

Paradise Lost, Book 2

By John Milton

1 High on a throne of royal state, which far  
Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,  
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand  
Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,  
Satan exalted sat, by merit raised  
To that bad eminence; and, from despair  
Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aspires  
Beyond thus high, insatiate to pursue  
Vain war with Heaven; and, by success untaught,  
10 His proud imaginations thus displayed:—  
“Powers and Dominions, Deities of Heaven!—  
For, since no deep within her gulf can hold  
Immortal vigour, though oppressed and fallen,  
I give not Heaven for lost: from this descent  
Celestial Virtues rising will appear  
More glorious and more dread than from no fall,  
And trust themselves to fear no second fate!—  
Me though just right, and the fixed laws of Heaven,  
Did first create your leader—next, free choice  
20 With what besides in council or in fight  
Hath been achieved of merit—yet this loss,  
Thus far at least recovered, hath much more  
Established in a safe, unenvied throne,  
Yielded with full consent. The happier state  
In Heaven, which follows dignity, might draw  
Envy from each inferior; but who here  
Will envy whom the highest place exposes  
Foremost to stand against the Thunderer’s aim  
Your bulwark, and condemns to greatest share  
30 Of endless pain? Where there is, then, no good  
For which to strive, no strife can grow up there  
From faction: for none sure will claim in Hell  
Precedence; none whose portion is so small  
Of present pain that with ambitious mind  
Will covet more! With this advantage, then,  
To union, and firm faith, and firm accord,  
More than can be in Heaven, we now return

To claim our just inheritance of old,  
Surer to prosper than prosperity  
40 Could have assured us; and by what best way,  
Whether of open war or covert guile,  
We now debate. Who can advise may speak.”

He ceased; and next him Moloch, sceptred king,  
Stood up—the strongest and the fiercest Spirit  
That fought in Heaven, now fiercer by despair.  
His trust was with th’ Eternal to be deemed  
Equal in strength, and rather than be less  
Cared not to be at all; with that care lost  
Went all his fear: of God, or Hell, or worse,  
50 He recked not, and these words thereafter spake:—

“My sentence is for open war. Of wiles,  
More unexpert, I boast not: them let those  
Contrive who need, or when they need; not now.  
For, while they sit contriving, shall the rest—  
Millions that stand in arms, and longing wait  
The signal to ascend—sit lingering here,  
Heaven’s fugitives, and for their dwelling-place  
Accept this dark opprobrious den of shame,  
60 The prison of his tyranny who reigns  
By our delay? No! let us rather choose,  
Armed with Hell-flames and fury, all at once  
O’er Heaven’s high towers to force resistless way,  
Turning our tortures into horrid arms  
Against the Torturer; when, to meet the noise  
Of his almighty engine, he shall hear  
Infernal thunder, and, for lightning, see  
Black fire and horror shot with equal rage  
Among his Angels, and his throne itself  
70 Mixed with Tartarean sulphur and strange fire,  
His own invented torments. But perhaps  
The way seems difficult, and steep to scale  
With upright wing against a higher foe!  
Let such bethink them, if the sleepy drench  
Of that forgetful lake benumb not still,  
That in our proper motion we ascend  
Up to our native seat; descent and fall  
To us is adverse. Who but felt of late,

When the fierce foe hung on our broken rear  
80 Insulting, and pursued us through the Deep,  
With what compulsion and laborious flight  
We sunk thus low? Th' ascent is easy, then;  
Th' event is feared! Should we again provoke  
Our stronger, some worse way his wrath may find  
To our destruction, if there be in Hell  
Fear to be worse destroyed! What can be worse  
Than to dwell here, driven out from bliss, condemned  
In this abhorred deep to utter woe!  
Where pain of unextinguishable fire  
90 Must exercise us without hope of end  
The vassals of his anger, when the scourge  
Inexorably, and the torturing hour,  
Calls us to penance? More destroyed than thus,  
We should be quite abolished, and expire.  
What fear we then? what doubt we to incense  
His utmost ire? which, to the height enraged,  
Will either quite consume us, and reduce  
To nothing this essential—happier far  
Than miserable to have eternal being!—  
100 Or, if our substance be indeed divine,  
And cannot cease to be, we are at worst  
On this side nothing; and by proof we feel  
Our power sufficient to disturb his Heaven,  
And with perpetual inroads to alarm,  
Though inaccessible, his fatal throne:  
Which, if not victory, is yet revenge.”

He ended frowning, and his look denounced  
Desperate revenge, and battle dangerous  
To less than gods. On th' other side up rose  
110 Belial, in act more graceful and humane.  
A fairer person lost not Heaven; he seemed  
For dignity composed, and high exploit.  
But all was false and hollow; though his tongue  
Dropped manna, and could make the worse appear  
The better reason, to perplex and dash  
Maturest counsels: for his thoughts were low—  
To vice industrious, but to nobler deeds  
Timorous and slothful. Yet he pleased the ear,

