold decision

To make ..er…some sins…go away…

Lord…we’ll have a great….debate

In parliament and pass ….new laws,

Abolish some sins, out…of date

And …" (*to gathering applause*)

"Let coveting one’s neighbour’s ass

To Sodom’s environs apply

(They do that sort of thing en masse)

Now, all in favour just shout aye.. (***Aye!)***

New Religion for a brand New Age!

New clauses, brand New Constitution

So God…Y-You’d just be….. all the rage

Please don’t dismiss…this bold solution."

Ere he could raise his arms aloft

In triumph, both his arms had withered

And all his flesh and bones turned soft

And down a smoking crack he slithered.

HOW DARE HE TRY TO WIN MY VOTE

HOW DARE HE TRY HIS SMARM AND CHARM

WHAT A WEASEL, WHAT A STOAT

HEY SATAN!

"What?"

DO HIM SOME HARM!

- "Right-o, but I can hardly cope,

Could you do Sodom *then* Gomorrah?

We’re out of pitchforks, flails and rope

Have you some Angels I could borrow?"

SILENCE SATAN! YOU HAD YOUR CHANCE

TO THRIVE BEHIND MY PEARLY GATES

IN PRIDE YOU TOOK A FOOLISH STANCE…

- "Well, I like it here with all me mates."

God grabbed some handy mountain tops

And ground them into smithereens

And houses, cafés, schools and shops

Were buried midst chaotic scenes.

At once a mighty gale went roaring

And ripping folk like fruit from trees,

Where they had climbed from water pouring,

All swirling round their knocking knees.

Far and wide a baleful wailing

Filled spaces dark and sulphurous

Till a Poet cried

- ‘Twas Virtue’s failing!

As all was much too dull for us!

Who wanted tea when there was beer?

And bony fish when there was steak?

If wholesome things had given cheer

There would have been no cause to break

Your laws and hence no great temptation….

So why should we be held to blame,

We Gomorrah’ns and that …Sodding nation!"

And as he spake an orange flame

Consumed him, doomed him, fuming Bard….

Now who was left who might persuade

God to calm, come down less hard

On quaking folk so sore afraid?

All who survived this spot of bother

Were panicking that they’d be next

Except one bold Philosopher.

He was, to put it mildly, vexed.

- "God, You just calm down a tad

And think things over logically;

Are people really quite so bad,

To treat them so abysmally?

If we ever have a naughty dream

Or naughty thoughts pop in our mind

Like bubbles in an errant stream

Is that the fault of humankind?

Men with a right to choose, you built

And when we choose these things to do

Why should we shoulder all the guilt?

Who made those dreams and fancies? You!"

OH THOU DOST THINK THYSELF SO CLEVER

WITH THY FLATULENT PHILOSOPHY.

ARE NAUGHTY CHOICES RIGHT? NO NEVER!

I DAMN THEE FOR ETERNITY!

Thunder clapped in clouds of blood

And shook foundations, tore up roots,

And where the learned sage had stood

Was just a pair of smoking boots.

Then from a bawdy house a Madam

Entwined her ruddy arms and spoke.

- "It strikes me that the sons of Adam

Take after him, a lusty bloke;

Eve’s lovely charms he can’t resist..

You made them irresistible…"

AND I TOLD THEM THAT THEY MUST DESIST

FROM PRACTICES DETESTABLE

IN GOMORRAH BUT MAINLY THERE IN SODOM

WHERE MEN WITH MEN IN SIN DO LIE

I DID NOT DESIGN THERETO A BOTTOM

MY NATURAL LAW DO THEY DEFY

AND AS FOR THEE, FOUL PROSTITUTE

THOU HARLOT, HARPY, STALE, BAD BAWD

I HEREBY MAKE THEE DESTITUTE

THOU AND THINE SHALL ALL BE GORED

BY SATAN’S HORNS

- "Hang on a bit!

We’re knackered here, we need a break."

SILENCE SATAN! GET ON WITH IT!

- "We need more men, for heaven’s sake!"

A Hero stood

-"I shall be brave

Upon this head I take all blame

That these two cities I might save…"

THAT’S VERY GENEROUS, TAKE HIS NAME

VERY GOOD AND KIND OF HIM

A BRIGHT IDEA, I’LL MAKE A NOTE……..

BUT TO ALL THE POISONS IN THIS LIMB

ONE LIFE IS NOT THE ANTIDOTE

And then a Priest stood on a box…

This theologian calmly said

- "Why hurl at us these waves and rocks

When all This issues from Your Head?

Why tax us all for Adam’s sin?

You were his Father as he was mine.

So with Yourself You should begin.

The fault in us is Yours, Divine!"

And for a moment God fell silent…

In skies there glimmered pale the sun

And all the winds and hailstones violent

As swiftly stalled as they’d begun.

And cautiously survivors stirred……

The Priest was lifted shoulder-high

In every street rejoicing heard

That angry God had left the sky!

But then, by mighty whirlwinds spun,

The whirling drapes of clouds drew back.

A mighty Hand plucked up the sun,

A peach, and all the sky turned black.

Until the gleam of every star

That glowed within the firmament

And wheeling planets, near and far,

Showed His Estate in its extent.

IN ME THROUGH ME FROM ME BY ME

IS NEITHER GOOD NOR BAD THERE **IS**.

MY PURPOSE IS MY MYSTERY

I FASHIONED NOT INIQUITIES

NO FLOWER NO TREE NO BEAST DOES ILL

FOR THEY HAVE NOT THE POWER OF CHOICE

TO THE MATTER OF MY SECRET WILL

THEY GIVE FORM AND HUE AND MOVEMENT VOICE

TO BREED TO FEED THIS KILLS THIS OTHER

IN THE NATURAL PATTERN OF MY PLAN………

THAT CAIN DECIDES TO KILL HIS BROTHER

IS THE EVIL STRATAGEM OF MAN

WHEN MAN TO MAN IS HARSH AND CRUEL

OR THE VESSEL OF HIS SOUL NEGLECTS

AND LIVES BEYOND THE GOLDEN RULE

OF EARTH AND NATURE DISRESPECTS

AND SPOILS THE GIFTS FOR HIM I SPAN

MISUSES THEM FOR DEVILMENT

NO WONDER THAT I PUNISH MAN

WHEN HE FROM SIN WILL NOT RELENT

I GAVE HIM GREAT INTELLIGENCE

THE GREATEST GIFT I COULD BESTOW

HIS SIN IS DISOBEDIENCE

FOR THIS I CHIDE AND BRING HIM LOW

SATAN TOO HAD POWER TO CHOOSE

AGAINST MY RULE DID HE REBEL

AND OTHERS DID THEIR CHOICE MISUSE

AND FOLLOWED SATAN STRAIGHT TO HELL

I AM THE FATHER MAN THE CHILD

WHEN HE OBEYS I KISS HIS BROW

WHEN HE REVOLTS IS HE REVILED

AND CHASTISED AS I CHASTISE HIM NOW

The Priest then turned and found a girl

A sobbing orphaned wanderer

- "Take then this Innocent to hurl

To the Fires with every squanderer

Of Your fabled generosity."

TOO MUCH, TOO MUCH DOST THOU PRESUME

And in thunderous ferocity

The Priest, enlightened, met his doom.

Now there was scarce a house intact

In Gomorrah and none at all in Sodom.

God counted all the sinners stacked

In cells of Hell and said THERE - I’VE GOT ‘EM!.

ALRIGHT, YOU BETTER ONES, COME OUT

From boughs, from bushes out they poured.

And from then on they would, no doubt

Behave themselves and praise the Lord.

**THE RETURN OF SATAN**

When Satan had lived a million years

In Hell, and he was very bored,

He wrote a message to the Lord:

- “Lord, I’m bored, I’m bored to tears,

I’m out of ways to punish men,

To chastise them for being bad;

Forgive, forget and I’d be glad

And I’d go straight and start again…

Take Adolf Hitler (I wish you would)…

Taking tweezers to his moustache,

I can’t do it with my old panache……

A change of scene would do me good;

Making veggies eat bad meat

And making idle loafers jog,

And pussy-lovers walk the dog

And kings and queens lick paupers’ feet,

Making pop fans hark to Mozart

And classic fans hear David Essex,

Turn the blasé into nervous wrecks…

God, I’ve lost the art and heart…

And if I fall asleep I dream

Of screeching folk in fiery cells

And brimstone, rotten-eggy smells

- If I pull another tooth, I’ll scream…

I’ve made monoglots learn French and Spanish

Till they are literate and fluent,

Tied to school desks many a truant,

Cooked gluttons pies which sudden vanish…

Made football hooligans watch ballets

And Guardian readers read the SUN

Made skinny models weigh a ton

And slavers sit in slimy galleys….

Made speeding drivers drive old coaches

For ever round and round Hell’s tracks,

Made the fashionable wear pack-a- macks

And thrown to gourmets bony roaches…

There’s nothing in my catalogue,

There’s nothing new or cruel to try

On nose or ear or tongue or eye

With ferret, raven, bat or dog;

I’ve exhausted all my keenest fires,

Hammered in too many nails

And tied too many knots in flails,

Chastising all the world’s pariahs.

So God, I beg another chance..

I know that I’m a handsome devil

But I’d play my harp and never revel….

Your Angel band would I enhance!”

He stuffed all in an envelope

And shook awake his waiting imp

- “Take this to God in Heaven, gimp”

- “But I don’t know the way!”

- “You’ll cope.”

The scarlet goblin rose on fumes,

Flying, soaring higher, higher

Till just as small was every fire

Below, as stars in purple glooms.

In dark, he felt a stony roof

The ceiling of the hellish pit,

Sharp with flints set into it,

Polished like a cloven hoof.

And as he searched, a shaft of light

Came thrusting from a golden patch,

A square, the very hole, the hatch

Where sinners plunged to meet their plight;

And as he stared, bank men in suits

Hurtled, screaming, through the hole

And filleted of perished soul

Became Satan’s latest raw recruits.

The goblin saw his vital chance

Before the swinging hatch was shut,

And on the edge his talons put

And clambered up to looks askance

Of Angels hushing frenzied squeals

Of sorry sinners in the queue

Who promised now what good they’d do

If someone heard their last appeals.

The hellion saw a canyon filled

With mortals in a mass lament,

Ten miles at least was its extent

Of newly dead - or newly killed…

An Angel shouted – “Crimson beast

What art thou? What might be thy charge?

Why art thou, churlish imp, at large?

By whom wert thou from Hell released?”

Quoth the imp – “I have a brief

From my great master to thine own,

A message which I, this imp, alone

Is meant to carry to thy Chief!”

- “From the Fallen One?” St Michael cried

Attentive to these squeaking tones,

Higher than those baleful groans

Of shaking sinners who had died.

