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THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

A POEM







THE
TEMPTATION OF JESUS.

A POEM.

BY AN

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TO
THOMAS CLAUD HAMILTON, Esq., M.A.,

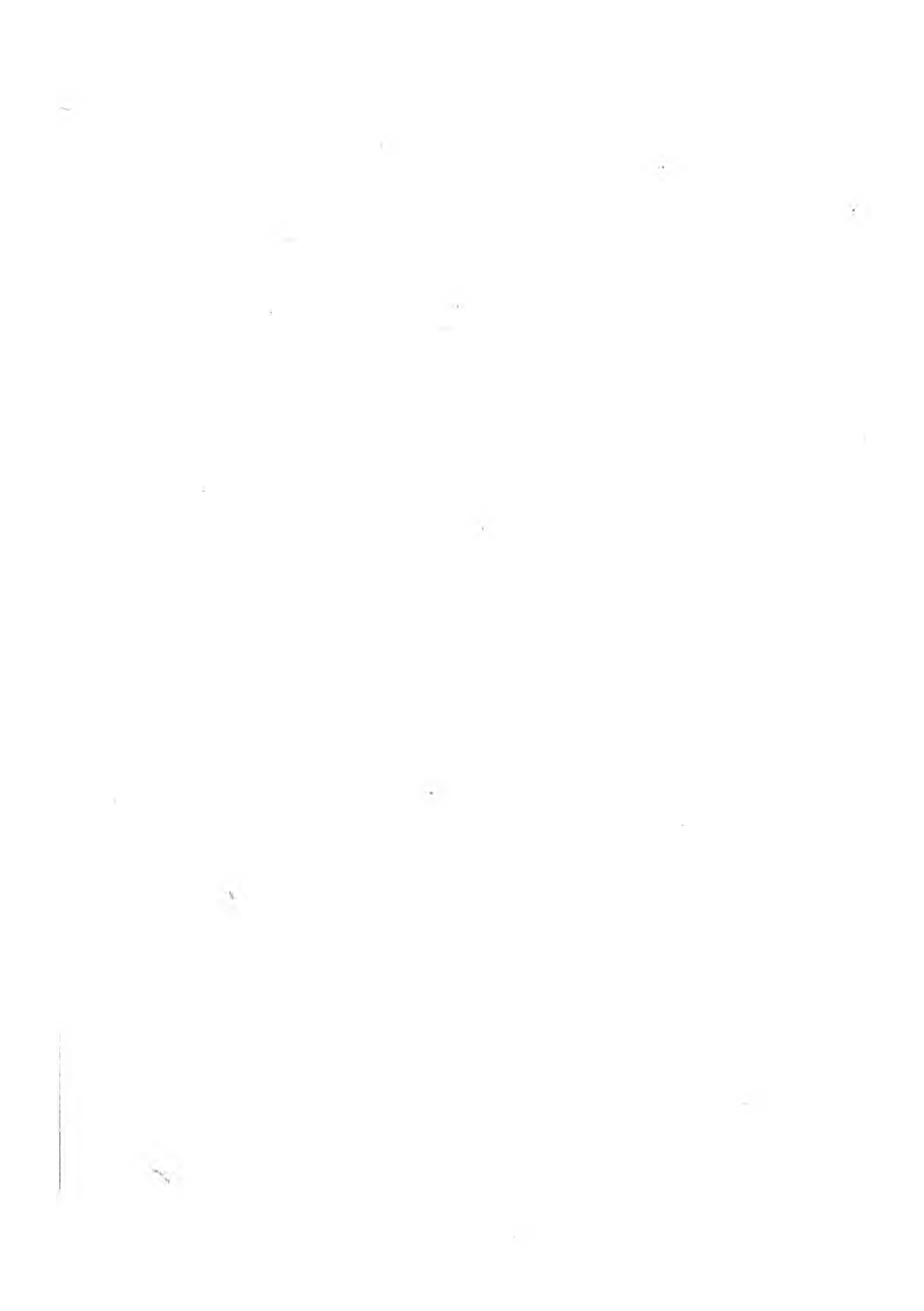
THIS HUMBLE ATTEMPT AT ILLUSTRATING
THE ETHICAL CHARACTER OF THE GREAT TEMPTATION

IS INSCRIBED,

WITH SINCEREST SENTIMENTS OF ESTEEM

AND FRIENDSHIP.

A.D. 1882.



THE CONFLICT waged in Judah's wilderness,
Where singly met the Princes of the powers
Invisible, in destined mortal strife ;
Whose issue laid beneath the victor foot
Of Woman's promised Seed the Serpent's head— 5
The death-wound yet delayed ;—and won again
The long-lost access to Life's flame-girt Tree,
Now planted in a safer Paradise :
Great SPIRIT of all truth, teach me to tell.
Thy fullest light upon the God-breathed Page 10
Outpour, and Reason guide unerringly :
Imagination, too, on venturous wing
Beyond the sense-bound range, deign to sustain.
So may I, but not else, of that dread scene,
Veiled from all human sight, essay to sing. 15

I.