And with persuasive accent thus began:—

- 120 “I should be much for open war, O Peers,  
As not behind in hate, if what was urged  
Main reason to persuade immediate war  
Did not dissuade me most, and seem to cast  
Ominous conjecture on the whole success;  
When he who most excels in fact of arms,  
In what he counsels and in what excels  
Mistrustful, grounds his courage on despair  
And utter dissolution, as the scope  
Of all his aim, after some dire revenge.
- 130 First, what revenge? The towers of Heaven are filled  
With armed watch, that render all access  
Impregnable: oft on the bordering Deep  
Encamp their legions, or with obscure wing  
Scout far and wide into the realm of Night,  
Scorning surprise. Or, could we break our way  
By force, and at our heels all Hell should rise  
With blackest insurrection to confound  
Heaven’s purest light, yet our great Enemy,  
All incorruptible, would on his throne
- 140 Sit unpolluted, and th’ ethereal mould,  
Incapable of stain, would soon expel  
Her mischief, and purge off the baser fire,  
Victorious. Thus repulsed, our final hope  
Is flat despair: we must exasperate  
Th’ Almighty Victor to spend all his rage;  
And that must end us; that must be our cure—  
To be no more. Sad cure! for who would lose,  
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,  
Those thoughts that wander through eternity,
- 150 To perish rather, swallowed up and lost  
In the wide womb of uncreated Night,  
Devoid of sense and motion? And who knows,  
Let this be good, whether our angry Foe  
Can give it, or will ever? How he can  
Is doubtful; that he never will is sure.  
Will he, so wise, let loose at once his ire,  
Belike through impotence or unaware,  
To give his enemies their wish, and end

Them in his anger whom his anger saves  
160 To punish endless? “Wherefore cease we, then?”  
Say they who counsel war; “we are decreed,  
Reserved, and destined to eternal woe;  
Whatever doing, what can we suffer more,  
What can we suffer worse?” Is this, then, worst—  
Thus sitting, thus consulting, thus in arms?  
What when we fled amain, pursued and struck  
With Heaven’s afflicting thunder, and besought  
The Deep to shelter us? This Hell then seemed  
A refuge from those wounds. Or when we lay  
170 Chained on the burning lake? That sure was worse.  
What if the breath that kindled those grim fires,  
Awaked, should blow them into sevenfold rage,  
And plunge us in the flames; or from above  
Should intermitted vengeance arm again  
His red right hand to plague us? What if all  
Her stores were opened, and this firmament  
Of Hell should spout her cataracts of fire,  
Impendent horrors, threatening hideous fall  
One day upon our heads; while we perhaps,  
180 Designing or exhorting glorious war,  
Caught in a fiery tempest, shall be hurled,  
Each on his rock transfixed, the sport and prey  
Or racking whirlwinds, or for ever sunk  
Under yon boiling ocean, wrapt in chains,  
There to converse with everlasting groans,  
Unrespited, unpitied, unreprieved,  
Ages of hopeless end? This would be worse.  
War, therefore, open or concealed, alike  
My voice dissuades; for what can force or guile  
190 With him, or who deceive his mind, whose eye  
Views all things at one view? He from Heaven’s height  
All these our motions vain sees and derides,  
Not more almighty to resist our might  
Than wise to frustrate all our plots and wiles.  
Shall we, then, live thus vile—the race of Heaven  
Thus trampled, thus expelled, to suffer here  
Chains and these torments? Better these than worse,  
By my advice; since fate inevitable

Subdues us, and omnipotent decree,  
200 The Victor's will. To suffer, as to do,  
Our strength is equal; nor the law unjust  
That so ordains. This was at first resolved,  
If we were wise, against so great a foe  
Contending, and so doubtful what might fall.  
I laugh when those who at the spear are bold  
And venturous, if that fail them, shrink, and fear  
What yet they know must follow—to endure  
Exile, or ignominy, or bonds, or pain,  
The sentence of their Conqueror. This is now  
210 Our doom; which if we can sustain and bear,  
Our Supreme Foe in time may much remit  
His anger, and perhaps, thus far removed,  
Not mind us not offending, satisfied  
With what is punished; whence these raging fires  
Will slacken, if his breath stir not their flames.  
Our purer essence then will overcome  
Their noxious vapour; or, inured, not feel;  
Or, changed at length, and to the place conformed  
In temper and in nature, will receive  
220 Familiar the fierce heat; and, void of pain,  
This horror will grow mild, this darkness light;  
Besides what hope the never-ending flight  
Of future days may bring, what chance, what change  
Worth waiting—since our present lot appears  
For happy though but ill, for ill not worst,  
If we procure not to ourselves more woe.”

Thus Belial, with words clothed in reason's garb,  
Counselled ignoble ease and peaceful sloth,  
Not peace; and after him thus Mammon spake:—

230 “Either to disenthroned the King of Heaven  
We war, if war be best, or to regain  
Our own right lost. Him to unthroned we then  
May hope, when everlasting Fate shall yield  
To fickle Chance, and Chaos judge the strife.  
The former, vain to hope, argues as vain  
The latter; for what place can be for us  
Within Heaven's bound, unless Heaven's Lord supreme  
We overpower? Suppose he should relent

240 And publish grace to all, on promise made  
Of new subjection; with what eyes could we  
Stand in his presence humble, and receive  
Strict laws imposed, to celebrate his throne  
With warbled hymns, and to his Godhead sing  
Forced hallelujahs, while he lordly sits  
Our envied sovereign, and his altar breathes  
Ambrosial odours and ambrosial flowers,  
Our servile offerings? This must be our task  
In Heaven, this our delight. How wearisome  
250 Eternity so spent in worship paid  
To whom we hate! Let us not then pursue,  
By force impossible, by leave obtained  
Unacceptable, though in Heaven, our state  
Of splendid vassalage; but rather seek  
Our own good from ourselves, and from our own  
Live to ourselves, though in this vast recess,  
Free and to none accountable, preferring  
Hard liberty before the easy yoke  
Of servile pomp. Our greatness will appear  
260 Then most conspicuous when great things of small,  
Useful of hurtful, prosperous of adverse,  
We can create, and in what place so'er  
Thrive under evil, and work ease out of pain  
Through labour and endurance. This deep world  
Of darkness do we dread? How oft amidst  
Thick clouds and dark doth Heaven's all-ruling Sire  
Choose to reside, his glory unobscured,  
And with the majesty of darkness round  
Covers his throne, from whence deep thunders roar.  
270 Mustering their rage, and Heaven resembles Hell!  
As he our darkness, cannot we his light  
Imitate when we please? This desert soil  
Wants not her hidden lustre, gems and gold;  
Nor want we skill or art from whence to raise  
Magnificence; and what can Heaven show more?  
Our torments also may, in length of time,  
Become our elements, these piercing fires  
As soft as now severe, our temper changed  
Into their temper; which must needs remove

280 The sensible of pain. All things invite  
To peaceful counsels, and the settled state  
Of order, how in safety best we may  
Compose our present evils, with regard  
Of what we are and where, dismissing quite  
All thoughts of war. Ye have what I advise.”