- “The very same – the Lord Lucifer,

Who sweeps this chaff from Heaven’s querns,

Who all thy Master’s mischief burns.”

- “What calumny do I infer

From such a gross, outrageous speech?”

And he tried to grab the goblin’s wings,

But fleetest of infernal things,

This goblin scurried out of reach.

- “Odious imp! Impious hellion!

How durst thou such a lie imply!

Thy master did my Lord defy,

Made Adam fall, inspired rebellion;

This wailing queue, this baleful World

Which should have been a Paradise,

Free of Toil and Death and Vice,

This Hell in which the Bad are hurled

Are all thy master devil’s fault!

And all the torment here thou spiest

With thy green eye, which me, the Highest

Here defies, revolves around his vile revolt!”

The goblin grimaced, grinned and cackled,

The Angels rose to full extent,

In hot pursuit of him they went.

He swifter though, could not be shackled

And fled between the scuttling feet;

And with the ruddy rocks he blended,

The canyon walls he soon ascended

And at its rim a swain did meet.

Now, he had never seen a swain

Alive and eating bread and cheese,

And quaffing ale in peaceful ease

Upon a pleasant, verdant plain.

- “O man,” he whispered, behind a rock.

“I need to make my way to God;

Look not, for thou wouldst find me odd,

My countenance would cause thee shock.”

The swain turned round but could not see

The mouth which these strange words did say.

- “Whoe’er thou art - to find thy way

Be kind and artless, just like me…”

The swain was old and almost blind,

The imp could tell his time was nigh.

And as he looked the swain did die,

Whereupon there came of Angelkind

One fair, who stroked that grizzled brow

Until his soul beside him stood;

- “Old swain, fear not for thou wert good!

I shall take thee up to heaven now.

For at its gates Saint Peter counts

The sins that men did not repent;

Thence shall thy simple soul be sent

To Purgatory for such amounts

Of time as Peter deems required

To purge thee, swain, until thy soul

Be cleansed and purified and whole

And all thy petty sins trans-fired.

- “Sounds fair enough to me, let’s go.”

And off they flew; the imp arose

And went behind them just as close

As he dared to, in their undertow.

The Angel had been upon this mission,

Before the great alarm rang out,

That some fiendish creature crept about,

And did not suspect this imposition.

Through the clouds the threesome flew

Till stars were twinkling in the east,

Reaching layers where bird nor beast

Did air or worlds beyond construe.

On a cloud of rose, a colour rare,

Tinged by gold and silver bright

Then gently did the pair alight,

Of their pursuer unaware.

Through the mists they slowly trod

Till in the distance, tall and wide,

And white, reflecting Heaven’s pride,

They spied the holy gates of God.

And as they reached the stately portal

The swain began to feel afraid,

For He cast his angel in the shade

Archangel Peter, Great Immortal.

Then he bent down, with kindly smile.

Through a beard of gold he quietly spoke -

Lest his great voice did fear invoke -

And bade him take a seat a while

That he could make inventory

Of all his small and great transgressions,

Both hidden ones and free confessions,

To be burned away in Purgatory….

The swain was falling off to sleep

When Peter slammed his massive book

So hard the pearly portals shook.

- “WHAT didst thou to that wee sheep?”

There was uproar at the gate until

The shepherd, cowed, avowed his crime

(Which gave the scheming demon time

To squeeze feet and feelers through the grille.)

And he was off before the sentinel

Had time to even move his spear,

And used his guile to disappear,

Learnt from time misspent in Hell.

Then all around a hue and cry

Went up, and guards ran everywhere,

The clever little beast to snare,

And hurl him hell-bent down the sky.

The clamour reached God’s very throne;

For intelligence of this He sent,

But told, He was omniscient,

He said – “Of course, We should have known..

But We forget…Our memory,

So keen so many years ago,

Now sometimes works a little slow.

There’s such a lot to know, you see…

Where every particle at every time

Is going, what doing, has gone and done,

In every atom, microbe, sun

Requires an Intellect sublime…

Yes…Bring that upstart hellion here,

We shall see what Satan has in mind

(But We should know…Oh, are We blind?)

Our thought at present is not clear….”

And angel courtiers looked concerned,

And worried glances were exchanged

And secret meetings were arranged

To air anxieties returned………

- “Where shall they seek this hellion out?”

A courtier shrewd and cunning said,

“The place, You know, is in Your Head

Divulge it, we shall find the lout..”

- “He hides…within a tree…a tree…

- “Which? The oak, the beech, the fig?

It has many…branches…is very…big

It’s…”

….”The banyan?”

..”PEACE… Shall We ban thee?”

And all fell silent and sought the floor

With eyes embarassed for their Lord,

Afraid that it might get abroad

That He could scarce remember more…

- “Wait now…..tell Our troops to forage

Amongst the groves near Peter’s gate.

We now indubitably state

The monkey’s in the tree……..of knowledge!”

First, silence swift befell the conclave.

Did someone smile, or even snigger,

As each such irony did figure?

Then, God the reckless order gave

To bring the imp to Him……direct!

(Why? What could Satan ever state

Might make his stain evaporate?

All pleas and ploys should He reject!

And did the Almighty wish to view

A mere imp, a lowly imp

Who in respect for Him would skimp?

More dignity from God was due!!)

In the woods the soldiers creeping

The tree of Adam’s doom decried,

And in its canopy one angel spied

Amongst the boughs the blighter sleeping;

And reaching up a shining trident

Through the branches to his nook,

The angel skilfully did hook

And brought to ground the demon strident.

- “Vassals! Slaves! What servile toads!

When did you make your own decisions?

Divided up in mute divisions,

Without a say! Ah, now explodes

My derision, all my vile contempt,

My venom for your lily livers,

Bowing deep to order-givers,

From independent thought exempt!

Here the merest imp you see

But I excelled in Satan’s throng.

Handsome, tall, courageous. strong

In these traits more than thee ..or thee..

I wore my uniform with pride…

Better to fight in a rebel cause

Than to sit and clap polite applause.

Such falsity should I abide?”

- “Silence, imp! For thou art netted,”

Shouted Michael, just arrived

“I know not how this imp contrived

To enter heaven…..Wert thou abetted?”

- “What? Dost thou, Saint Michael, scent a treason?”

- “Do not “thou” me, thou imp abject!”

- “Aha! Suspicion I detect!

What stinks, stinks bad, with rancid reason!”

- “SILENCE! SHUT THY GOB HOBGOBLIN!

Tie his chicken’s legs together

And round his neck this barbèd tether.”

- “How shall I walk then?”

- “Hobbling! Wobbling!!”

And from the groves he was escorted

Through white arcades, down golden paths,

Up steps where granite epitaphs

Recorded Satan’s plot aborted,

By pillars blue and creamy marbled,

Down terraces all swathed in silk

Where cherubs bathed in asses’ milk,

Where echoed cries and laughter garbled

At this red churl with winglets clipped,

Who, tethered, hobbled, limped and swayed,

Stared back at starers unafraid

And kept some dignity, tight-lipped.

Until great cedar portals, slowly,

Slowly showed a silver crack

Which turned to gold as each swept back,

Admitting Highest, high - and lowly

To the glory of His mighty dais,

Where God sat in a blinding glow

By praising angels, row on row

Brandishing a fiery mace.

And when His hand He slowly raised

The tumult of the scene did cease.

And in this perfect calm and peace

Upon the scarlet imp He gazed.

- “Be this the rebel’s emissary,

The messenger of Lucifer?

Forthwith with thee shall We confer,

And hear his latest heresy.”

And by the trident-prodder pushed,

Like a crayfish on a giant’s fork,

The hellion began to talk

Amongst the great assembly hushed.

- “My master, Satan, hied me hither

To You great Sire of all Creation,

Under a weighty obligation

A precious parchment to deliver.

My own escape did I contrive

From my jail in perpetuity

And used my ingenuity

To this heaven from my hell to strive” -

(And here the hellion turned and leered) -

“Past every angel, high and low,

Fleet of foot and wing did go,

And fleet of mind by stars I steered!”

Then from his pouch there was produced

The letter by King Demon writ;

That God Almighty would peruse it……

That His Mighty mind might be seduced?

This note was taken up to God

Who read it slow with rising mirth

Until was shaking all His girth

-“Satan will straighten! Cunning Sod!

And yet, leave Us all, We shall reflect

Upon the several consequences,

Of these sly and wily cadences

And see what purpose We detect

Between these lines nefarious…”

And all withdrew, the doors were slammed

Upon the holy - and the damned -

With hopes and notions various.

Now God had harboured hopes for aeons

His broken realm could all be healed

And Hell be cleansed of sin and sealed,

That Eden’s ruined environs

To former glories be restored,

By pure pairs there be populated

Whose race, when they had copulated,

Would love, obey and praise the Lord.

If Satan, straitened, could return,

In Heaven take his rightful place,

Then why in any part of Space

Should fires of retribution burn?

If Satan, greatest reprobate,

Could bow his head and say Amen,

Then why not silly, sinful men

Or women - and each apostate?

He knew the Beast would one day tire

Of stoking up the fires of Hell

On heaven’s fields would yearn to dwell

To seek forgiveness would aspire.

Yet, here ended God’s omniscience

No consequences could be gleaned

Of a transformation of the fiend;

Of such He had no prescience.

He read again, again, again…

And looked for sentiments insincere.

Then bade his ministers reappear

And shared with them of thoughts, His train.

The letter He had copied fast

By scribes, by servants passed around.

All read in silence. Not a sound

Till all had read the offer last.

The shrewd advisor - Kennet by name

Stole a surreptitious glance

At Michael who then, quite by chance,

At Kennet, did the very same.

Kennet smiled, another sneered,

One tittered, another, then another

Till every angel, clung to brother,

And in laughter Satan’s offers jeered.

Till one by one this company

Looked up and sensed the Lord’s grave face

And sobriety regained the place

Slowly of their gaiety.

- “We meant,” then calmly said the Lord,

“To hear your wisest, cool advice.

Is this, your braying laughter, wise?

Now should this letter be ignored?”

Then forward Holy Peter stepped

- “Lord, I count no end to sinning.

I say we strike a new beginning.

Let Hell and Earth be newly swept,

Let all the stinking cells of sin

Be opened up and clinkers blown,

Got rid of every singèd bone,

Put out the fires, let sunlight in!

Sow of Hope, sweet, fragrant seeds

Which on sooty compost of the old

With carpets of new flowers unrolled

Shall cover over foul misdeeds.

Let Lucifer honestly repent

Before this Holy Congregation

All souls, the Good of God’s great nation.”

St Michael bellowed – “I dissent!”