SILENCE profound pervaded highest heaven,
As stood about the emerald-circled Throne
The countless sons of light, summoned by trump
Of Archangel to audience of their King.
Yet was that company, though numberless, 20
In faultless order ranged, as legions trained
To martial discipline, close formed around
Their golden standards bannerless upborne.
Then, from the central seat, a voice sublime,
Like sound of many waters, issued forth. 25

“ Angels elect, know ye :

Now are the time
And season come, eternally decreed,
And oft predicted by prophetic lip
Touched by a Seraph's hand with living fire
From Altar here. My one coëqual Son 30
Goes forth on Earth, as Man, to win for men



Redress of primal Fall, and place secure—
Coheirs with you—in these celestial realms.
He now retires to Judah's wildest waste
For forty days, to hold converse with Me
In solitude, as Moses did when charged
With similar behest—to promulgate
A new-revealéd Covenant. Like whom,
Again, sustained in ecstasy, He fasts
The penal term. Him Satan shall assail
With all his subtlety, in fierce attempt
To work His overthrow before He stands
To minister. This conflict I ordain
Retributive, in witness to the world
That Man, made in My own similitude,
Lost not his innocence by fated Fall.
A sinless creature he was placed, like you—
Who own no higher moral excellence
Than that in My true image ye were made—
On creature trial, free to choose between
Evil and Good. Evil he chose, and fell.

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Now sinless Man—each avenue of thought,
Each spring of action tried, to find him frail—
Shall through extremest creature ordeal
All stainless pass ; standing in innocence 55
Made strong by discipline and victory,
As I designed Adam should firmly stand.
Concerning this My Son I give you charge :
Until His Prophet-mission be fulfilled—
(He then, as Priest, shall offer up Himself)— 60
Shield Him from violence. This fast expired,
He needs forthwith your willing ministry.
Michael, the charge is thine.”

Thus spake the KING ;
Whom Satan overheard, for he had come
With urgent plaint : and when, the audience o’er, 65
The sons of light in marshalled host withdrew,
Dark transit made he past the shining ones,
And with obeisance deep approached the Throne,
Where the veiled Seraphim in glory stood.

To him the Holy One :

“ Whence comest thou, 70
O Lucifer : and what thy purpose here ? ”

To Whom the Archfiend :

“ From Bethania,
Most High ; where I have heard the Nazarene
Proclaimed from hence Thine own belovéd Son.
Thou sendest him to wrest my sovereignty 75
O’er mankind from my hands. I crave to know
The true conditions of his strife with me.
Thy Son ! Is he, then, God—or Man—or both
In some mysterious hypostasis ?
If God, he must be all-invincible, 80
And worse than wasted would the mock attempt
To overcome him prove. If Man, he may
Or may not—(since the scales of victory
Have either way, to him or me, inclined)—
Come from the contest as my conqueror. 85
I shrink not—be the issue what it may—

From our set conflict, meeting him as Man.
Place but our duel on some parity
Allowing me a possible success,
And I shall fight him to the bitter end.
But if he be at once both God and Man,
I know not how to measure strength with him.
Impeccable and peccable ! In terms
A contradictory. Enigma dark
This is, impenetrable to my ken.
JEHOVAH ! Thou that art Thyself the TRUTH,
And dwell'st eternally in purest LIGHT,
Set not my mortal combat with Thy Son,
Before the eyes of angels and of men,
On such conditions as must even prove
That no true moral issue has been tried.
I care not twice to challenge Deity :
Nay, I would e'en elect to quit the field
Before a blow is struck, than seem to fight
In blank despair against Omnipotence."

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To him the KING :

“ Great is the mystery—
God in the Flesh. Not Mine the task to solve
For thee or any other how, in one,
Creator with the creature coëxists.
But know thou this: My own belovéd Son 110
Exposéd is, as Man, to all thy guile.
As Man shall He encounter and o'erthrow
Thy power on earth. Try Him in every way
Thy artifice, and hate, and tyranny
Permitted, can devise. He shall prevail 115
Through all, and hurl thy kingdom to the dust.
Thou could'st not wring from upright, patient Job
The bitter curse thou said'st lurked in his heart.
More signal thy discomfiture shall be
With Him, as Man; though, when the time is full, 120
I suffer thee to take His precious life.
Not so was Job left to thy will. Depart!
Expend all fraud, all force, on Him—and fail.”

