Paradise Lost: The Fourth Book

THE ARGUMENT.—Satan, now in prospect of Eden, and nigh the place where he must now attempt the bold enterprise which he undertook alone against God and Man, falls into many doubts with himself, and many passions—fear, envy, and despair; but at length confirms himself in evil; journeys on to Paradise, whose outward prospect and situation is described; overleaps the bounds; sits, in the shape of a Cormorant, on the Tree of Life, as highest in the Garden, to look about him. The Garden described; Satan’s first sight of Adam and Eve; his wonder at their excellent form and happy state, but with resolution to work their fall; overhears their discourse; thence gathers that the Tree of Knowledge was forbidden them to eat of under penalty of death, and thereon intends to found his temptation by seducing them to transgress; then leaves them a while, to know further of their state by some other means. Meanwhile Uriel, descending on a sunbeam, warns Gabriel, who had in charge the gate of Paradise, that some evil Spirit had escaped the Deep, and passed at noon by his Sphere, in the shape of a good Angel, down to Paradise, discovered after by his furious gestures in the Mount. Gabriel promises to find him ere morning. Night coming on, Adam and Eve discourse of going to their rest; their bower described; their evening worship. Gabriel, drawing forth his bands of night—watch to walk the rounds of Paradise, appoints two strong Angels to Adam’s bower, lest the evil Spirit should be there doing some harm to Adam or Eve sleeping: there they find him at the ear of Eve, tempting her in a dream, and bring him, though unwilling, to Gabriel; by whom questioned, he scornfully answers; prepares resistance; but, hindered by a sign from Heaven, flies out of Paradise.

O FOR that warning voice, which he who saw

The Apocalypse heard cry in Heaven aloud,

Then when the Dragon, put to second rout,

Came furious down to be revenged on men,

Woe to the inhabitants on Earth! that now, 5

While time was, our first parents had been warned

The coming of their secret Foe, and scaped,

Haply so scaped, his mortal snare! For now

Satan, now first inflamed with rage, came down,

The tempter, ere the accuser, of mankind, 10

To wreak on innocent frail Man his loss

Of that first battle, and his flight to Hell.

Yet not rejoicing in his speed, though bold

Far off and fearless, nor with cause to boast,

Begins his dire attempt; which, nigh the birth 15

Now rowling, boils in his tumultuous breast,

And like a devilish engine back recoils

Upon himself. Horror and doubt distract

His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir

The hell within him; for within him Hell 20

He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell

One step, no more than from Himself, can fly

By change of place. Now conscience wakes despair

That slumbered; wakes the bitter memory

Of what he was, what is, and what must be 25

Worse; of worse deeds worse sufferings must ensue!

Sometimes towards Eden, which now in his view

Lay pleasant, his grieved look he fixes sad;

Sometimes towards Heaven and the full-blazing Sun,

Which now sat high in his meridian tower: 30

Then, much revolving, thus in sighs began:—

“O thou that, with surpassing glory crowned,

Look’st from thy sole dominion like the god

Of this new World—at whose sight all the stars

Hide their diminished heads—to thee I call, 35

But with no friendly voice, and add thy name,

O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams,

That bring to my remembrance from what state

I fell, how glorious once above thy sphere,

Till pride and worse ambition threw me down, 40

Warring in Heaven against Heaven’s matchless King!

Ah, wherefore? He deserved no such return

From me, whom he created what I was

In that bright eminence, and with his good

Upbraided none; nor was his service hard. 45

What could be less than to afford him praise,

The easiest recompense, and pay him thanks,

How due? Yet all his good proved ill in me,

And wrought but malice. Lifted up so high,

I ’sdained subjection, and thought one step higher 50

Would set me highest, and in a moment quit

The debt immense of endless gratitude,

So burthensome, still paying, still to owe;

Forgetful what from him I still received;

And understood not that a grateful mind 55

By owing owes not, but still pays, at once

Indebted and discharged—what burden then?

Oh, had his powerful destiny ordained

Me some inferior Angel, I had stood

Then happy; no unbounded hope had raised 60

Ambition. Yet why not? Some other Power

As great might have aspired, and me, though mean,

Drawn to his part. But other Powers as great

Fell not, but stand unshaken, from within

Or from without to all temptations armed! 65

Hadst thou the same free will and power to stand?

Thou hadst. Whom has thou then, or what, to accuse,

But Heaven’s free love dealt equally to all?

Be then his love accursed, since, love or hate,

To me alike it deals eternal woe. 70

Nay, cursed be thou; since against his thy will

Chose freely what it now so justly rues.

Me miserable! which way shall I fly

Infinite wrauth and infinite despair?

Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell; 75

And, in the lowest deep, a lower deep

Still threatening to devour me opens wide,

To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heaven.

O, then, at last relent! Is there no place

Left for repentence, none for pardon left?....

….That day I oft remember, when from sleep

I first awaked, and found myself reposed, 450

Under a shade, on flowers, much wondering where

And what I was, whence thither brought, and how.

Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound

Of waters issued from a cave, and spread

Into a liquid plain; then stood unmoved, 455

Pure as the expanse of Heaven. I thither went

With unexperienced thought, and laid me down

On the green bank, to look into the clear

Smooth lake, that to me seemed another sky.

As I bent down to look, just opposite 460

A Shape within the watery gleam appeared,

Bending to look on me. I started back,

It started back; but pleased I soon returned

Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks

Of sympathy and love. There I had fixed 465

Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,

Had not a voice thus warned me: ‘What thou seest,

What there thou seest, fair creature, is thyself;

With thee it came and goes: but follow me,

And I will bring thee where no shadow stays 470

Thy coming, and thy soft imbraces—he

Whose image thou art; him thou shalt enjoy

Inseparably thine; to him shalt bear

Multitudes like thyself, and thence be called

Mother of human race.’ What could I do, 475

But follow straight, invisibly thus led?

Till I espied thee, fair, indeed, and tall,

Under a platan; yet methought less fair,

Less winning soft, less amiably mild,

That that smooth watery image. Back I turned; 480

Thou, following, cried’st aloud, ‘Return, fair Eve;

Whom fliest thou? Whom thou fliest, of him thou art,

His flesh, his bone, to give thee being I lent

Out of my side to thee, nearest my heart,

Substantial life, to have thee by my side 485

Henceforth an individual solace dear:

Part of my soul I seek thee, and thee claim

My other half.’ With that thy gentle hand

Seized mine: I yielded, and from that time see

How beauty is excelled by manly grace 490

And wisdom, which alone is truly fair.”

So spake our general mother, and, with eyes

Of conjugal attraction unreproved,

And meek surrender, half-embracing leaned

On our first father;