As he pushed through, all turned and watched

Till his foot on lowest step was placed

And pointing there said – “Here erased,

Here was foul rebellion scotched,

Here to God the very threat,

The consequence of Satan’s vice

Put down with awesome sacrifice…

Here, are aeons later met -

The very ones who fought the fight -

Here to speak of pacts of peace

With our Foe? Can we ever cease

To combat Dark with golden Light?

The war on Evil is never won

Thereto our preachers ever go.

Better distrust the Devil we know

Not trust this one! There, I’m done.”

Cheers and jeers rang out for both;

Sly Kennet saw his golden chance

And took an equi-distant stance

Sought compromise and thence the growth

Of his insidious influence.

He swiftly held his hand aloft

And with a voice persuasive, soft

He spoke with growing confidence;

- “Mighty God, Good Company,

Two Greats of Heaven have we now heard.

Whose reasoning shall be preferred?

With both Archangels I agree…

In disagree in equal measure…”

He paused as many a nodding head

Confirmed the truth of what he said

- “So let us seek a precious treasure,

Smooth elixir of water and oil

- The hopes of Peter, the fears of Michael -

That we may break the vicious cycle

Of sin and torture, death and toil,

That Earth might be a Paradise

And Hell a flower-strewn museum,

A cemetery, a mausoleum

Where lie old purgatives of Vice.

Old spirits here on Heaven’s books

May stay amongst us if they choose,

Or come and go, for none would lose

If Glory shines in all the nooks

In every place which God has made,

On mountain, beach, on verdant meadow,

Where tides and streams and rivers flow,

In every wood and every glade!

Lucifer has sworn an oath

(*And here he held aloft his page*)

- Let us begin a Second Age

And hold him to his written troth

But…(*to swelling discontent)*

For Lucifer to gain admission

He must agree to precondition

To show that what he wrote, he meant.

His followers should be hostages

Held prisoner on some planet hard

- Angel throngs could be their guard -

And should he sin, no vestiges

Of them, his men, should be preserved.

Let Lucifer, once here, be shackled,

His horny hands be manacled

And let his freeing be deserved!

When that blue jewel of Your Creation

Around Your golden light, the sun,

Ten thousand times her course has run,

Should be the term of his probation.”

And when he sat a sullen silence

Was broken by some single cheers

Till there was ringing in his ears

Many shouts of acquiescence,

Till God spake out and all paid heed;

- “It breaks Our Heart that rife do teem

Such imperfections in Our Scheme.

If We could root out every weed

Which chokes the lovely blooms We wrought,

The thistles in the thoughts of men,

Banish sin, begin again

What should a minor risk purport?

If that motley band of Satan’s allies

Were banished furthestmost from here

What insurrection should we fear?

For here wells none, we must surmise…

Archangel Michael! Our Bravest Hero!

We understand your fulmination

You it was in culmination

Of our affray disarmed the Foe;

Who should more than you protest

Lord Lucifer restored to see?

To keep him under lock and key

Of all Peers you would be the best.

Your guard shall now be fifty more,

The strongest, cleverest in Heaven

And in thy charge shall he be shriven

This disobedient Lucifer!

We have spoken, congregation,

Let no-one doubt Our made-up mind

Announce Our Will to every kind

That shall be whole Our great Creation!

Michael! Take your band straightway

And quench the steaming hobs of Hell.

Thyself in person go and tell

That Demon what he must obey.

Set out the terms of his release

And take his soldiers into exile,

Curtail the fate of sinners vile;

Make every further torment cease.”

All praising God, then all withdrew

And Michael gathered all around

His comrades old, and newly found,

And down to them this challenge threw:

- “Soldiery! A great task ours!

Forthwith are we to fly to Hell

And Satan’s brash rebellion quell

And fetter his infernal powers;

All souls that in his fires he fries

All precincts, pools and tools of pain

All offices of his domain,

Atrocities he did devise,

Shall we inter in alabaster

And seed fresh soil with meadowsweet

Let in God’s light, God’s gentle heat

And bring that demon to our Master!

Swift through Heaven the news had spread

And crowds of souls had soon assembled

And with their cheers the palace trembled

As Michael on his mission sped.

Through open gates he led his host

And soo,n in clouds, a storm he tamed

And loud to quaking men proclaimed

To nether and to uppermost

- “Riddling Man, wrapped up in thine,

Too blinded by thy daily need

Too minded on thyself, thy greed

For trifles, hear a Truth Divine!

Love the Earth and love thy brother

Praise the Lord for all thou hast

Share His fruits, His Bounty vast

And care and comfort one another.

I am come to say a solemn end

To sin and suffering there below

To stop thy wretched overflow

To lakes of Hell where all men tend.

Trespassers now shall all be banished

Unto the orb which rises there

Yon silver queen with craters bare.”

And, with a thunderclap, he vanished.

Many fell and just as many ran

And many stood and stared amazed

Save one - a tax-evader - unfazed

Laughed and said – “Behold what Man

Can do with his technology!

What holograms he can invent,

And-”

- “This mocking man will not repent!

Now ever shall he banished be!”

When all looked round, all wondered where

That man had gone, for in his place

Was nothing, not one single trace,

Just shoes of ass skin, smoking pair.

- “There! Regard the shivering moon!”

And each did crane a fearful neck

Until they saw a tiny speck,

Extinguished like a sea-maroon.

- “In exile shall he ever stand

And stare upon the wondrous Earth,

The emerald womb of Adam’s birth,

Her sapphire waves which wash the land.”

And the people broke the granaries

To share their blessed bread abroad,

Broke armouries with weapons stored,

Broke down all their boundaries

Discarded all abominations,

All tokens of their magpie thieving,

And, rejoicing, in the Lord believing,

Eschewed all false denominations.

Encouraged, on Saint Peter flew

And more determined, set his brow,

For Satan would be watching now;

His wily ways too well he knew.

What authority must he command,

What rhetoric must he create,

The Will of God to clearly state,

To make the Devil understand

What commitment God expected,

What promises he must fulfil

That ten millennia would pass until

His change of heart would be accepted.

Then in that canyon did he alight

And to all the waiting, wailing queue

Cried - “Amnesty I bring for you!

To purgatory is booked your flight

There shall you expiate your sins -

Some for decades, some for centuries -

Till every spirit radiant, pure is

Before your eternal life begins!”

And all the sinners fell to crying

In great relief, in gratitude

And soon the milling multitude

On shafts of golden light were flying.

And taking up his mighty spear,

With fury great Saint Michael tore

And threw away the ancient door

And shouted – “Lucifer, come here!”

And from the smoky, misty mire

A great black cloud, a spurting plume,

The smoke from furnaces of doom

Towards Saint Michael billowed higher,

And swelling, did his face engulf;

To him at once there did appear

With jet-black eyes and twisted sneer

Satan’s massive head of wolf,

And appalling, galling breath did breathe.

But Michael stood and did not flinch

Did not retreat one single inch,

Though inwardly his gorge did seethe.

-“Thy plea is granted,” he muttered low.

“Now this inferno thou shalt quit

And there below in place of it

Tall fragrant flowers will ever grow.

Now hear the terms of thy parole:

Within my sovereign custody

Shackled shall remain thy body.

Ten thousand years shall be the toll

Which thou must pay to make amends;

And while thou dost, upon the moon

Thy dissipated, dread, platoon

Shall serve as hostages, thy friends.

And shouldst thou once again transgress,

Then thou wouldst ever in a cell

Linger till the great stars fell,

And, dwelt within yon Emptiness,

Would perpetually thy comrades float,

And scream unheard that they would die

Rather than be cast awry

In the dungeon dark of Space remote.

They would pay eternal forfeit,

Shouldst thou scorn the Holy Law

And on Goodness make unholy war,

Of preening pride show any surfeit…”

His coal eyes gleamed alight with glee

- “Ten thousand years is slight probation

Compared to Ever in damnation.

To all God’s terms shall I agree!”

And with a wicked razor claw

He cut his thumb and signed with blood

The bull to prove he understood

That sin henceforth he would no more.

Michael blew and dried the cross,

So that his breath blew in his face,

To show the Foe his proper place

And that this freedom meant, its loss.

His warty hand grabbed Michael’s hand,

But Michael drew his own away,

Disgusted and was swift to say

- “Satan, thou shouldst understand

That I shall ever be thy warder,

And like yon kestrel ever watch thee

Of thy shackles twist, in spite, the key;

Of thy every deed shall be recorder;

Thou shalt never whisper naughty word,

Make grimace, sneer behind thy sleeve,

Each tic of thine shall I perceive……

This Hell by thee shall be preferred,

….At least thou hadst thy privacy

And there imposed thy wanton will,

Deployed thy own perverted skill,

To punish men’s impiety.”

Satan smiled. –“Great Michael, listen,

I intend to prove you wrong

I too in Heaven still belong

And shall regain my old position

And serve with God’s great trusty few,

His Inner Court, and implement

His policies and complement

The loyal Gabriel, Peter…You.”

Saint Michael scanned his ruby face

For any sign of sly dissembling,

Then bid his angel troops, assembling,

To lead him shackled from that place.

And turning then did draw his sword,

Mightier than a lightening flash,

And smote Hell’s smoking piles to ash

And buried all the cursèd horde.

And the devil’s every dire dragoon

Who stood in awe of Michael’s deed

Were put to work and sowed the seed,

Then marched away to plague the moon.

And Michael drew his sword once more

Hell’s dome, the canyon floor, he rent

Till light and rain through every vent

Upon the underworld did pour.

He saw thin loops and threads of green

Throughout the ash begin to spread

Bathed in light and rain there shed,

The first that Hell had ever seen.

And satisfied that all was well

That in this pit God’s works abounded,

That here His new Estate was founded,

The Saint pronounced an end to Hell.

Then he bounded up and out and found

His soldiers milling round the Foe,

Who towered above two angels low

Who with a clanking, hammering sound,

Were Satan’s ankles fettering;

And as they watched, in cooling rain

Regrew the devil’s golden mane

And downy-plumed each leathern wing,

His lupine snout, in snarling set,

And goaty horns began to shrink,

And fade away his sulphur stink

And turned to blue his eyes of jet.

His fiery glow began to fade,

His twisted, arrowed tail did go;

From cloven hooves of indigo

A pair of perfect feet was made.

And all, astonished, must concur

(And he, by rainy pools not least

Where he, upon himself, could feast)

How beautiful was Lucifer.

And seeing also in all eyes

Of admiration, gleaming proof,

His ancient gaze of one aloof

Itself began to realise

In glancing, dancing eyes superb

And gracious, warm, embracing smile

Bestowed with such a winning style.

And this did Michael much disturb.

-“LUCIFER!” - And all were shocked,

Looked up to see their master stride

And almost with their charge collide,

Till both in searching stares were locked.