Forth from the place of Light original,
Downward the Archfiend swiftly sank, through space 125
Illimitable, past unnumbered suns
With all their rolling worlds around: downward,
And downward still, to dense terrestrial air,
His turbulent domain. Swift his descent,
But swifter yet his thoughts, as lightnings dart 130
Athwart a blackened sky. His counsel sealed,
When to his kindred evil ones he comes
The purport of his absence is untold.
Shrouded in gloom he sat apart from all,
Nor hearing gave to tidings proffered him 135
By furtive watchers. Sullenly, askance,
His chiefmost captains viewed the silent prince,
As, heedless of them, all the nightly hours
Alone he meditated. They, in turn,
Indifferent, remit all discipline, 140
And wild confusion reigns on every side.
Long sat the prince abstracted: nor the yells,
Nor shrieks, nor laughter, nor mad revelry

Of Pandemonium entered his ear,
Till, starting at the russet streak of dawn, 145
He rises suddenly and notes the din :
Then waves his hand rebukingly. So stern
His look, the captains cower and disperse
To quell the hideous riot. He apart
Walks to and fro in this soliloquy :— 150

“ Yea—I shall act uncounselled, and alone.
Why was not Job o’ercome ?—the burning taunt
Cast in my teeth in heaven. Only because
I wrought unwisely with him ; using force
To break his spirit down, then leaving God 155
To build him up. That time I lent an ear
To those who now would take the same mad course
With the poor Nazarene. Their hour may come :
But in this instance I shall act alone.
Alone I entered Eden, where swift wreck 160
I made of all with few soft-whispered words.
Persuasion is the surest means—at first.

What if it fail ? I can but give loose rein
 To the whole demonkind to work its will.
 How to persuade him is my problem now. 165
 His creature part is human : and, as Man,
 Though being God's high Son, he even dares
 To challenge me. I should be sceptical
 Of terms so fair, had not JEHOVAH pledged
 His truth that he encounters me as Man. 170
 Now what I dreaded as impregnable—
 His Godlike part, whate'er it is—shall give
 Safe cover for my close-concealed approach.
 A snowflake on the snowdrift shews itself
 Distincter than my purpose shall appear, 175
 When with full ripened plot I come to him.
 But to strike soon is very life or death ;
 Since by his fast he arms himself at will
 For prompt assault upon my whole domain.
 Far stronger shall I find him if those days 180
 Of holy abstinence leave him untried.
 Could I now taint him by one act—one thought—

Of wrong, no more is needed. All unfit
To work out sinless righteousness for men
Should he for ever be : sinful himself."

185

Thus Satan : and with purpose forthwith formed,
And will determined, hastes he to the wild,
Ere yet the sun is risen. On his way
He clothes himself with each new beam of light,
Till he appears again, as once he was,
Bright Morning Star. Then rising high in air
Surveys the scene where Jesus may be found.
Whom kneeling he observes ; about to rise
From early orison. Now higher still,
And still more bright in lustrous robe, he soars :
And straight descending, as a son of heaven,
Alights before the God-Man.

190

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To Whom thus :

" High Son of God, though in this humble state,
Judge not Thy Father's love, nor our good care

Of Thee, by these surroundings, bare and bleak. 200
Nor fear for plenteous sustenance, e'en here ;
Since Thy mere word shall change these stones to bread
Now is the hour for necessary food :
Give Thy command, and the obedient waste
Shall instantly a bounteous board provide." 205

To him thus Jesus :

“ Though from very heaven
An angel came, be he Anathema
If he the holy Scripture contravene.
There it is written—‘ Not by bread alone,
But by each word proceeding from the mouth 210
Of God, shall man subsist.’ ”

To Whom again

The Tempter :

“ So the holy prophet wrote,
And truly wrote—for others : not for Thee,
The Son of God. Yet he brought manna down

From heaven each day for forty circling years, 215
 To feed the selfsame men for whom he wrote
 What Thou hast cited : plainly shewing them
 That, whatsoe'er the written precept taught,
 Bread for each day was a necessity.
 But here, Thou seest, no Angels' food is sent ; 220
 Nor shall there any. He who feedeth all
 Works not superfluous. Thou art His son,
 And canst Thyself at will create all meat."

To him thus Jesus :

" What is written so,
 For all men is it written, and for me. 225
 Nor was that manna meat but as God's word
 Gave to it life-sustaining energy.
 For did not death descend, e'en as they ate,
 On most of those to whom that bread was sent ?
 Enough to shew how true the writing is— 230
 That God's sure word, and nought besides, is life.
 Yea, he that wrote so lived for forty days,

Once and again, without support of food.
What him sustained the same sustaineth me,
Who, like him, hold communion with God."

235

The Tempter thus :

 " A house-slave Moses was.
To such the daily meed of sustenance
Is of the master's grace. Thou art the Son
In Thine own house—creation's widest range.
It shocks an angel's sense of Providence
To see Thee thus—God's Son—all destitute !
Prove now that what the Father's voice proclaimed—
' This is My best-beloved, well-pleasing Son '—
Was truly said of Thee. Speak but the word
That shall dispel all doubt. Speak, and create."

240

245

To him thus Jesus :

 " If the house-slave lived
By his great Master's care, may not the Son
Trust in his Father's love ? Do angels doubt

God's guardianship? They stand as witnesses
Whose hand upholdeth them immortally—
Types of His never-failing providence.
Forbear this vain discourse. My trust in God
Is unreserved. His will is meat to me."