He scarce had finished, when such murmur filled  
Th’ assembly as when hollow rocks retain  
The sound of blustering winds, which all night long  
Had roused the sea, now with hoarse cadence lull  
290 Seafaring men o’erwatched, whose bark by chance  
Or pinnace, anchors in a craggy bay  
After the tempest. Such applause was heard  
As Mammon ended, and his sentence pleased,  
Advising peace: for such another field  
They dreaded worse than Hell; so much the fear  
Of thunder and the sword of Michael  
Wrought still within them; and no less desire  
To found this nether empire, which might rise,  
By policy and long process of time,  
300 In emulation opposite to Heaven.  
Which when Beelzebub perceived—than whom,  
Satan except, none higher sat—with grave  
Aspect he rose, and in his rising seemed  
A pillar of state. Deep on his front engraven  
Deliberation sat, and public care;  
And princely counsel in his face yet shone,  
Majestic, though in ruin. Sage he stood  
With Atlantean shoulders, fit to bear  
The weight of mightiest monarchies; his look  
310 Drew audience and attention still as night  
Or summer’s noontide air, while thus he spake:—

“Thrones and Imperial Powers, Offspring of Heaven,  
Ethereal Virtues! or these titles now  
Must we renounce, and, changing style, be called  
Princes of Hell? for so the popular vote  
Inclines—here to continue, and build up here  
A growing empire; doubtless! while we dream,  
And know not that the King of Heaven hath doomed  
This place our dungeon, not our safe retreat



320 Beyond his potent arm, to live exempt  
From Heaven's high jurisdiction, in new league  
Banded against his throne, but to remain  
In strictest bondage, though thus far removed,  
Under th' inevitable curb, reserved  
His captive multitude. For he, to be sure,  
In height or depth, still first and last will reign  
Sole king, and of his kingdom lose no part  
By our revolt, but over Hell extend  
His empire, and with iron sceptre rule

330 Us here, as with his golden those in Heaven.  
What sit we then projecting peace and war?  
War hath determined us and foiled with loss  
Irreparable; terms of peace yet none  
Vouchsafed or sought; for what peace will be given  
To us enslaved, but custody severe,  
And stripes and arbitrary punishment  
Inflicted? and what peace can we return,  
But, to our power, hostility and hate,  
Untamed reluctance, and revenge, though slow,

340 Yet ever plotting how the Conqueror least  
May reap his conquest, and may least rejoice  
In doing what we most in suffering feel?  
Nor will occasion want, nor shall we need  
With dangerous expedition to invade  
Heaven, whose high walls fear no assault or siege,  
Or ambush from the Deep. What if we find  
Some easier enterprise? There is a place  
(If ancient and prophetic fame in Heaven  
Err not)—another World, the happy seat

350 Of some new race, called Man, about this time  
To be created like to us, though less  
In power and excellence, but favoured more  
Of him who rules above; so was his will  
Pronounced among the Gods, and by an oath  
That shook Heaven's whole circumference confirmed.  
Thither let us bend all our thoughts, to learn  
What creatures there inhabit, of what mould  
Or substance, how endued, and what their power  
And where their weakness: how attempted best,

360 By force or subtlety. Though Heaven be shut,  
And Heaven's high Arbitrator sit secure  
In his own strength, this place may lie exposed,  
The utmost border of his kingdom, left  
To their defence who hold it: here, perhaps,  
Some advantageous act may be achieved  
By sudden onset—either with Hell-fire  
To waste his whole creation, or possess  
All as our own, and drive, as we were driven,  
The puny habitants; or, if not drive,  
370 Seduce them to our party, that their God  
May prove their foe, and with repenting hand  
Abolish his own works. This would surpass  
Common revenge, and interrupt his joy  
In our confusion, and our joy upraise  
In his disturbance; when his darling sons,  
Hurled headlong to partake with us, shall curse  
Their frail original, and faded bliss—  
Faded so soon! Advise if this be worth  
Attempting, or to sit in darkness here  
380 Hatching vain empires.” Thus Beelzebub  
Pleaded his devilish counsel—first devised  
By Satan, and in part proposed: for whence,  
But from the author of all ill, could spring  
So deep a malice, to confound the race  
Of mankind in one root, and Earth with Hell  
To mingle and involve, done all to spite  
The great Creator? But their spite still serves  
His glory to augment. The bold design  
Pleased highly those infernal States, and joy  
390 Sparkled in all their eyes: with full assent  
They vote: whereat his speech he thus renews:—  
“Well have ye judged, well ended long debate,  
Synod of Gods, and, like to what ye are,  
Great things resolved, which from the lowest deep  
Will once more lift us up, in spite of fate,  
Nearer our ancient seat—perhaps in view  
Of those bright confines, whence, with neighbouring arms,  
And opportune excursion, we may chance  
Re-enter Heaven; or else in some mild zone

400 Dwell, not unvisited of Heaven's fair light,  
Secure, and at the brightening orient beam  
Purge off this gloom: the soft delicious air,  
To heal the scar of these corrosive fires,  
Shall breathe her balm. But, first, whom shall we send  
In search of this new World? whom shall we find  
Sufficient? who shall tempt with wandering feet  
The dark, unbottomed, infinite Abyss,  
And through the palpable obscure find out  
His uncouth way, or spread his airy flight,  
410 Upborne with indefatigable wings  
Over the vast abrupt, ere he arrive  
The happy Isle? What strength, what art, can then  
Suffice, or what evasion bear him safe,  
Through the strict senteries and stations thick  
Of Angels watching round? Here he had need  
All circumspection: and we now no less  
Choice in our suffrage; for on whom we send  
The weight of all, and our last hope, relies."