Lucifer beamed with eyes of sapphire

Outsparkling Michael’s eyes of grey,

Which, earnest, would not look away

And returned that gaze of glittering fire.

Till slowly Lucifer looked up

Did close his jewel eyes and say,

Sighing - “Ah, such a precious day!

Now runneth over Heaven’s cup

Which with this rain doth me baptise!

I am to what I was restored!

I am thankful to the bounteous Lord!

I raise in praise my grateful eyes!

I” -

- “Lucifer!”

- And he looked down

Unsmiling now, at Michael square;

One stared with unremitting stare;

One frowned with unremitting frown.

- “Lucifer, you gave your word….

Have sworn that you would cast aside

All sinful vanity and pride…”

- “Aye, Michael, it would be absurd

To leave that lair where I was cast,

Escape again to light and air

To rain and hues of sunset fair,

To shimmering stars in night-pools vast,

To put this - and - Ah! Heaven all at risk -

No! My euphoria you misconstrue

To see my beauty born anew

In Heaven’s showers, fresh and brisk,

My joy at God’s munificence

Overwhelms me, *not* my beauty.”

- “Do not think you can deceive me

You admire your own magnificence.

I read your meanings perfectly,

Chiming on your silver tongue -”

- “Lord Michael! No! You do me wrong!

I am in earnest. Please, please believe me!”

And Lucifer, lucid, gazed about him.

- “I see God’s Amber in the West

Flow molten through a cloudy crest

And seep beyond the canyon rim…

And a galleon moon, set silver sail

To catch the fading breeze of light,

To ride the eastern tides of night

Amidst the starry breakers pale….

How many years have passed since I,

An angel in my first estate,

Watched in wonder, watched elate

And saw the charm of such a sky?”

Then he looked in Michael’s eyes direct,

And lowering his crystal voice

Said – “Michael, it was not your choice

My wanèd star to resurrect.

You spoke agin me. Who spoke for me?

Whose rhetoric did Him convince

To raise again this fallen Prince

To Cloisters of Eternity?”

And Michael sought to look beyond

This seeming curiosity,

And his eyes, for some monstrosity

Of purpose in his question, conned.

Why should Lucifer so wonder

About the dealings in God’s Senate,

Speeches by him, by Peter, by Kennet,

Which almost rent the House asunder?

Kennet was a star arising

Within the Parliament of Heaven.

(By what ambition was he driven?

What position was he prizing?)

- “Why do you now so hesitate?”

- “Why do you now require to know?”

- “Did Peter speak for me? Yes or no?”

- “Why is this of import great?”

- “Tell me!”

-“No!”

- “So, is curiosity”

A greater wrong, a greater sin

Than that which simmers now within

Your narrow heart, of…….. jealousy?”

And in this word the serpent’s hiss

Seethed upon his teeth and lips.

He placed his hands upon his hips

And seemed to pout a tiny kiss.

- “Me? Jealous?”

Sod then dared to smile

To see the ire on Michael’s brow

- “Who looks the ruddy angel now?”

Yet Michael calmed his boiling bile

And smiled a smile as his reply

- “Take care Satan!”

- “No, Lucifer,

As Lord Lucifer to me refer…”

Then Michael looked him in the eye…

- “Ah, yes, my noble prisoner,

Yet, as your gaoler should I be jealous?

Forgive if I am overzealous

And Prisoner’s name on you confer!”

- “Forgive me if I strayed, Great Michael”,

Said he with insolent irony

- “I obeyed a questing urge in me,

Which wondered whether it might rankle

That your great advice by God was spurned…

But surely more than two of you

Spoke out? Can no-one present tell me who

It was, who weighty matters turned

In favour mine? Who it was who better plead

Their case than great Saint Michael could,

Who nipped his reasons in their bud

And won the day for me instead?”

One foolish angel – “Kennet!” - shouted,

And Michael smote his head in wrath.

- “Temper! Gaoler! This angel doth

Tell nought but truth, this boy you clouted…

What? Is honesty a sin…or virtue?”

- “I remind you….Prisoner…. that I decide

If you are guilty. Control your pride.

Your taunting casuistry shall not hurt you,

But those” - *(now gazing at the moon)*

- “Who rely upon your wise discretion.

Shall I teach your insolence a lesson

And hurl one comrade, yours, past Neptune?”

At which the devil seized his chance

To show these troops what loyalty,

(*So cheaply proved, on bending knee*)

Great leaders’ men should them advance.

-“Great Lord!” - cried he, with hands a-wringing,

(With one eye set on the little knots,

Of angels wiping bloody clots

From their comrade’s nose, and comfort bringing)

“Spare my soldiers! Shrive their master!

If I have sinned, then wind these screws

Tight, as tight as you may choose,

To my sinews sore, fast and faster.

Yet before these witnesses I swear….”

(*And again those angel-knots adressed*)

“….That I have tried my very best

From pride and vanity to forebear.”

(*Did one nod?)* Satan, smiling, hung his head

And stretched his arms aloft to pray,

Begged loud that none be flung astray

On his account, of those he led.

- “I know that I shall hurt to walk,

That manacled shall be each wrist;

I am sorry if you take my jist

All wrong…Shall I, really, hurt to talk??”

Michael felt that glances sullen

Were falling on his wingèd shoulders.

He leapt astride two massive boulders,

Had Satan gagged and said, crestfallen

- “I sense now what I had mighty feared

In this straightforward breast of mine.

This angel has a wit malign,

Cunning more rampant than Peter’s beard!

His tongue darts quicker than any snake

And his it was in Eden’s glade

Which hissed of fruit which God forbade

And led Adam to his first mistake.

He ever oozes wit and charm,

Misuses beauty to thence seduce

The quite Unwary, Unwise, Obtuse,

And disarms them ere he does them harm.

From thee, cadet, whom I did smite

A name I would not breathe, he drew.

The Why, should not be cause for you.

To keep it secret was my right,

For reasons which I shall not share.

Your oaths to God and me were sworn…

Now if your loyalties be torn

Twixt Us and him, you SHALL declare!

For I will not brook or bear dissent.

I know this weasel – Oh look, how hurt he seems,

With eyes uprolled to starry streams! -

On devious, demonic ways is bent.

Than me this fiend is cleverer

The cleverest of all God’s host!

To the wiles must every ear be closed

Of this calculating prisoner,

Or he will lead you swift astray.

This is an order. You WILL ignore him.

Say nothing to him. Do nothing for him

Without my say. YOU WILL OBEY.

Our task is now to stay alert

Ten thousand years, and keep him tied

Until is pierced his selfish pride;

Let nothing our great task pervert!

If we can see this matter through,

Until his self-regard has gone

Then God’s great Dream for everyone

And everything there is, comes true!”

By torchlight now, he made them swear,

Each one in turn unto his face

New oaths, and did each one embrace

And blessed the one whom, unaware,

The Beast had tricked with clever ploys…

But Satan sensed he had sown a seed

Which might spring up, a foul weed,

In him or fellow hobbledehoys.

The night span on. The moon descended,

Through fields of dark cleaved down the Plough;

Till crops of light on yonder brow

Glowed high, and higher, as night’s power ended.

- “Now make ready!” Saint Michael cried.

“There, Heaven’s gates will soon appear.

Bring the prisoner amidst these here,

Behind me steer, to left and right!”

And rosy-lipped, the Sorceress,

Sweet Dawn, from eastern pillows rising,

As flock of swans this host disguising,

Drew them high to God’s recess,

High Heaven, great cathedral Dome,

Spanning all of Time and Space,

The Citadel of God’s good race,

Wherein they make eternal home,

Built by God’s creative Might,

All star-lit in its western realm,

All sun-lit at its eastern helm,

Which steers the day to shores of night!

What throngs of souls, a thousand deep,

Of heads a seething sea in swell,

To see the creature brought from Hell,

A patient watch for him did keep.

And when the Gates swung back at last

And, manacled, he hobbled through,

And for those crowds came into view,

Of sighs, across this ocean vast,

Swept breezes in astonishment,

At Lucifer, his stately stature,

Sturdy, lithe, leonine creature,

Of Beauty, superb accomplishment;

His gag, on beard of golden silk,

Gave him such a roguish air,

And, with golden mane and ringlets fair,

Made swoon some souls of weaker ilk.

Saint Michael and Saint Peter saw

With misgiving what effects he wrought;

The former said – “You little thought,

When you stood up and argued for

This monster’s rehabilitation,

His features would regain their glory.

And now what end shall have our story?

I tell you now. Annihilation….”

Before Great Peter could reply,

Saint Michael moved to Satan’s side,

Yet Peter to his Peer replied

-“Shall you the will of God defy?”

This Satan heard…

They walked unto

The Hall where God in anxious wait

Sat on his marbled Throne of State,

And cried – “His manacles undo!

That he might sign a solemn Pledge

All rivalry to Us foreswear,

And ever fond allegiance bear,

To enjoy celestial privilege.

But if this solemn Pledge he breaks,

Within Our Midst he stirs dissent,

Then all Our Mighty Anger pent,

Greater than all oceans, seas and lakes,

Shall wash him into darkest regions

Of Our Cosmos, Universe colossal,

There to spin and float and jostle

And sink with his rebellious legions.

Sign thy name! And never then

Pretend to more than what thou art,

Love Us with a steadfast heart

And never, ever sin again!”

And Lucifer with eyes in flame

Took up in craggy hand the plume,

And looking once around the room

With great panache wrote down his name.

And all this while Saint Michael stared,

A harrier above his prey,

To see if he might give away

Some secret confidence he shared,

Some understanding prearranged,

With any in his near surround;

And at the forefront Kennet found,

With an air of unconcern, estranged

From any look of Lucifer.

As Satan’s head moved to and fro

Acknowledging all those he did know

Yet never once in Kennet’s quarter

Did his sly and brilliant eyes alight.

This, with a shudder, Michael saw

And, sudden, did his task abhor,

Whose fair result he now deemed slight.

Then God bade all around applaud,

And as they did, with mighty claps,

He had the gag around those chaps

Removed at once, and then implored

Lucifer to give accounts

Of what had caused his change of heart

And he, with seeming lack of art

(*Though, with unseeming, large amounts*)

The ranks of Heaven thus adressed.

- “When all the World was bright and new

And pristine in its every hue,

When God did every speck invest

With form and colour, some with life,

Then all created things rejoiced

Their very joy at being voiced,

Then where was rivalry and strife?

The waters sang on rocks and shingle,

The winds went whistling and gave the bird

The sweetest music ever heard

- Alone excelled when lovers mingle! -

Though every speck had ample space

And yet to thrive must each consume

Some other speck, hence filled with doom,

Was each example of its race.