250

Resisted thus, downcast the Tempter stood
A moment there, revolving rapidly
Whether there yet remained some artifice
Untried, wherewith to undermine the trust
Of Jesus in His Father and his God:
But none found he at hand to serve his end.
Then, as a meteor makes vivid track
And vanishes, the Archfiend disappeared.
Swiftly he soared again, refulgent all,
And in high ether cast his bright disguise.
His eye malignant viewed the scene below:
And he, ere seeking his abode, let loose
The sudden fury of the elements
Upon the wild. Dark thunder-clouds he raised

255

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From the Great Sea, and rolled them heavily
Against the fleecy sunlit cumulus,
Wafted by Eurys softly from afar. 270
Then crashed the loud artillery of heaven
In quick recurrent peals, responsively
To the deep sullen moan of fires entombed
Beneath the everlasting hills, and rocks
That shook while they with massive weight compressed 275
The surging of the buried element.
Torrents descended on the desert height,
As if the ocean, lifted from its bed,
And all too weighty for the firmament,
A second Deluge brought. Across the waste 280
Affrighted flew the roebuck, heedless now
Of yelling pack of jackals, howling wolf,
Low-sweeping, screaming, eagle, or the roar
Of lion startled in his quaking den.
But undismayed was He whose presence there 285
Had brought Satanic fury on the place.
Within the deep recess of mountain cave

He calmly stood, nor gave the storm rebuke.
And yet not unconcerned saw He, and heard,
The wild convulsion. Deep within His soul
He sighed o'er what was made by Him all-good,
Now changed to desolating violence.

290

Leaving the elements to spend themselves
At will, the author of such wantonness,
More quickly calmed than they, once more alone
In lengthened cogitation slowly weighed
The chances of his enterprise : reviewed
His first encounter with his dreaded foe
With keenest scrutiny, to ascertain
Where his own weakness lay, and where the strength
Of his antagonist.

295

300

Thus with himself:

“ As Man he foiled me. Yet my purpose was
To cloke beneath professed concern for him
As God’s high Son all seeming of device
Against his creature nature, where the blow 305
Was deeply aimed. So had I laid the snare—
Enticing him to use his might divine
In self-assertion as distrustful man.
No subtler toil could all my craft contrive.
But he is proof against distrust of God: 310
Nor in him lurks desire of self-support,
Where angelkind and men alike are frail.
Yea, I myself was feebly proud when first
I rose in self-assertion. Weak mankind
Is, to a by-word, prone to vain self-trust. 315
This Jesus is not so. I may not there
Expect advantage with him:—Yea, *I may!*
His very trust might plausibly be pushed
To perilous extreme, presumptuous,
In some bold challenge of God’s providence. 320

That seems to be the penetrable point
In his strong armoury. There shall I aim.
The holy Book, whose every word he knows,
Shall readily supply mine argument.
The SPIRIT'S sword—strange weapon in my hand ! 325
Shall deal him home an unsuspected thrust,
'Gainst which his Shield of Faith, that served him well
In first attack can give him slight defence.
But now, to study well each pass and ward,
And wait and watch for opportunity 330
That may give promise to my next attempt."



II.

HIGH FESTIVAL the sons of Israel held
At Salem's central shrine ; assembled there
From every land beneath the circling sun.
Then passed one through the wilderness, in haste, 335
Towards Jerusalem : youthful he seemed,
Yet in aspect devotional, and sage ;
Trustful withal, as he who afterwards
On the loved bosom of his Master leaned.
Jesus he saw, in silent mood absorbed ; 340
And, wondering, thus spake :

“ Surely, thou art—
If from appearance I do not misjudge—
A pious son of holy Abraham,
Who ought observantly attend the Feast
At Zion, as commanded by the Law. 345
Thither I now press on, so long delayed

By service to my Master, whom, perchance,
Thou knowest—John the Baptist he is called.
Fain would I have companionship with thee ;
For in thy countenance is sapience
Beyond thy years. Yea, as I look on thee,
Thou close resemblest Him whom I have seen
Baptized in Jordan, with attending signs,
And heavenly declaration that He is
God's own belovéd Son. Say, art thou He ?
For no mere curious thought prompts me to ask ;
But true desire to know my future Lord :
Since John has pointed all his followers
To Him, as greater Master than himself."

350

355

To him thus Jesus :

“ As thou say'st, I am
A son of Abraham ; and to the Law,
Enjoining every male in Israël
To worship where the Name Ineffable
Hath chosen place, pay willing reverence.

360

He said : and suffered to be guided till
They reached Jerusalem. And as they went,
The Novice ever and anon referred
To some recondite matter in the word
Of Prophecy, receiving in reply
A clear interpretation of the sense.
But chiefly led he their prolonged discourse
To David's lofty theme, Messianic—
The throne restored again to Israël,
With sovereignty extended o'er the earth ;
And with enthusiasm echoed back
The thoughts unfolded :—

385

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“ What His strength of trust !
What His sustaining confidence must be !
What full assurance His ! to whom is pledged,
On very oath, the might of Deity !
Oh ! were I He, right soon I should essay
Such whelming proof of special Providence
As must constrain conviction in all minds,

395

That not one word so written can e'er fail.
The sons of Abraham demand such signs 400
And wonders wrought before their sceptic gaze,
As shall no corner leave for lurking doubt
Within the darkened chambers of their heart.
Messiah, claiming more than Moses did,
Must greater wonder-work than he display, 405
To bend the stiff-necked people to His will."