This said, he sat; and expectation held  
420 His look suspense, awaiting who appeared  
To second, or oppose, or undertake  
The perilous attempt. But all sat mute,  
Pondering the danger with deep thoughts; and each  
In other's countenance read his own dismay,  
Astonished. None among the choice and prime  
Of those Heaven-warring champions could be found  
So hardy as to proffer or accept,  
Alone, the dreadful voyage; till, at last,  
Satan, whom now transcendent glory raised  
430 Above his fellows, with monarchical pride  
Conscious of highest worth, unmoved thus spake:—

"O Progeny of Heaven! Empyrean Thrones!  
With reason hath deep silence and demur  
Seized us, though undismayed. Long is the way  
And hard, that out of Hell leads up to light.  
Our prison strong, this huge convex of fire,  
Outrageous to devour, immures us round  
Ninefold; and gates of burning adamant,  
Barred over us, prohibit all egress.

440 These passed, if any pass, the void profound  
Of unessential Night receives him next,  
Wide-gaping, and with utter loss of being  
Threatens him, plunged in that abortive gulf.  
If thence he scape, into whatever world,  
Or unknown region, what remains him less  
Than unknown dangers, and as hard escape?  
But I should ill become this throne, O Peers,  
And this imperial sovereignty, adorned  
With splendour, armed with power, if aught proposed  
450 And judged of public moment in the shape  
Of difficulty or danger, could deter  
Me from attempting. Wherefore do I assume  
These royalties, and not refuse to reign,  
Refusing to accept as great a share  
Of hazard as of honour, due alike  
To him who reigns, and so much to him due  
Of hazard more as he above the rest  
High honoured sits? Go, therefore, mighty Powers,  
Terror of Heaven, though fallen; intend at home,  
460 While here shall be our home, what best may ease  
The present misery, and render Hell  
More tolerable; if there be cure or charm  
To respite, or deceive, or slack the pain  
Of this ill mansion: intermit no watch  
Against a wakeful foe, while I abroad  
Through all the coasts of dark destruction seek  
Deliverance for us all. This enterprise  
None shall partake with me." Thus saying, rose  
The Monarch, and prevented all reply;  
470 Prudent lest, from his resolution raised,  
Others among the chief might offer now,  
Certain to be refused, what erst they feared,  
And, so refused, might in opinion stand  
His rivals, winning cheap the high repute  
Which he through hazard huge must earn. But they  
Dreaded not more th' adventure than his voice  
Forbidding; and at once with him they rose.  
Their rising all at once was as the sound  
Of thunder heard remote. Towards him they bend

480 With awful reverence prone, and as a God  
Extol him equal to the Highest in Heaven.  
Nor failed they to express how much they praised  
That for the general safety he despised  
His own: for neither do the Spirits damned  
Lose all their virtue; lest bad men should boast  
Their specious deeds on earth, which glory excites,  
Or close ambition varnished o'er with zeal.

Thus they their doubtful consultations dark  
Ended, rejoicing in their matchless Chief:  
490 As, when from mountain-tops the dusky clouds  
Ascending, while the north wind sleeps, o'erspread  
Heaven's cheerful face, the louring element  
Scowls o'er the darkened landscape snow or shower,  
If chance the radiant sun, with farewell sweet,  
Extend his evening beam, the fields revive,  
The birds their notes renew, and bleating herds  
Attest their joy, that hill and valley rings.  
O shame to men! Devil with devil damned  
Firm concord holds; men only disagree  
500 Of creatures rational, though under hope  
Of heavenly grace, and, God proclaiming peace,  
Yet live in hatred, enmity, and strife  
Among themselves, and levy cruel wars  
Wasting the earth, each other to destroy:  
As if (which might induce us to accord)  
Man had not hellish foes enow besides,  
That day and night for his destruction wait!

The Stygian council thus dissolved; and forth  
In order came the grand infernal Peers:  
510 Midst came their mighty Paramount, and seemed  
Alone th' antagonist of Heaven, nor less  
Than Hell's dread Emperor, with pomp supreme,  
And god-like imitated state: him round  
A globe of fiery Seraphim enclosed  
With bright emblazonry, and horrent arms.  
Then of their session ended they bid cry  
With trumpet's regal sound the great result:  
Toward the four winds four speedy Cherubim  
Put to their mouths the sounding alchemy,

520 By herald's voice explained; the hollow Abyss  
Heard far and wide, and all the host of Hell  
With deafening shout returned them loud acclaim.  
Thence more at ease their minds, and somewhat raised  
By false presumptuous hope, the ranged Powers  
Disband; and, wandering, each his several way  
Pursues, as inclination or sad choice  
Leads him perplexed, where he may likeliest find  
Truce to his restless thoughts, and entertain  
The irksome hours, till his great Chief return.