In angels, men, and beasts and trees,

This basic rule of life obtains,

In seas, in forests, rivers, plains,

Life thrives on life’s insolvencies.

Is Sin within the weft inwoven,

The very fabric of the World,

Essential when our Master hurled,

His matter bounteous, leavened, proven?

Yet if God is pure, is matter pure.

Is Evil born of material conflict,

Where atoms by gravity inflict

Themselves on others, and so endure?

And I within my bloom of youth

Seethed too with energy and zest

And with this startling beauty blessed

Bore out that universal truth,

That matter will itself assert.

Yet must be subject to the Mind,

When forged in holy Angelkind

And not the Angel Soul pervert.

In talon, sabre-tooth, and beak,

Matter blindly serves the drive

Of animals to stay alive,

No evil-doing there does wreak.

I erred. For I could not control

This mighty urge, on me conferred,

And in this vessel pride was stirred,

Which poisoned my immortal soul.

A million years deprived of light,

Contoured by vile conceits and vices,

Which pride in weaker minds entices,

Disgusted me, the very sight

Of sinners beset with souls distorted,

Dissembling and dissident,

Depraved and disobedient

Reminded me, as they contorted

And buckled in their agony,

With blabber mouths and bulging eyes,

With lolling tongues and stench of sties,

What claws of sin had wrought of me.

Then sure in thought, mature in mind,

A messenger to God I sent

To tell my fresh and good intent

To leave my brutish hell behind.”

Now God in his beneficence

Beamed down on Lucifer again,

Till all who watched could not refrain

From praising God’s Magnificence.

Save Michael, who through teeth clenched tight

Said - “Aye, thy sweet and harping tongue

Shall charm and soothe with harping song

And hide thy descant thoughts of spite…”

- “Saint Michael! Archangel!” God exclaimed,

We must extend Our gratitude

That you have brought a devil rude

And have him for Our host reclaimed!

Now yonder beacon brighter burns,

Of the eastern moon. And stars at west,

With diamond brilliance more are blessed!

Of Our gifts prodigal, a son returns!

Let Heaven sing in celebration,

Let orchestras ring royal tunes

That all planets, all their spinning moons,

Shall echo to Our exultation!”

Then Michael kneeled before the throne

Said – “Sire! These unforeseen events

To many minds bring weighty portents.

We would have a word. Alone.”

And God took up His fiery mace,

Proclaimed his Inner Circle should

Remain while all the lesser would

In thankful joy depart the place.

Then Michael, heart as full as seas,

Turned and said with voice in tremble

-“Forsooth, doth Lucifer dissemble!

His serpent tongue finds ever ease

In promises, in eloquence;

Before we came, like flails of spite,

His words and eyes with barbs of spite

Belaboured me in insolence-”

- “Your antipathy is famed

For Lucifer, and also his for you…

The final combat where you two

Fought shall ever more be framed

In my mind in sheer ferocity,”

Said Peter. “We should not be shocked

That both in enmity are locked..

And, Michael your impetuosity…..”

And, as if to prove this very truth

A marble pillar Michael slammed

And cried – “Antipathy be damned!”

And shocked all with his speech uncouth.

And in the silence which ensued

Michael stared in Kennet’s face

And said – “I sense within this place

Some foul conspiracy is brewed…”

- “Conspiracy?” - cried Peter – “You jest!

And yet your ire shows you in earnest…

Michael, Michael, whatever ghost discernest

Thou is invisible to me and all the rest!”

Some laughter made his visage burn;

From Kennet’s leer he thought it came,

And calling Kennet out by name

He stared at him with aspect stern.

Yet Kennet smiled and coolly bowed

And said – “Lord Michael we admire

Your honesty, your righteous ire

Your urge to air your thought aloud,

Your loyalty, your care, your fear

That evil may be on the prowl,

That smiles have hidden aspects foul…

Yet a seeming may be quite sincere -”

- “Sincere?” - said Michael – “Sincere, you say?

Thy tongue should rot to say that word -”

- “Saint Michael! Your calumny absurd

Shall I ignore…but what, pray

Makes you so accuse me?”

- “You spake for him, in his defence”

- “I spoke for compromise -”

- “What nonsense!”

- “Almighty God, he does abuse me!”

- “We excuse your ire, your mighty passion,

For you do love Us here the most

Of any in Our sacred host;

Your fiery words make such confession.

But this ardour only just exceeds

The hate you feel for Lucifer.

To cooler heads must I defer;

Brave Saint! Be wary! Hatred breeds

A race of fancies. Without the sire

Of Reason all are waifs and strays

With whom no gentler infant plays;

Who kindles loathings, plays with fire!”

- “Aye, Lord.” - And here he raised his face

To stare at Glory as near he dare -

- “I wish that I had arms to spare

To fight for You and your pure race….

I am mistaken…Lord Kennett, here, your hand….

With doubt have I been overwrought…

You spoke your mind and never sought

Advantage.”

- “Michael, I understand

And thank you. Let us now be friends;

I cannot hide my admiration

Nor any here their approbation

For one who thus his Lord defends.”

And all the Senate with single voice

For Michael’s constancy gave praise,

And many eyes with tears did glaze

For this mighty heart, untrimmed by poise.

And God said – “Michael you know We must,

For a chance to heal Our great divide,

Stop the wind and turn the tide

Of history. And, Michael We must trust,

Must trust as much as you must doubt.

Watch Lucifer, We know you will.

We trust you to. Such trust shall fill

Any void which hollows out

Of misgiving as We contemplate

If Mephistopheles is genuine

In sloughing off his serpent skin

For the glory of Our great Estate.

Michael, watch him. Con his ways

With every new day, more and more.

Hear his words. But We implore,

Bring evidence that Satan strays.”

As all departed, called Michael

His lieutenant, and whispered low

- “Mark that fellow and follow

Him. That shallow Kennet. Mark him well.”

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After five milennia Saint Peter said

- “What joy is now! We fly with pleasure

To Earth and wander all at leisure,

By lakes by raging torrents fed,

Through woods which cling to mountain sides

Through villages where people sip

A heady wine of fellowship,

Where everyone at peace resides

And no-one hungers, no-one craves;

Yet in dangerous landscapes, never still,

In transient fortune, good and ill

Where fields may fill with grapes, or graves,

Whence souls from decay are resurrected

To alabaster’s cool perfection,

Where of pain and sorrow is no conception

For ever.

Or, such stasis may be rejected

To walk once more wherever one will

And heartily, bodily pleasures feel,

As well as torments, sharp and real,

And the senses virtuously fulfil

Without excess. Or see bright bowers

Of a museum where souls underwent

Agonies, who would not repent,

Now in oblivion drowned by flowers.

What a Genius, our Mighty Lord,

Who has tamed the wilful breast of Man!

And Lucifer, erstwhile Satan!

For here he sits, his virtue assured

By the guards of Michael vigilant,

Surrounded by the cherubim

Who love to sit and sing with him,

As he plucks his lyre strings brilliant,

Still shackled by terms of his probation,

Yet ever cheerful, ever blithe

Content within his beauty lithe

To see in smiles its confirmation.”

And Kennet said – “Your words are wise.

The gates which once you did patrol

Stand ever open and every soul

May choose ever blue, or clouding, skies.

May feel the burn of waspish stings,

And then their gentle, cool relief,

Or the plangent agony of grief,

Yet the certain joy of future meetings

With lovers who are lying dead,

Both sweet memories or resurgent passions

To please in varied, urgent fashions,

To still the trembling loved one’s bed.

Ah! The joy of fleeting pain!

The fleeting joy of ecstasy!

Yet the bliss of calm Eternity

Within the balm of God’s domain!

Could any universe this one excel?

What other worlds, a multitude

So varied in their pulchritude,

Where never may a mortal dwell,

Teem in this Divine Creation

With beasts and plants astonishing!

Now never needs admonishing

Any soul for depredation.”

- “How perfect is this Imperfection!

This blend, variety of being!”

Saint Peter turned, elated, seeing

That Lucifer laughed in his direction.

He was putting his silver lyre aside

And rubbing where the shackles gripped,

(He grimaced as they turned and slipped)

And said, as he the gates decried,

- “I could not help but overhear”

(And as he spoke a guard made notes)

“To what joys now Man himself devotes

Beyond these gates! Thereto shall I also steer

A gleeful course when I am free,

And in body feel the sun and rain

And tender loving hands again,

Then, in spirit, turn in ecstasy

To Home from earthly holiday,

To bask in God’s eternal Beam

Of love and mercy. Oh how I dream

As every minute ticks away.

Five millennia have I sat

And must sit now five millennia more,

Deprived of all that I adore;

And yet I did agree to that!”

- And he smiled at Peter a smile so huge

That his heart, his tender heart did melt

And only his chafing suffering felt

And did not suspect a subterfuge.

Kennet saw and said – “Lord, a word.”

And drawing Peter swift aside

Said – “Should Lucifer in chains abide

When he is cured of sin? Absurd!

Should we not now demand the key

And ease these chains and shackles off

Which have now chastised him long enough,

And walk with him in gardens - free?”

And Peter stared at Lucifer

As sweet cherubs on the cheek he kissed

And, theatrically, did turn his wrist

To rub relief in ankles sore.

In Peter’s eye a tear did start

To witness such a touching scene

Which determined him to intervene

To draw a watching guard apart,

Instructing him to fetch the key.

- “Lord Michael holds the key you seek.”

He replied with manner mild and meek.

- “Then go and summon him to me!”

When Michael came he had been told

By his lieutenant, his special guard,

What in the garden had transpired,

And was wondering what might unfold.

Then straight did Peter turn and say

- “Saint Michael, we would have him freed

For we believe that he has need

Of relief from chafes without delay.”

- “Indeed! By whose authority

Should this prisoner be unbound?

Your summons doth me most astound,

As if it came by God’s decree!”

- “Saint Michael, what would be the harm

Of giving Lucifer respite

From shackles screwed on limbs too tight,

Would a little easing cause alarm?”

- “A little walk, a little easing

A little freedom, a little more

Till gradually shall we restore

To the Beast all rights, do all his pleasing!”

- “Saint Michael! You do exceed your power

These words are too intemperate.

The key! Or else you may regret

This display of pique and temper sour!”

Their argument had drawn a crowd

So then Lord Kennet intervened

And pointing at the shackled fiend

Said – “When shall he then be allowed

To have of liberty a little taste?

Shall five millennia pass till he

Of all these dire restraints is free?

On what logic is such cruelty based?”

Saint Michael looked at Kennet hard

And felt within a fury rise

He could not stem, for Kennet’s eyes

Were mocking him. He shouted – “Guard!

Put this Kennet under arrest!”

At which the crowd, now many strong,

To which Kennet’s allies did belong

Milled around in great unrest.