Jesus to him :

" Although such greater proof
Shall, doubtless, evidence Messiah's claims,
The Scripture hath predicted unbelief
In all but few."

The Novice earnestly : 410
" The stronger reason for surpassing proof.
Had I His mission to fulfil, not one
Resource within the infinite extent
Of high Omnipotence I'd leave unused.

Wonders in heaven above I'd multiply, 415
And signs on earth beneath incessant work,
Till every stubborn heart was made believe."

To him thus Jesus :

 " Zeal, not wisdom, thus
Thou would'st evince. Mechanical assent
Is valueless. Calm reason is the ground 420
On which the firmest faith doth strongly stand.
Thou seemest not to have considered
That John the Baptist did no miracle ;
Yet all men count him for a prophet true."

To Him the Novice :

 " Yea, the Baptist bade 425
All his disciples note a difference
Between Messiah's ministry and his—
That where he was so wanting, there would Christ
Abound : whose very name, MIRACULOUS,
Gives indication of vast wonder-work." 430

Jesus, again, to him :

“ And what if John
Should one day deem Messiah's miracles
All-insufficient ground for firm belief ? ”

Promptly the Novice made rejoinder then :

“ Could anything more strongly shew the need 435
Of demonstration such as *must* constrain
The faith of every one ? See ! Now the crowd
Moves from the Temple. There the pompous Scribe
And boastful Pharisee advance, with broad
Phylactery, receiving on all sides, 440
With feigned disdain, the homage of the throng.
Ah ! this recalls the withering rebuke
My Master gave them, when they came to him
For baptism. I verily believe
That Thou, God's Son, shalt, in Thy Father's house, 445
Slight recognition have, unless Thou dost,
By signal token, due acknowledgement
Command from the unthinking multitude.

Some hours must pass ere the next Sacrifice
Is offered up. Meanwhile we may o'erview
The festal scene from yonder minaret.
Of private access I have privilege
By favour of a priest, my next of kin."

450

Like practised guide the Novice led the way
By tortuous ascent within a tower
Uprising from the rocky precipice
O'erhanging Kedron's softly flowing brook.
He then set Jesus where the eminence
Was steepest o'er the deep ravine, and said :

455

" See the vast multitudes, the outer court—
Surrounding precincts—Kedron's yonder slope—
And the great city, densely covering.
This moment would I choose for some high deed
Of thrilling wonder, in full view of all.
To Thee the written word is said—' He gives
His angels charge concerning Thee : their hands
Shall safely bear Thee up, lest Thou should'st dash,

460

465

At any time, Thy foot against a stone.'
Now boldly cast Thyself down hence, and prove
Before all spell-bound eyes that Thou art He— 470
God's highest Son—on whom such love is set :
And angel legions shall, swifter than thought,
Descend in dazing light to break Thy fall ;
While, with acclaim, beholders shall declare
That Zion's promised King at length is come." 475

To him thus Jesus :

“ Yea, the Scripture saith
As thou hast cited. But, again 'tis writ—
'Thou shalt not tempt the LORD thy God,' (as at
Massah they tempted Him.) Our fathers there
Demanded special proof that God was nigh : 480
And thus provoked the Holy One.”

To Him

The Novice :

“ Opportunity as this

May never once again present itself.
Prove now the written word is very truth :
For who believeth not God's word makes Him 485
A liar. Were I Thou, such trial bold
I should essay, both of my own strong trust
And His so surely promised guardianship."

To him thus Jesus :

“ Wrongly hast thou read
The written word ; which no presumptuous act 490
Suggests, but speaks of swift deliverance
In peril—*not self-wrought*. Thou hast to learn
That in FREE-WILL lies Man's security.
He may be set, through outward circumstance,
On some high pinnacle of vanity ; 495
And thence be urged to make a reckless plunge
After some phantom-good beyond his reach.
But that mad act must ever be his own.
If from the dizzy height he fall, through pride
Or other master-passion in his breast, 500

He casteth down himself—his is the act :
No other hath the power to throw him off.
Thus in Man's moral nature is FREE-WILL
A citadel of strength, impregnable,
When guarded watchfully at each approach.
'T is only when a traitor heart within
Surrenders the position made so strong
For his security, that Man can fall.

505

“ Deceitfully, though young, the word of God
Thou handlest. For His word is, like a sword
With double edge, sharpened on either side
To safeguard faith ; dividing True from False.
Thou would'st have me on trial of His truth
Set God ! Impious presumption in a man,
Who is himself on trial of his faith—
As creature on Creator trustfully
Depending. Yea, let God ever be true,
And Man a liar : for if aught there be
To call in question any word of His,

510

515

The cause is not with Him, but deep within 520
 Man's doubting heart. Why put His word on proof
 When 't is believed indubitably true ;
 And the clear warning comes to every man
 Against gratuitous presumptuousness ?
 Thine argument—' He who believes not God 525
 Makes Him a liar '—is most rightly mine.
 Nor yet, e'en though I should constrain belief
 By such display as thou dost urge me to,
 Ought what is so forbidden be essayed.
 Evil should not be done that good may come." 530

The Novice then impatient :

" All my strength

I fain would use to cast Thee down forthwith ;
 That this supreme occasion be not lost.
 But I must hence, on matters overlooked.
 I'll find Thee at the hour of sacrifice." 535

Jesus saw him no more.