530 Part on the plain, or in the air sublime,  
Upon the wing or in swift race contend,  
As at th' Olympian games or Pythian fields;  
Part curb their fiery steeds, or shun the goal  
With rapid wheels, or fronted brigades form:  
As when, to warn proud cities, war appears  
Waged in the troubled sky, and armies rush  
To battle in the clouds; before each van  
Prick forth the airy knights, and couch their spears,  
Till thickest legions close; with feats of arms

540 From either end of heaven the welkin burns.  
Others, with vast Typhoean rage, more fell,  
Rend up both rocks and hills, and ride the air  
In whirlwind; Hell scarce holds the wild uproar:—  
As when Alcides, from Oechalia crowned  
With conquest, felt th' envenomed robe, and tore  
Through pain up by the roots Thessalian pines,  
And Lichas from the top of Oeta threw  
Into th' Euboic sea. Others, more mild,  
Retreated in a silent valley, sing

550 With notes angelical to many a harp  
Their own heroic deeds, and hapless fall  
By doom of battle, and complain that Fate  
Free Virtue should enthrall to Force or Chance.  
Their song was partial; but the harmony  
(What could it less when Spirits immortal sing?)  
Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment  
The thronging audience. In discourse more sweet  
(For Eloquence the Soul, Song charms the Sense)  
Others apart sat on a hill retired,

560 In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high  
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate—  
Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,  
And found no end, in wandering mazes lost.  
Of good and evil much they argued then,  
Of happiness and final misery,  
Passion and apathy, and glory and shame:  
Vain wisdom all, and false philosophy!—  
Yet, with a pleasing sorcery, could charm  
Pain for a while or anguish, and excite  
570 Fallacious hope, or arm th' obdured breast  
With stubborn patience as with triple steel.  
Another part, in squadrons and gross bands,  
On bold adventure to discover wide  
That dismal world, if any clime perhaps  
Might yield them easier habitation, bend  
Four ways their flying march, along the banks  
Of four infernal rivers, that disgorge  
Into the burning lake their baleful streams—  
Abhorred Styx, the flood of deadly hate;  
580 Sad Acheron of sorrow, black and deep;  
Cocytus, named of lamentation loud  
Heard on the rueful stream; fierce Phlegeton,  
Whose waves of torrent fire inflame with rage.  
Far off from these, a slow and silent stream,  
Lethe, the river of oblivion, rolls  
Her watery labyrinth, whereof who drinks  
Forthwith his former state and being forgets—  
Forgets both joy and grief, pleasure and pain.  
Beyond this flood a frozen continent  
590 Lies dark and wild, beat with perpetual storms  
Of whirlwind and dire hail, which on firm land  
Thaws not, but gathers heap, and ruin seems  
Of ancient pile; all else deep snow and ice,  
A gulf profound as that Serbonian bog  
Betwixt Damiata and Mount Casius old,  
Where armies whole have sunk: the parching air  
Burns froze, and cold performs th' effect of fire.  
Thither, by harpy-footed Furies haled,  
At certain revolutions all the damned

600 Are brought; and feel by turns the bitter change  
Of fierce extremes, extremes by change more fierce,  
From beds of raging fire to starve in ice  
Their soft ethereal warmth, and there to pine  
Immovable, infixed, and frozen round  
Periods of time,—thence hurried back to fire.  
They ferry over this Lethean sound  
Both to and fro, their sorrow to augment,  
And wish and struggle, as they pass, to reach  
The tempting stream, with one small drop to lose  
610 In sweet forgetfulness all pain and woe,  
All in one moment, and so near the brink;  
But Fate withstands, and, to oppose th' attempt,  
Medusa with Gorgonian terror guards  
The ford, and of itself the water flies  
All taste of living wight, as once it fled  
The lip of Tantalus. Thus roving on  
In confused march forlorn, th' adventurous bands,  
With shuddering horror pale, and eyes aghast,  
Viewed first their lamentable lot, and found  
620 No rest. Through many a dark and dreary vale  
They passed, and many a region dolorous,  
O'er many a frozen, many a fiery alp,  
Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death—  
A universe of death, which God by curse  
Created evil, for evil only good;  
Where all life dies, death lives, and Nature breeds,  
Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,  
Obominable, inutterable, and worse  
Than fables yet have feigned or fear conceived,  
630 Gorgons, and Hydras, and Chimeras dire.

Meanwhile the Adversary of God and Man,  
Satan, with thoughts inflamed of highest design,  
Puts on swift wings, and toward the gates of Hell  
Explores his solitary flight: sometimes

He scours the right hand coast, sometimes the left;  
Now shaves with level wing the deep, then soars  
Up to the fiery concave towering high.  
As when far off at sea a fleet descried  
Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial winds



640 Close sailing from Bengala, or the isles  
Of Ternate and Tidore, whence merchants bring  
Their spicy drugs; they on the trading flood,  
Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape,  
Ply stemming nightly toward the pole: so seemed  
Far off the flying Fiend. At last appear  
Hell-bounds, high reaching to the horrid roof,  
And thrice threefold the gates; three folds were brass,  
Three iron, three of adamantine rock,  
Impenetrable, impaled with circling fire,  
650 Yet unconsumed. Before the gates there sat  
On either side a formidable Shape.  
The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair,  
But ended foul in many a scaly fold,  
Voluminous and vast—a serpent armed  
With mortal sting. About her middle round  
A cry of Hell-hounds never-ceasing barked  
With wide Cerberean mouths full loud, and rung  
A hideous peal; yet, when they list, would creep,  
If aught disturbed their noise, into her womb,  
660 And kennel there; yet there still barked and howled  
Within unseen. Far less abhorred than these  
Vexed Scylla, bathing in the sea that parts  
Calabria from the hoarse Trinacrian shore;  
Nor uglier follow the night-hag, when, called  
In secret, riding through the air she comes,  
Lured with the smell of infant blood, to dance  
With Lapland witches, while the labouring moon  
Eclipses at their charms. The other Shape—  
If shape it might be called that shape had none  
670 Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb;  
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,  
For each seemed either—black it stood as Night,  
Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell,  
And shook a dreadful dart: what seemed his head  
The likeness of a kingly crown had on.  
Satan was now at hand, and from his seat  
The monster moving onward came as fast  
With horrid strides; Hell trembled as he strode.  
Th’ undaunted Fiend what this might be admired—

680 Admired, not feared (God and his Son except,  
Created thing naught valued he nor shunned),  
And with disdainful look thus first began:—

“Whence and what art thou, execrable Shape,  
That dar’st, though grim and terrible, advance  
Thy miscreated front athwart my way  
To yonder gates? Through them I mean to pass,  
That be assured, without leave asked of thee.  
Retire; or taste thy folly, and learn by proof,  
Hell-born, not to contend with Spirits of Heaven.”