Straight Michael went to Lucifer

Who rubbed his legs, all innocence,

Smarting with the pain intense,

And to his face said – “Prisoner,

Foul Poisoner of all that’s good

I know what cunning game you play,

That over Kennet you hold sway

To split the Angel brotherhood!

Saint Peter, would that you could see

Through my eyes Satan’s purposes!

His ploys and his conspiracies

You miss through your credulity.

- “Michael! What monstrous lack of tact!

Him of treason you accuse,

Me of foolishness. You abuse

And exceed your powers, without one fact

To prove what you assert and claim!”

And followed by the noisy throng

They hurried off, convictions strong

That God the other saint would blame.

- “God!” said Michael – “You gave me charge

Of Lucifer, to watch him close

And ever mark what words he chose

Which slyest schemes might camouflage.

This have I done five thousand years

So faithfully at your request;

Now Peter, at his friend’s behest,

Against our orders interferes

And tries to have the Fiend released,

To take him for a little stroll,

As if he might be on parole,

In truth feels sorry for the Beast…”

- “Sire! Michael much exaggerates.

This was a thought of common decency

And never one of leniency,

For on Lucifer each shackle grates.

Is this confinement? Or is it torture?”

(And many in the crowd applauded.)

- “What Kennet said has been recorded

For him I demand forfeiture

Of rights and freedoms in this realm…

Read, Majesty, of his sedition

To undermine my grave position

And all precautions overwhelm.”

Now several in the crowd were jeering

But fell silent while the Lord now read.

When He had finished Kennet said

- “Majesty, I crave a hearing!

That I was overcome with pity

To see Lucifer with cherub singing

Lovely lays through gardens ringing

I do not deny, for I am guilty!

With pure compassion you have filled me

And I ask if it be reasonable

To deem sweet pity treasonable,

Sweet spring you have instilled in me?

Great God of mercy. Now I crave

Forgiveness for this weakest lapse!

May Heaven’s walls on me collapse

If I am numbered Satan’s slave!

I thought, and great Saint Peter too,

That centuries without transgression

Made pointless such another session

And that respite might be overdue.

But I was wrong…”

- “No, you were right!”

Said Peter in a mighty passion

- “Who could deem as sin compassion,

Inspired by such a moving sight….

There Lucifer entertaining, teaching

With lyre tones each holy hymn

To sing God’s praises, cherubim,

Fair conduct from them all beseeching?”

- “Peter, you are a mighty fool!”

And every listener gasped to hear

One angel so insult his peer

And looked for God to overrule.

Now Gabriel, who had never spoken,

Slowly to his feet did rise

And gazing round with kindly eyes

Said – “Verily, my heart is broken

To see such Greats in ire wrangle

When we have known such peace of mind

Midst angels, souls and human kind.

May my calm thought this knot untangle…

It was I who went so long ago

To tell a maid how she would bear

A son, a part of Yahweh, there

Who would on men such love bestow,

Compassion for his sinning way

Yet anger for the whispering snake;

All links in history would He break

And proclaim the dawning of a day

When the sin is hateful not the sinner…

Peter, you err when you believe

The Devil is cured. You are naïve.

Michael, you err, for at your inner

You seethe with hatred unremitting;

In five millennia shall he be freed;

Perhaps ere then there will be need

To test what liberty might bring.

If a prisoner is not exposed

To temptations of his wicked past

How shall we know his vow might last,

That his Sovereign, Sin, has been deposed?

And if the sin is expiated

And still the sinner hangs in chains

What sense in purgatory remains?

Might virtue then become frustrated?”

(And the crowd applauded Gabriel.)

- “Let cool compassion rule instead…..

Now have I done. My mind is said.”

And then a mighty hammer fell.

- “We told you Michael, when you came

With news of crime, to bring Us proof

That still he walks on cloven hoof….

To Us this goat you caught seems lame,

Like Lucifer, it barely limps.

Does Kennet play a double game?

What is his real master’s name?

Is he lieutenant to a million imps

Who hide behind the pillars here?”

And laughter echoed through the palace

Tinged with ridicule and malice,

Anathema to Michael’s ear.

- “Lord Kennet! You exceed your powers,

For one whole year shall be expelled;

From you, Peter, shall be withheld

Access to Lucifer, for as many hours

As you fail to vow all interceding

Shall ever more be made for him.

Henceforth on lyre mere cherubim

Shall Lucifer with airs be leading.

Michael, you were precipitate

In leaping to a false conclusion.

If we think that change is all illusion

In Lucifer, then let us put

Him on yonder orb with all his crew

And blast it to the farthest arm

Of this great All, from way of harm.

Michael, I have faith in you,

But put suspicions in their place;

Eyes may excel in their dissembling,

The honest eyes of Truth resembling,

Yet sometimes we must trust the face.

Lucifer once a week shall walk

Around the gardens with his guard

Henceforth his chains shall chafe less hard…

….And with promenaders may he talk….”

Then Michael cried in loudest voice

- “Despite these verdicts all is clear

Whose counsel You prefer to hear…

Now am I left with little choice

But to resign this weighty task of mine.”

So saying, drew his shining blade

And on the lowest step it laid

And did his shaggy head incline.

And though a heaving throng stood there

Not one single sound was heard.

This silence showed that all concurred

On the import that his speech did bear.

- “Is this how Our love should be repaid?”

Said God now, barely murmuring.

“Is this how you should treat your King

Who you to mighty consort made?”

- “I tell You, Lord, he is foul at heart.

Have him brought and fix Your gaze,

All-seeing eyes of sinful ways,

Until You see he plays a part!”

- “What shall be have We decided.

Michael, still We claim to be

More omniscient than thee!

By your retort We feel derided!

Once We banished Lucifer

For pride and show of vile ambition.

Cantankerous pride is your condition,

Which you in every word aver.

Gabriel! To you I charge

The care of Lucifer from now

And you with judging powers endow,

To chain or let him roam at large.”

- “Oh misery!” Saint Michael groaned.

- “How durst thou question Our decision!

And if thou sharest not Our vision

Be now by Me and Mine disowned!”

Without a word then Michael turned

And a bobbling sea of heads gave way

As he crossed their passage in dismay

And with fuels of shame and anger burned.

In his eyes were welling tears of gall

And pillars melted there like brooks

As he left the throne to wondrous looks

Of those not born at Satan’s Fall.

*Apologize! God would forgive! -*

His braking thoughts were urging now…

But his striding pride would not allow;

- *Never, as long as I may live!*

He turned once more at Peter’s gate

Of faces saw a silent sea

Stare wide in incredulity.

And left for ever God’s estate.

And against the sky of sapphire blue

Past rosy clouds, gold-hemmed by sun,

On swan-white wings, of virtue spun,

Down to waning earth he flew,

Descending in a mountain wood

With only streams for company

And took for anonymity

A simple form in flesh and blood,

Until by death he would be blessed.

Of immortality he had tired

And nothing less than peace desired

Within oblivion’s dark at rest.

Sly Lucifer had waited long.

At last Saint Michael’s star had waned!

He calculated what might be gained,

Beguiling Gabriel with his song.

This latter saint began with vigour;

When Lucifer had leave to stroll

He could not suborn a single soul

For Gabriel dogged his steps with rigour.

But there came a year when Lucifer

By dint of clever, winning ways,

By languid, innocent displays

Was appointed Heaven’s gardener.

Though ever close his guards stood by,

Monotony had dulled their edge.

He then began to take advantage

By whispering his comments wry…

- “If a being be omniscient

His nose scents all there is to know..

So knows he here what seeds I sow

And what shall grow, to what extent?

Ah, what a know-all, nosy God!”

And all the cherubs laughed and hooted

As Lucifer, leaping, leather-booted

Upon his seedbeds danced and trod.

Soon one soul had made complaints

That a cherub of known urbanity

Had uttered some profanity

And cast off his polite constraints.

Saint Michael’s stern lieutenant loyal

Approached his new Lord, Gabriel

And of these matters all did tell

Yet instantly did he recoil.

- “This is nothing! Cherubim err.

I have often watched and am content

His time with them is not misspent

This is no fault of Lucifer.

These fears as groundless, false I find

Which in thy heart have been aroused.

To Michael’s cause wert thou espoused.

Henceforth shalt thou be reassigned.”

And when Saint Michael’s trusty aide

To new perversions drew attention

He was taken straight in close detention,

On charge that he had disobeyed.

And as he stared between the bars

Lord Kennet passing, stopped and smirked

And making sure no soldier lurked

He pointedly gazed up at Mars

Then found the rising moon and said,

- “Soon these two shall be aligned,

Mars and moon; whence those confined

Shall victors in these precincts tread…”

The lieutenant lustily did shout

Of boils of treachery soon to burst

That heaven’s citizenry was cursed,

That imps of hell would soon break out!

Soldiers came, then Gabriel

Who, patient, heard him out and said

That he was feverish, should be bled,

That he of groundless fears did yell.

When days then weeks without event

Passed into months and then a year

And insurgency did not appear

No soul to this their credence lent.

But Lucifer had plotted well;

This calm he turned to his fiendish cause

And often drew a hushed applause

For whispered schemes dreamt up in hell:

….”Why dost thou show thy stamp collection

To this fair soul who nods her head

Politely? I’d wager much, instead

She’d rather see….thy firm….erection….

….If I were ruler here (and not the least!)

Much altered then would be thy heaven…

Much more like Earth, for I would leaven

Its flatness with a seething yeast!

….Dost thou forget strong tastes of wine

Its warmth as it trickles down thy throat?

To boredom, swiftest antidote?

….Feel yet, in heaven, a tingling spine!

If all the saved are yet immortal

Can swap sublunacy for the sublime

Feel the real or ethereal at any time

What is the point of heaven’s portal?

Let all as ancient gods carouse

Creating freaks for entertainment,

In such variety with no arraignment

From a god whose ire should nought arouse!

For god should bless not criticize

The sports which any might invent

Which stifling codes would circumvent…

Free your minds from heaven’s spies,

To produce what monsters any will!

And if pain or catastrophe ensue

Our powers strong would sure undo

The impact of the grossest ill!

What excitement! What a joy!

What times of sheer hilarity!

In heaven’s insularity

A host of sports that never cloy!”

Lucifer sensed exactly who

He could beguile with naughty thoughts,

These dreams of endless, mindless sports,

And to whom such chaos was taboo.

Kennet had smuggled him a list

Of those who had stayed in Purgatory

The longest fired to purity

The ones who such could least resist.

When he had scattered many a seed

In many a soul swelled rotten fruit;

And he noted thence with eye astute

Where special discontent did breed.