The tempted One
Descending thence, retired to Olivet :
Knowing a spot of deep retirement there—
Gethsemane—where, save at intervals,
He stayed in solitude : and thence again,
Having observed the Festival, returned
To the wild waste for audience with His God.

540

The Tempter now became solicitous,
On second failure of his secret wiles.
Perplexed, irate, but not yet desperate,
More anxious counsel held he with himself :
For still he sought not aid, in word or act,
Of his most trusted ones. Not Sammaël,
The subtlest sophist in his fallen host,
Nor Belial bold, nor Tophet truculent,
Nor any demon, of whate'er resource,
Took he in confidence. Stung to the quick

545

550

By his imperious reticence, these formed,
In sullen conclave, mutinous design :
Suspicious of compáct made secretly, 555
Consigning them to chains more firmly clenched
By the dread hand of Him who now had come,
Like stronger man, to spoil their armoury.
Their chieftain, having raised around himself
A high secluding wall of opaque mist, 560
Thought thus alone :

“ Again my subtlest snare
He has evaded. Strong is he, as man,
In his religious life. To try him there
Is purposeless. This mystic intercourse
He holds with God arms him at every point 565
Against my secret thrusts. I surely thought
The last must have struck home—and mortally.
Not less I meant than that by his own act,
Made plausible by warrant of God’s word,
His human form should suffer fatal wreck. 570
But vain was all my studied artifice.

The youth played his set part without a fault—
 Not subtler spoke the serpent in Eve's ear ;—
 But he effected nought. Now there remains
 One more resource, held closely in reserve 575
 As final in so grave extremity
 As presses me. I may not hesitate,
 Though in rebellion Hell itself shall rise.
 The stake is mine : for who but I can hold
 The reins of this infernal government ? 580
 To me, as leader of the first who fell,
 This kingdom came, which I myself enlarged
 By adding Earth and Man. Others, again,
 I brought down from on high—angels unmoved
 By proud unrest ; yet easily the lure 585
 Of Earth's fair daughters wrought their lustful fall.
 These turbulent have proved, claiming apart
 From me distinct dominion for themselves,
 And ever menacing my rule supreme.
 They have their use. Tempters of common men 590
 They are with much success, pleasure and pain

Adapting to them in their coarser forms—
 Enough, forsooth, with average mankind.
 But for those higher natures who are set
 As standard-bearers on the moral field 595
 More subtle means are needed. These I take
 In my especial charge, and chiefly him
 Who comes, as Man, to wrest mankind from me.
 Those wanton ones have tried him many times
 By beauty's snare ; but unavailingly. 600
 His chasteful glance makes the strange woman sigh
 For innocence ; and virtuous Hebrew maids
 And matrons see in him that manliness
 Which gives them highest thoughts of purity.
 This Seed of Woman has, in truth, so much 605
 Of Woman's purest soul, that all in vain
 Must every effort end to work in him
 The faintest taint of fleshly appetite.
 Nor shall I, in my next supreme attempt,
 Use counterfeit. Each guise he penetrates, 610
 Seem what I may. Boldly I shall advance

In my own character, and play the stake
That must—if he is capable of sin
Through any motive in Humanity,
Or any influence of things on earth—
Reduce Redemption's scheme to nothingness.
Persuasion, tempered with deep terror, now
Shall try this man as never man was tried."

615

Thus meditated the abstracted prince
Within his vaporous environment,
While from without the murmurs mutinous
Of his discarded counsellors, unheard
By him so long, grew loud and violent.
At length he stood with listening ear, and caught
The tenor of the general discontent :—
They deemed him now resolved to execute
The threat which oft incipient revolt
In Hell had quelled—that he would abdicate

620

625

A throne made odious by their lawlessness,
In favour of a Prince whose iron hand, 630
Should crush all turbulence, nor license give
To that one solace of despair still theirs—
Freedom to work the direst forms of ill.
He into blackest darkness should them cast,
Bound in their solitary cells with links 635
Of adamant, reserved for final doom
In the dank seething of the sulphurous lake.
That menace long impending, now they deemed
His reticence portended them, at last,
Accomplishment at hand ; and with fierce shouts, 640
And foulest imprecations, him accused
As traitor, and in bold rebellion rose.
He, like a nobler Sardanapulus
Beset by his disloyal mighty ones,
Smiled his defiance of their demon rage, 645
Standing at bay within his citadel.
Then, casting to conflicting winds his dense
Environment, proudly confronted them.