690 To whom the Goblin, full of wrath, replied:—  
“Art thou that traitor Angel? art thou he,  
Who first broke peace in Heaven and faith, till then  
Unbroken, and in proud rebellious arms  
Drew after him the third part of Heaven’s sons,  
Conjured against the Highest—for which both thou  
And they, outcast from God, are here condemned  
To waste eternal days in woe and pain?  
And reckon’st thou thyself with Spirits of Heaven  
Hell-doomed, and breath’st defiance here and scorn,  
700 Where I reign king, and, to enrage thee more,  
Thy king and lord? Back to thy punishment,  
False fugitive; and to thy speed add wings,  
Lest with a whip of scorpions I pursue  
Thy lingering, or with one stroke of this dart  
Strange horror seize thee, and pangs unfelt before.”

So spake the grisly Terror, and in shape,  
So speaking and so threatening, grew tenfold,  
More dreadful and deform. On th’ other side,  
Incensed with indignation, Satan stood  
710 Unterrified, and like a comet burned,  
That fires the length of Ophiuchus huge  
In th’ arctic sky, and from his horrid hair  
Shakes pestilence and war. Each at the head  
Levelled his deadly aim; their fatal hands  
No second stroke intend; and such a frown  
Each cast at th’ other as when two black clouds,  
With heaven’s artillery fraught, came rattling on  
Over the Caspian,—then stand front to front

720 Hovering a space, till winds the signal blow  
To join their dark encounter in mid-air.  
So frowned the mighty combatants that Hell  
Grew darker at their frown; so matched they stood;  
For never but once more was wither like  
To meet so great a foe. And now great deeds  
Had been achieved, whereof all Hell had rung,  
Had not the snaky Sorceress, that sat  
Fast by Hell-gate and kept the fatal key,  
Risen, and with hideous outcry rushed between.

730 "O father, what intends thy hand," she cried,  
"Against thy only son? What fury, O son,  
Possesses thee to bend that mortal dart  
Against thy father's head? And know'st for whom?  
For him who sits above, and laughs the while  
At thee, ordained his drudge to execute  
Whate'er his wrath, which he calls justice, bids—  
His wrath, which one day will destroy ye both!"

She spake, and at her words the hellish Pest  
Forbore: then these to her Satan returned:—

740 "So strange thy outcry, and thy words so strange  
Thou interposest, that my sudden hand,  
Prevented, spares to tell thee yet by deeds  
What it intends, till first I know of thee  
What thing thou art, thus double-formed, and why,  
In this infernal vale first met, thou call'st  
Me father, and that phantasm call'st my son.  
I know thee not, nor ever saw till now  
Sight more detestable than him and thee."

T' whom thus the Portress of Hell-gate replied:—

750 "Hast thou forgot me, then; and do I seem  
Now in thine eye so foul?—once deemed so fair  
In Heaven, when at th' assembly, and in sight  
Of all the Seraphim with thee combined  
In bold conspiracy against Heaven's King,  
All on a sudden miserable pain  
Surprised thee, dim thine eyes and dizzy swum  
In darkness, while thy head flames thick and fast  
Threw forth, till on the left side opening wide,

Likest to thee in shape and countenance bright,  
760 Then shining heavenly fair, a goddess armed,  
Out of thy head I sprung. Amazement seized  
All th' host of Heaven; back they recoiled afraid  
At first, and called me Sin, and for a sign  
Portentous held me; but, familiar grown,  
I pleased, and with attractive graces won  
The most averse—thee chiefly, who, full oft  
Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing,  
Becam'st enamoured; and such joy thou took'st  
With me in secret that my womb conceived  
770 A growing burden. Meanwhile war arose,  
And fields were fought in Heaven: wherein remained  
(For what could else?) to our Almighty Foe  
Clear victory; to our part loss and rout  
Through all the Empyrean. Down they fell,  
Driven headlong from the pitch of Heaven, down  
Into this Deep; and in the general fall  
I also: at which time this powerful key  
Into my hands was given, with charge to keep  
These gates for ever shut, which none can pass  
780 Without my opening. Pensive here I sat  
Alone; but long I sat not, till my womb,  
Pregnant by thee, and now excessive grown,  
Prodigious motion felt and rueful throes.  
At last this odious offspring whom thou seest,  
Thine own begotten, breaking violent way,  
Tore through my entrails, that, with fear and pain  
Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew  
Transformed: but he my inbred enemy  
Forth issued, brandishing his fatal dart,  
790 Made to destroy. I fled, and cried out Death!  
Hell trembled at the hideous name, and sighed  
From all her caves, and back resounded Death!  
I fled; but he pursued (though more, it seems,  
Inflamed with lust than rage), and, swifter far,  
Me overtook, his mother, all dismayed,  
And, in embraces forcible and foul  
Engendering with me, of that rape begot  
These yelling monsters, that with ceaseless cry

Surround me, as thou saw'st—hourly conceived  
800 And hourly born, with sorrow infinite  
To me; for, when they list, into the womb  
That bred them they return, and howl, and gnaw  
My bowels, their repast; then, bursting forth  
Afresh, with conscious terrors vex me round,  
That rest or intermission none I find.  
Before mine eyes in opposition sits  
Grim Death, my son and foe, who set them on,  
And me, his parent, would full soon devour  
For want of other prey, but that he knows  
810 His end with mine involved, and knows that I  
Should prove a bitter morsel, and his bane,  
Whenever that shall be: so Fate pronounced.  
But thou, O father, I forewarn thee, shun  
His deadly arrow; neither vainly hope  
To be invulnerable in those bright arms,  
Through tempered heavenly; for that mortal dint,  
Save he who reigns above, none can resist.”