Gabriel woke and began to feel

A change in heaven. Some seemed bored

And loath to sing and praise their Lord,

Less happy with the commonweal.

So Gabriel broached his fears to God

And told him of environs tense

Which he in every nook could sense.

To which many angels there did nod.

God knew that Satan was to blame

And said – “Shall Evil now prevail?

Shall once again Our Purpose fail?

Shall this Creation end in shame?”

And Peter looked at Gabriel

And raised his eyes in wonderment.

-“Is this of All the fundament,

If heaven win the day or hell??”

- “Gabriel, We charge you now,

Put Satan under close arrest

Then shall We face the sternest test

Since Satan made his worthless vow.”

And wearily He raised His mace

To seal with light this great command

Yet held it with a shaking hand

And its fading almost showed His face.

Then Gabriel and Peter flew,

With guards marched in and fettered him

And with four uplifting every limb

The Fiend from gardens swift withdrew.

- “Too late!” He shouted laughing loud

Pointing to the rising moon

- “Soon from there a great typhoon

Shall sweep away your master proud!

My soldiers even now break free

Led by him of Michael’s guard,

By his mistreatment schooled and scarred,

To swear fidelity to me!

A liquor of sweet fruits I gave

Which from my garden I did brew

To intoxicate his retinue

And turn each slaver into slave!

My trusty knights, my dire brigade,

Relish now a fight gainst good;

The bitter seething in their blood

By sweet revenge shall be allayed.”

His captors let him down and stared

All anxious at the rising moon,

Shining like a great doubloon

And watched with loathing how there fared

From craters, bleak and dark-rimmed eyes,

Spiralling in fiendish vigour,

Ever blacker, ever bigger

Five columns each in line, like flies;

And as they watched the spirals split,

Three turned to heaven and two to Earth

And circling its ocean girth

Upon the darkening land they lit.

The buried armouries they found

And wrenching off their rusting locks

Removed their vicious, evil stocks

And then took off, to heaven bound.

Then Kennet came with renegades,

A thousand souls by Sod beguiled,

Held up his crooked hand and smiled…

- “Now we control these ways and glades!”

-“What treason, Kennet, dost thou intend?”

Shouted Peter, much aggrieved.

- “Of thy sword and office be relieved;

Enslaved, before thy Master bend!”

- “Never! Till all time be done!

O Michael! Now has Heaven need

Of thy bold heart to intercede

Ere Earth just one day more has spun!”

Now Satan spoke in darker tone,

His proper voice had he disguised,

- “Thou fool! Thou shouldst have realised

What great Saint Michael knew alone…

Ah, how I wish he were my ally,

Wiser than all this paltry host,

Than father, son and holy ghost…”

-“What sacrilege!” did Gabriel cry.

- “Be silent, meerest messenger!

What folly, thy philosophy!

To think thou couldst refashion…..Me!

Mephisto! Me, the Great Revenger!

Yet who is more naïve than all?

Who could not see beyond my ploys?

As innocent as callow boys

Who mouth his praise in choir stall!

The lord himself! I sense his might,

The fire, the light he owns have dwindled

Which now by me shall be rekindled!

What dark desires shall they requite!

And dreams forgotten, at dawn suppressed,

Queer visions of a world, half-lit,

Where gurning beasts of fancy flit,

Shall all appear at my behest!

Peculiars shall I incorporate,

Strange thoughts which souls desire and dread,

Shall tumble out from drunken head,

What chimeras shall I soon create!”

And as he spoke, in every square,

His serfs, sharp-winged, began to land

With all their wicked contraband

And soon were milling everywhere,

Whooping, firing rounds in glee,

Disarming old Saint Michael’s squad,

Mocking, vilifying God

Whose servants then began to flee.

Then Satan raised his hands aloft

And all fell silent in his gaze,

Whose beauty did all heaven amaze,

And in a voice full deep, but soft

Said – “All who hear Us must obey,

Now We are here sole Sovereign,

Our dynasty shall here begin

When We ascend the throne this day!

And when We own that mighty seat

Whence universal power doth flow

We shall repay the vows we owe

To make the universe complete,

Of Our Conception, of Our Desire

With other instruments than those

Whence oafs did fawning hymns compose…”

And taking up an ancient lyre

He dashed it into smithereens;

His imp brought him a violin

And a jolly jig he did begin

And ever faster played till scenes

Of helpless souls in reels cavorting

Were rife in heaven’s holy precincts

In touch with earthy, baser instincts

The calmer, higher mind aborting.

And when at last he stopped they fell

And all in squirming heaps were strewn,

Squealing for another tune,

Completely under Satan’s spell.

- “There will be time enough for songs

More stirring all than this poor one!

When the boring god of gloom has gone

And I hold sway with heaven’s throngs!”

And followed by his loyal band

And dancing crowds, forthwith he flew

And scattered far the loyal few

Who stayed in vain for God’s command.

He shoved the cedar doors apart

And looked towards the shining throne

Where, faded more, God sat alone

Slumping with a heavy heart;

And raising clumsily His mace

He pointed it at Lucifer,

But this did nothing him deter

And staring at His ancient face

Said – “God you must concede defeat!

For even if you use your lance

To send Us to the dark expanse

Of space, you see how souls do greet

Reforms which only We can make.

All yearn deep down for joy and pleasure;

You offer them in smaller measure

Than they desire. Your great mistake!

Men’s impulses are streams in spate,

Which morals dam but ne’er dissolve,

For of urgent stuff did all evolve.

Whose flaw is yours. Now abdicate!”

These final words rang out and hung

In the silence which received his speech;

And then, again, God’s hand did reach

To grip his mace, which fire flung.

But by a golden buckler shielded

He gave God back His angry light…

And when all looked again in fright

The throne was empty. God had yielded.

And laughing, Satan took his seat

And all astonished eyes surveyed.

Now was his long-planned conquest made!

And, arms aloft, he cried in heat

- “Let every soul its flesh regain

And never more let pleasures cloy!

Let life, our mistress give us joy!

Be ever banished guilt and pain!”

And God’s imperial mace he brandished

Yet no confirming light shone out

No matter how the Fiend might shout,

How often then he whined and wished.

And then **- a Voice** - more terrifying

A Voice no soul had heard before

Louder than storm and ocean roar

Sent all the fickle spirits flying.

- “O Fiend! O Man, his fiendish kind

That thought they might subvert Our Might

And then to Evil bend Our Light

Know now what issues from Our Mind:

A creature pure, unflawed, We seek;

This newest one had been the best

So We put it to this stringent test:

Could Good survive its Source grown weak?

Were souls in heaven, of sinning shriven,

From Evil’s overtures immune?

Could they resist its jangling tune,

When by Our good biddings none were driven?

Would obedience hear a weary Master?

Would well-schooled ears shut Evil out?

Yet, We knew, We knew without a doubt

That all would end in this disaster!

A curse on matter!! It is sin incarnate!

If matter be, then sin must be!

All atoms seek supremacy,

In matter sin resides, innate!

And yet…Our task as great Creator,

As Shaker of eternal dice

Makes Us seek a Paradise

Of this paradox of Saint and Traitor…

For matter freed is ever flying

From Our moulding Hand to liberty

Asserts itself and will be free

Our laws obeying…Our Law defying!

How can Satan be debarred?

For when We blow old ash to coals

He burns there, later too in souls;

So starts each Cosmos evil-starred!

Now this one, evil-starred, must end,

It is broken and can never mend.”

The captive throne where Satan sat

Began to glow blue hot, vibrate.

And when he knew his burning fate

At God these words of fury spat,

- “In every bloom, in every seed,

In every breeze, in every brook,

In every lip, in eye, in look,

Sin and poison shall I breed!” -

And saying this, his flesh caught fire

His eyes flowed silver down his chest

And in a blackened, swirling void the rest

Of him went down entire.

And then the throne turned molten gold

And surged around a rent in space,

Which in its spinning grew apace,

As deep in heaven thunder rolled.

The East turned indigo, nigh black,

The western rim a crimson hue,

Which a piercing, orange eye peered through

Till all at once a livid crack

Of lightning split the firmament

Whence spilt a shoal of stars like rain,

And when the storm-lash cracked again

The moon, cut free, in swift descent

Crashing, crushed her mother sleeping,

Her Earth, whose seas in steaming mist

And boiling clouds the Alchemist

Drove off to space with lavas seeping;

Cross continents great fires spread

The scorch went deep and deeper still

And burned into her heart until

All that boiled was molten lead;

And then the very sun, that eye

More reddened now, began to spark

And at its midst a purple dark

Began to spread and fill the sky,

Against which souls as white as shrouds

Fell down in prayer and sorely wept

As heaven by great quakes was swept

And deluged by Earth’s fleeing clouds;

Statues, fountains, columns fell,

White marble cracked and turned to dust

As everywhere through riven crust

Flames leapt from a reforming hell.

Each saint and demon, man and soul,

All beasts of every ilk and form

Were caught up in the whirling Storm,

Hurled, howling, in the spinning Hole;

And then the smouldering rocks and gas,

The planets, all the galaxies,

Arrested in their wayward sprees….

Till utter darkness came to pass….

In Utter Darkness God then slumbered

His longest sleep and never dreamt.

Not one atom of His last attempt

The void beyond Himself encumbered.

On His couch, the rippling universe,

Tightly wrapped, He never stirred,

No light leaked out, no whisper heard,

No single mite escaped His Purse.

The Night that kept Him had no borne…

Then all at once a silver chink,

His waking eye, began to blink.

New stuff began His loins to spawn…

Its inception had awoken Him.

Changed slightly were its formulae,

Less sprightly strained at Gravity

And burned less brightly, rim to rim.

God marked the change and deemed it good;

Ere long new galaxies were swarming

Wherein hot sapphire stars were forming,

A blue and lustrous sisterhood.

And surveying all that He had wrought,

He picked the coolest of them all,

And, gathering dust, He let it fall

And set its circling years at nought.

Till on their several paths, bright spheres,

Glowing white with golden tails,

Like galleons with fullest sails,

Had crossed their star a billion years.

He moved one to a farther ring,

The largest world, which then with ice

He pelted till a paradise

Was endowed with every lovely thing

Which into being He could dream;

Into streams and oceans glittering fish,

Of all colours in His Mind, did wish,

What birds and beasts did He esteem

To complement each emerald wood!

This planet was a perfect place,

So vast that none could fill its space

With their own kind. God deemed this good.

He had fashioned no carnivorous beast,

No fly, no flea, no parasite,

Corrupting things with Satan’s spite,

Not in mightiest, not in least.

In a violet East the blue star rose

And, caped in silver, swift she sped.

At her fierce breath the rainclouds fled

And when she set the mountains froze.