“Hence, hence, insensates!” sternly said the prince.
 “How many masters would ye have in Hell? 650
 Because I choose to exercise my right
 Of privacy as I, your King, deem fit,
 Shriek ye rebellion, kindled into flame
 By dark suspicion, bred of darker fear?
 Ye apprehend that now my frequent threat 655
 Brooks no delay? Can your insane revolt
 Do else than now precipitate the end?
 Cease, then, this foolish riot. Yet awhile
 I must, perforce, indulge in reticence.
 The time will come when ye shall well approve 660
 This guarded secrecy. But know thus much:—
 I am now pitted with the Nazarene
 In single fight, challenged insultingly.
 With me this struggle rests. What if I fail?
 Ye then are free to do your worst with him. 665
 Should ye succeed, by force or fraud, combined
 Or singly, make your terms: for willingly
 I yield my sceptre to his conqueror.”

He said : and wild acclaim responsive rose
High in aërial space. Fresh fealty
Each demon vowed to the suspected prince :
In eager homage each with other vied.
So craftily allegiance he regained,
While meditating darkest treachery.

670



III.

THE LAST of all the days of abstinence 675
Had fully come upon the great Recluse
Ere Satan ventured on new enterprise.
Oft had the Tempter shrewdly scanned each move
On either side in his supreme assault—
All possible vicissitudes forecast ; 680
As foeman twice o'erthrown prepares himself
For final shock with his antagonist :—
Wily, yet daring now to recklessness.

As when strong Vulcan wrought for Thetis' son
Unconquerable arms, a spear-head, shaped 685
At fiercest heat, deep in the chilly Styx
He deftly dipped : so Satan had assayed
His chosen weapon for his last attack.

His burning brain evolved the bold design ;
His icy heart with craft attempered it.
Not on Hell's anvil had he ever forged
A shaft so penetrant, a barb so keen.

690

The day far spent, Jesus he sought once more :
Whom, seated in the mountain-shade he spied.
A moment quailed the Evil One, awe-struck :
So rapt He seemed, in holy reverie—
Strong in repose of soul : a moment feared
Encounter on his own selected ground.
Then, summoning resolve, boldly advanced.

695

As if some argent statue from the hand
Of Phidias had lost its virgin sheen,
And, tarnished o'er, seemed but the dullest dross ;
Yet peerless form and contour still retained :
So Satan now appeared. All glory fled,
His person, once with light celestial robed,
Stood darkly forth. For not the western sun,

700

705

Diffusing gorgeous splendour on all else,
In richest glow and varied tint, bestowed
On him a radiance. (Not otherwise
Some murky spot on the bright solar disc 710
Repels all flame.) And yet nobility
Was stamped on each proud feature ; every limb
Shewed nervous strength, as in the trained athlete :
For no decadence, no defect, had marked
That fallen son of immortality. 715
Nor wanted he insignia of state :
A crown he wore, and in his right hand held
A golden sceptre.

Without prelude thus :
“ Jesus of Nazareth, full well I know
Thy purpose in descent from high estate 720
To the mean circumstance of life on Earth,
As suffering Man :—my kingdom thou would'st win.
Behold me, then, acknowledged Potentate
Of all this lower world. Such majesty,

With power of transference to whom I will, 725
 Is solely mine, by the high gift of heaven.
 (This grace, indeed, comes of necessity;
 For thousands own me as their chosen Prince
 'Gainst one who loyalty to God avows.)
 The untold myriads of the human race— 730
 The boundless regions—countless cities—wealth
 Incalculable—of the outstretched Earth
 I proffer thee forthwith. But now ascend
 This eminence, and view the wide-spread scene.
 Or art thou spent by so long abstinence? 735
 I'll summon the obedient power of air,
 And waft thee to the mountain-top, from whence
 Thou may'st behold the glory of all lands."

To him thus Jesus :

" It behoveth me
 To give consent thus far. Lead thou the way : 740
 I need no help to reach the mountain-height.
 No parley is implied ; nor wish or thought

Is entertained of worldly sovereignty.
Not of this passing scene (as well thou know'st)
Is the true kingdom promised me of God." 745

To Him the Tempter :

“ The decree is fixed
That thou shalt have for thine inheritance
The nations all, and earth's remotest parts
For thy possession. With an iron rod
Thou yet shalt rule the world, and dash each foe 750
In pieces, like the potter's shattered clay.
All this is fore-ordained. Thy path, also,
To such dominion is prescribed throughout
In lines of agony. I now propose
Attainment of the end more easily— 755
All pain eschewed—THY CROWN WITHOUT THY CROSS !
My kingdom, although doomed to fall in dust
If we contend, shall not, like Jericho,
Sink at the summons of the challenger.
Most resolute resistance shall I make, 760

Not shunning use of all permitted means
 In Earth and Hell for desperate defence.
 But such unequal war I would avoid.
 Instant surrender I prefer to make,
 Here abdicating all: thus sparing thee 765
 The life of anguish and the death of shame
 Inevitably thine in strife with me.
 See, now, from hence the splendour of my realms.
 Here at our feet lies what ye Hebrews call
 'The World'—the pleasant land from Lebanon 770
 To Sihor, and from Jordan to the Sea.
 Mark the choice vineyard and the pasture green
 Alternating throughout in hill and vale.
 Beyond are Bashan's verdant plains, attached
 By right of war to Jacob's heritage. 775
 And there—Jerusalem, whose streets were once
 Of silver, and her palaces of gold;
 Again to rise magnificent, possessed
 By David's greater Son. This little world
 Is circumgirt by larger—Rome's domain; 780