She finished; and the subtle Fiend his lore  
Soon learned, now milder, and thus answered smooth:—  
820 “Dear daughter—since thou claim'st me for thy sire,  
And my fair son here show'st me, the dear pledge  
Of dalliance had with thee in Heaven, and joys  
Then sweet, now sad to mention, through dire change  
Befallen us unforeseen, unthought-of—know,  
I come no enemy, but to set free  
From out this dark and dismal house of pain  
Both him and thee, and all the heavenly host  
Of Spirits that, in our just pretences armed,  
Fell with us from on high. From them I go  
830 This uncouth errand sole, and one for all  
Myself expose, with lonely steps to tread  
Th' unfounded Deep, and through the void immense  
To search, with wandering quest, a place foretold  
Should be—and, by concurring signs, ere now  
Created vast and round—a place of bliss  
In the purlieus of Heaven; and therein placed  
A race of upstart creatures, to supply  
Perhaps our vacant room, though more removed,

Lest Heaven, surcharged with potent multitude,  
840 Might hap to move new broils. Be this, or aught  
Than this more secret, now designed, I haste  
To know; and, this once known, shall soon return,  
And bring ye to the place where thou and Death  
Shall dwell at ease, and up and down unseen  
Wing silently the buxom air, embalmed  
With odours. There ye shall be fed and filled  
Immeasurably; all things shall be your prey.”

He ceased; for both seemed highly pleased, and Death  
Grinned horrible a ghastly smile, to hear  
850 His famine should be filled, and blessed his maw  
Destined to that good hour. No less rejoiced  
His mother bad, and thus bespake her sire:—

“The key of this infernal Pit, by due  
And by command of Heaven’s all-powerful King,  
I keep, by him forbidden to unlock  
These adamantine gates; against all force  
Death ready stands to interpose his dart,  
Fearless to be o’ermatched by living might.  
But what owe I to his commands above,  
860 Who hates me, and hath hither thrust me down  
Into this gloom of Tartarus profound,  
To sit in hateful office here confined,  
Inhabitant of Heaven and heavenly born—  
Here in perpetual agony and pain,  
With terrors and with clamours compassed round  
Of mine own brood, that on my bowels feed?  
Thou art my father, thou my author, thou  
My being gav’st me; whom should I obey  
870 But thee? whom follow? Thou wilt bring me soon  
To that new world of light and bliss, among  
The gods who live at ease, where I shall reign  
At thy right hand voluptuous, as beseems  
Thy daughter and thy darling, without end.”

Thus saying, from her side the fatal key,  
Sad instrument of all our woe, she took;  
And, towards the gate rolling her bestial train,  
Forthwith the huge portcullis high up-drew,

Which, but herself, not all the Stygian Powers  
880 Could once have moved; then in the key-hole turns  
Th' intricate wards, and every bolt and bar  
Of massy iron or solid rock with ease  
Unfastens. On a sudden open fly,  
With impetuous recoil and jarring sound,  
Th' infernal doors, and on their hinges grate  
Harsh thunder, that the lowest bottom shook  
Of Erebus. She opened; but to shut  
Exceeded her power: the gates wide open stood,  
That with extended wings a bannered host,  
890 Under spread ensigns marching, might pass through  
With horse and chariots ranked in loose array;  
So wide they stood, and like a furnace-mouth  
Cast forth redounding smoke and ruddy flame.  
Before their eyes in sudden view appear  
The secrets of the hoary Deep—a dark  
Illimitable ocean, without bound,  
Without dimension; where length, breadth, and height,  
And time, and place, are lost; where eldest Night  
And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold  
900 Eternal anarchy, amidst the noise  
Of endless wars, and by confusion stand.  
For Hot, Cold, Moist, and Dry, four champions fierce,  
Strive here for mastery, and to battle bring  
Their embryon atoms: they around the flag  
Of each his faction, in their several clans,  
Light-armed or heavy, sharp, smooth, swift, or slow,  
Swarm populous, unnumbered as the sands  
Of Barca or Cyrene's torrid soil,  
Levied to side with warring winds, and poise  
910 Their lighter wings. To whom these most adhere  
He rules a moment: Chaos umpire sits,  
And by decision more embroils the fray  
By which he reigns: next him, high arbiter,  
Chance governs all. Into this wild Abyss,  
The womb of Nature, and perhaps her grave,  
Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire,  
But all these in their pregnant causes mixed  
Confusedly, and which thus must ever fight,