God visited a forest deep,

And from Himself He made a man

Then after him a kindly woman

And whispered laws which they must keep:

To love Himself and love each other

To educate and love their offspring

To respect the lives of everything,

Hold sacrosanct their spinning mother…..

Who span one juicy, luscious fruit,

Yellow-skinned, akin to pear,

Which grew in wild abundance there.

Yet its scented flesh would all pollute;

This golden fruit must they never taste

For if they did and disobeyed

Their lives serene would be dismayed

And all their children be disgraced.

This fruit should never be consumed

And if they took one tiny bite

A thirst or hunger to requite

Their lovely race would all be doomed.

They vowed to God and vowed to tell

All their sons and daughters each

That they should never strain to reach

Those fruits which high in trees did swell.

For in the forest did abound

All proper fruits which they could eat;

And never did they yearn for meat

Of bird or beast or fish they found.

The man and woman loved to lie

And always in great joy they mated,

Were never of each other sated

As golden days and nights raced by.

With their many children in the wood

They came across the thriving tree.

They made them stoop and bend a knee

And promise that they understood

These golden fruits to never try,

No matter how their scent might please;

To ascend these tall, forbidden trees

And eat would make the eater die.

They slept beneath the canopy

And their youngest watched its boughs, entranced,

As in breezes and in moonlight danced

Of sunny fruits, a panoply.

And one fell by his couch so near

Its perfume caused his head to spin

That a hunger welling up within

Might overcome his tutored fear.

But he stilled his hand and went to sleep

And dreamt of a golden, singing bird,

One he had never seen or heard

Which round his drowsy head did creep.

It whistled in his ear so sweet;

And then it stretched, all golden plumed

And pecking, of that fruit consumed,

And brought him some, in beak, to eat.

And when he woke it was in his hand

And in his mouth a juicy bite,

Quickening his appetite,

The very fruit which God had banned.

The broken vow could not be mended.

Here sin begins again, God saw.

And, cackling now, like any daw,

The golden bird, turned red, ascended.

**GENESIS**

i

Nothing. Not even is there pregnant space;

And is locked away whatever shall be;

Yet might not ever be. There, not a trace

Of substance may allay this nullity.

Light might never shine on flickery shade,

No stars their fiery boundaries define;

Around them nor are bounding planets made,

There is no winding tight nor long decline

Of Time; no tick, once struck, of endless Time,

No measure; dimensionless to gauge

Is Nothing. No whispering, no echo, no rhyme

Has Nothing.

May God this Pointlessness assuage?

ii

God stirs. The Universe emerges

From His loins; chaotic, formless, dark;

God moves and blows and thence there surges

A Light aflame from kindling spark

And all the fleeing stars take fire

That their spinning worlds see Night and Day;

Some seas and firmaments acquire

Of fish and birds a vast array,

And their continents with creatures teem,

Of all degrees in size and kind;

When God surveys His wondrous Scheme

It pleases His inventive Mind.

iii

And seizing worlds with care inspects

Of the numberless, the gaseous, one terrestrial orb,

And as He cons it God reflects

What hosts of things it may absorb;

For it is fabulous. Great mountains roar

A lava gold; its whirling clouds and polar caps

Storm indigo, or are white with storm in store;

It swirls blue with sea which silver laps

At sandy beaches bound by bands of green,

Astir with creatures painted every hue;

Their shapes enchant His gazing eye serene,

All that His miraculous shades imbue.

iv

Yet no beastly eye appreciates

The Genius of His mighty hands

Nor the wonders of His great Estates;

To be the steward of these lands

To understand that He, Creator

Had made all Heaven and Earth entire,

He craves a sentient spectator,

Who will stare and all these works admire.

And from a mound of darkest soil

He makes a man and thence a female

To cherish Eden and not despoil

The beauty of His verdant Vale.

v

They saw and all those sunlit groves admired;

The myriads of leaf, of flower, of bird,

And walked together lithe and unattired;

In naked loins were swelling passions stirred

Till, lying clinging in a clearing bright

Beneath a bower of trees and Heaven’s blue

Each did the other’s longings soft requite

Till with his seed did Adam Eve imbue.

Upon their loving union God had smiled

On delights which thrive on burning, urgent skin

And envisaged Eve full-rounded, filled with child

To found a race of beings free of Sin.

vi

And when they woke a moon had risen high

And in the dappled cool did they embrace

Till from a stream they heard a whispered sigh

And thought they saw a faun depart the place.

The faun, transformed, became His Watchful Eyes.

Which had lingered, seeing Adam join with Eve

Who now rose to hide away from forest spies

In bracken which their trembling hands did cleave;

And came upon a moonlight silvered tree

Whence golden fruits erotically did pend

And seemed to promise luscious ecstasy.

So through its boughs did Adam swift ascend.

vii

God spoke to Adam as he stretched his hand

- “The fruit you pick shall brew in you dismay;

To taste its juice would let you understand

My Laws; and cause your very death this day.”

And Adam clambered down and looked afraid;

To disobey the Lord he had not meant;

He looked around the golden, dawnlit glade,

Bejeweled with dew, and saw the whole extent,

Of disobeying God, the awful cost;

The warming sun and crystal, quickening air,

This precious gem of Life would all be lost;

Yet he tasted in his mouth a dry despair.

viii

And straight he drew his lovely Eve to him

And gently stroked her lustrous, sable head,

Caressed and kissed each dark and fragrant limb

And told her quietly what the Lord had said.

Her widening eyes grew wild and filled with awe

As she imagined both the consequence and taste

Of such a fruit consumed beyond God’s law

And gripping Adam’s hand made off in haste.

Yet berries, nuts and fruits which God had given

Soon to Eve seemed barely half as sweet

And from her breast was all contentment driven

And the honey-scented fruit she yearned to eat.

ix

She felt the breath of God wherever they stood

And as they lay in love, His staring eye;

So she beckoned Adam deeper in the wood

Denser, where in bushes they might lie;

And as they crept Eve stopped and raised a hand

And pointed out a new forbidden tree,

Much taller than the first, with contraband

Of bounteous fruit, bewildering to see.

And as they gaped they fell beneath its spell

Which Adam was the first, alarmed, to break

And dragging Eve away he found a dell

And there within a couch of leaves did make.

x

And there they slept beneath the soaring moon

By choirs of sapphire stars which God had swept

To shimmer in her pool, a vast lagoon;

And from a distance silent vigil kept.

The night flowed on and then the moon descended;

Eve’s dreaming eyes were flickering like leaves

And in her dream – of leaves – a serpent wended

And whispered in her ear – “God’s word deceives!

He told you not to eat of nut or seed

Or fruit which grows upon or falls from any tree!

So does nothing grow in Eden you might need?

Is there nothing here to eat for him and thee?”

xi

“How can this be? Art thou a simpleton?”

And Eve began to mutter in her dream

- “Of fruits we may not eat there is but one,

Yon amber fruit does Adam poisoned deem…”

- “Does Adam deem?? God did not forewarn thee!

Art thou sure if Adam tells the truth or lies?

Is God or Adam thy authority?

To eat that delicious fruit would make thee wise

And rival God…”

- “But it would bring us death!”

- “A jealous God has tricked thee with this terror.

Do not despair of thy immortal breath.

Eat and thou shalt instant see thy error!”

xii

When Eve awoke a shimmering sun had risen

And lighted up those golden, brimming boughs.

She recalled the dream, the serpent’s hissed derision

And thought - “We merely do as God allows!

This God who follows us where’er we go-

I would be free to follow my own mind…

And to know what God alone reserves to know…

I hate this God! The bane of humankind!”

And bold she went, left Adam, sleeping still,

And found that tree which flourished in her thought

And watched as one twig did its kingpin spill

Which holding out one trembling hand, she caught.

xiii

And as she did she broke its puckered skin

And exposed the yellow, glistening flesh beneath,

Whose fragrance caused her youthful head to spin

And in her urgent blood desire to seethe.

In sudden anguish she flung the fruit away

Yet, instinctively, she licked her dripping hand

And all the other fruits were earth and clay

Compared to this, the fruit which God had banned.

And frantically she found the fruit again

Which tender to her longing lips did draw

Whereupon it left a scarlet stain….

At every bite she desired to taste it more.

xiv

Then thinking of her Adam back she flew

And held the fruit half-eaten by his head

Its giddy scent God’s warning did undo

And he ate thereof. But then awoke in dread

Was this the very fruit that God forbade?

This awful thought sang round and round his mind;

When Eve confirmed his fears it drove him mad,

And he spat it out, the juice, the flesh and rind.

In shame they clothed with leaves their nakedness,

From a breeze, which chill had sprung, now were they hidden

But to the breeze, the voice of God, must Eve confess

She had done just as the wily snake had bidden.

xv

Though Adam blamed his Eve did God curse all,

He deemed the snake and him as much to blame;

That slinking coil in dust He made to crawl

That its hatchlings Woman’s children stood to maim

And so the snake’s might bite hers on the heel;

And Eve would bear her offspring in distress

And gripping pain in pregnancy would feel

And subject to man would live in abjectness.

He turned to Adam and bade him watch the soil

Which now in drought all writhed with thorn and weed;

To whence he sprang would he return to toil

To eke what meagre grains his kin might feed.

xvi

Back to the soil would his sinful kin be borne

When breath their mortal bodies left at last.

Now he and Eve a wandering race would spawn

To discover of the world its canyons vast,

To turn to use what elements God created,

Whence they could smelt their weapons and their tools,

Whence hooks and traps ingenious could be baited,

Whence fruit of vines could turn the wise to fools,

And wander ever further from their Source

In every land find new experience

And follow hence the river’s snaking course.

And thrive a while in disobedience.

**ADAM**

God needed one to love and praise his doing

To gaze at heaven whence shone his starred elation

To be dazed, amazed on Earth at his construing,

At the manifest, the wealth of his creation.

He bent thereto his zest, each element,

Atoms of fang and thorn and scorpion tail

All scattered in his mystic soil he spent,

Invested in Adam that he, of all, prevail.

And gave to him the holy gift of Mind

And urged him to obedience of his laws;

Although a work of furies, be inclined

To master them and meld them to God’s Cause.

Yet flawed was all the stuff that made his limbs

In sharpness and in thrusting built to sting,

Distracted by his lusts and dreams and whims,

Was ill-designed to do God’s great designing.

For not enough of trust did he possess;

All far out-pawed by curiosity,

He bit forbidden fruit in wilfulness

And dreamt conceits of foul monstrosity

Perceived, believed that he might wear God’s crown,

Command the Earth to yield the wealth he prized

All secrets, formulae to his renown

Which lesser fames and forms than him despised.

Amassing more than he should ever need

Or wish, and never with his owning satisfied;

And paying to his higher mind no heed

Fell victim to his foolish greed, and died.