Unless th' Almighty Maker them ordain  
920 His dark materials to create more worlds—  
Into this wild Abyss the wary Fiend  
Stood on the brink of Hell and looked a while,  
Pondering his voyage; for no narrow frith  
He had to cross. Nor was his ear less pealed  
With noises loud and ruinous (to compare  
Great things with small) than when Bellona storms  
With all her battering engines, bent to rase  
Some capital city; or less than if this frame  
Of Heaven were falling, and these elements  
930 In mutiny had from her axle torn  
The steadfast Earth. At last his sail-broad vans  
He spread for flight, and, in the surging smoke  
Uplifted, spurns the ground; thence many a league,  
As in a cloudy chair, ascending rides  
Audacious; but, that seat soon failing, meets  
A vast vacuity. All unawares,  
Fluttering his pennons vain, plumb-down he drops  
Ten thousand fathom deep, and to this hour  
Down had been falling, had not, by ill chance,  
940 The strong rebuff of some tumultuous cloud,  
Instinct with fire and nitre, hurried him  
As many miles aloft. That fury stayed—  
Quenched in a boggy Syrtis, neither sea,  
Nor good dry land—nigh foundered, on he fares,  
Treading the crude consistence, half on foot,  
Half flying; behoves him now both oar and sail.  
As when a gryphon through the wilderness  
With winged course, o'er hill or moory dale,  
Pursues the Arimaspians, who by stealth  
950 Had from his wakeful custody purloined  
The guarded gold; so eagerly the Fiend  
O'er bog or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare,  
With head, hands, wings, or feet, pursues his way,  
And swims, or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies.  
At length a universal hubbub wild  
Of stunning sounds, and voices all confused,  
Borne through the hollow dark, assaults his ear  
With loudest vehemence. Thither he plies



Undaunted, to meet there whatever Power  
960 Or Spirit of the nethermost Abyss  
Might in that noise reside, of whom to ask  
Which way the nearest coast of darkness lies  
Bordering on light; when straight behold the throne  
Of Chaos, and his dark pavilion spread  
Wide on the wasteful Deep! With him enthroned  
Sat sable-vested Night, eldest of things,  
The consort of his reign; and by them stood  
Orcus and Ades, and the dreaded name  
Of Demogorgon; Rumour next, and Chance,  
970 And Tumult, and Confusion, all embroiled,  
And Discord with a thousand various mouths.

T' whom Satan, turning boldly, thus:—"Ye Powers  
And Spirits of this nethermost Abyss,  
Chaos and ancient Night, I come no spy  
With purpose to explore or to disturb  
The secrets of your realm; but, by constraint  
Wandering this darksome desert, as my way  
Lies through your spacious empire up to light,  
Alone and without guide, half lost, I seek,  
980 What readiest path leads where your gloomy bounds  
Confine with Heaven; or, if some other place,  
From your dominion won, th' Ethereal King  
Possesses lately, thither to arrive  
I travel this profound. Direct my course:  
Directed, no mean recompense it brings  
To your behoof, if I that region lost,  
All usurpation thence expelled, reduce  
To her original darkness and your sway  
(Which is my present journey), and once more  
990 Erect the standard there of ancient Night.  
Yours be th' advantage all, mine the revenge!"

Thus Satan; and him thus the Anarch old,  
With faltering speech and visage incomposed,  
Answered: "I know thee, stranger, who thou art—  
That mighty leading Angel, who of late  
Made head against Heaven's King, though overthrown.  
I saw and heard; for such a numerous host  
Fled not in silence through the frightened Deep,

With ruin upon ruin, rout on rout,  
1000 Confusion worse confounded; and Heaven-gates  
Poured out by millions her victorious bands,  
Pursuing. I upon my frontiers here  
Keep residence; if all I can will serve  
That little which is left so to defend,  
Encroached on still through our intestine broils  
Weakening the sceptre of old Night: first, Hell,  
Your dungeon, stretching far and wide beneath;  
Now lately Heaven and Earth, another world  
Hung o'er my realm, linked in a golden chain  
1010 To that side Heaven from whence your legions fell!  
If that way be your walk, you have not far;  
So much the nearer danger. Go, and speed;  
Havoc, and spoil, and ruin, are my gain."

He ceased; and Satan stayed not to reply,  
But, glad that now his sea should find a shore,  
With fresh alacrity and force renewed  
Springs upward, like a pyramid of fire,  
Into the wild expanse, and through the shock  
Of fighting elements, on all sides round  
1020 Environed, wins his way; harder beset  
And more endangered than when Argo passed  
Through Bosphorus betwixt the justling rocks,  
Or when Ulysses on the larboard shunned  
Charybdis, and by th' other whirlpool steered.  
So he with difficulty and labour hard  
Moved on, with difficulty and labour he;  
But, he once passed, soon after, when Man fell,  
Strange alteration! Sin and Death amain,  
Following his track (such was the will of Heaven)  
1030 Paved after him a broad and beaten way  
Over the dark Abyss, whose boiling gulf  
Tamely endured a bridge of wondrous length,  
From Hell continued, reaching th' utmost orb  
Of this frail World; by which the Spirits perverse  
With easy intercourse pass to and fro  
To tempt or punish mortals, except whom  
God and good Angels guard by special grace.

But now at last the sacred influence

Of light appears, and from the walls of Heaven  
1040 Shoots far into the bosom of dim Night  
A glimmering dawn. Here Nature first begins  
Her farthest verge, and Chaos to retire,  
As from her outmost works, a broken foe,  
With tumult less and with less hostile din;  
That Satan with less toil, and now with ease,  
Wafts on the calmer wave by dubious light,  
And, like a weather-beaten vessel, holds  
Gladly the port, though shrouds and tackle torn;  
Or in the emptier waste, resembling air,  
1050 Weighs his spread wings, at leisure to behold  
Far off th' empyreal Heaven, extended wide  
In circuit, undetermined square or round,  
With opal towers and battlements adorned  
Of living sapphire, once his native seat;  
And, fast by, hanging in a golden chain,  
This pendent World, in bigness as a star  
Of smallest magnitude close by the moon.  
Thither, full fraught with mischievous revenge,  
Accursed, and in a cursed hour, he hies.