All previous dynasties—Assyrian, Mede,
 Grecian, and African—absorbed in one.
 But this, again, is circumscribed by realms
 More vast:—India, with its six hundred thrones :
 Trans-Gangene empires still unvisited : 785
 An unknown hemisphere—a second Earth :
 Islands of continental magnitude :—
 See ! the refractive atmosphere uplifts
 Each distant scene. Such sight no human eye
 Has yet beheld, nor ever shall again. 790
 This wide dominion shall be wholly thine,
 Without an effort made, or pain endured,
 With full investiture here, at my hands,
 If thou wilt formal homage pay for all,
 In worshipful address before me now.” 795

To him the Tempted One instantly thus :
 “ Get hence, O Satan, with thy lying bribe,
 Is it not written—‘ Thou the LORD thy God
 Shalt worship ; and Him only shalt thou serve ’ ? ”

Not unprepared for first repulse, Satan 800
Rejoined :

“ Well might I question what thou say’st
Is written, since in Scripture is not found
Precept so worded. Nor, although there were,
Would it be relevant. What do I ask ?
Not worship rightly due to God alone, 805
But such as Scripture sanctions, yea, enjoins,
As seemly to a prince. But I forbear
Mere argument, though vantage rests with me.
To thine own hopes and fears I make appeal.
Wilt thou elect to reach thy promised throne 810
By rueful path made terrible to thee
At every step by suffering untold,
When in a moment, without touch of pain,
Thou canst secure for ever to thyself
All thou might’st win through woe ineffable ? 815
That is my question : thine the answer is.
Much more I could now urge, as well thou know’st ;
But am content to leave the issue thus.”

To him thus Jesus :

“ Have my answer then,
Father of lies. And first, the written word 820
Is as I cited, though the letter seems
To thee not so. For, in thy crafty use
Of plainest terms thou mak'st a difference
Where none exists between the things implied.
Thou speak'st of ' worship ' in a lower sense, 825
But askedst it in form where it must mean
That worship which is God's prerogative :
For He is Potentate in Heaven and Earth,
And giveth thrones in them to whom He will.
Therefore it is, when from the Holy Book 830
I made reply, I met thy sophistry
By citing, not one precept by itself—
(So artfully hadst thou contrived thy snare,
No single passage meets thy fallacy :)—
But several conjoined, reflecting more 835
The living spirit of the word throughout
Than the dead letter in a given place.

Not otherwise, by warrant of God's word
 Might I confute thee in thine argument.
 But even were it true that at His hand 840
 Thou hast received authority to reign
 Subordinate to Him upon this Earth,
 With power of transference at thine own will—
 A power attached to no deputed rule—
 Homage to thee would treason high involve 845
 'Gainst Him whose favour so exalted thee.
 But false thy boast. No better title thine
 Than rebel-chief, defiant of thy Lord.
 Thy kingdom is a lie cast in the face
 Of Him who reignieth Lord Omnipotent, 850
 In right of first creation of all things.
 Thou durst e'en vaunt of willing preference
 For thy misrule by multitudes on Earth :—
 My mission is to turn the hearts of men
 In loyalty again to their true Lord ; 855
 And when all hearts are drawn to Him, then falls
 Thy kingdom, swift as lightning, to the ground.

Where shall be then thy present impious sneer—
‘ This grace, indeed, comes of necessity ’—
When, Heaven long lost to thee, Earth is redeemed, 860
And Hell, in anarchy, disowns its prince ?
But see, once more, the lying artifice
Of this suggested compromise with thee.
With plausible admission of the doom
Inevitable to thy baseless throne 865
If we contend for final mastery,
Thou feign’st to pity me as suffering Man,
And profferest surrender of this world
On terms impossible—that I, forsooth,
The Cross evading, may attain the Crown. 870
Thou hast e’en said that these are bound in one
Immutable decree. Messiah’s Crown
Is set prophetically on His Cross.
There shall He conquer Sin, and Death, and Hell ;
And only there. There is no other path 875
By which His destined dignity is reached.
And did I entertain this compromise,

What must I then become, but as thyself—
Arch rebel as thou art ? Nay, baser still
Than thou, fast rivetting thy chains on those 880
Whom I am sent to set for ever free.
A deeper Hell than thine should I devise,
Redemption's gracious work abandoning.
Welcome, Rome's rack and gibbet ; welcome thrice,
All horrors thou canst heap upon my Cross ; 885
Rather than hold compáct of any kind
With thee, usurping fiend, father of lies.
This is my choice : my heart's own preference."

The Tempter thus repelled, this deep dismay
Concealed ; and yet again calmly rejoined : 890

" Thy self-devotion I can understand.
So Regulus resigned himself to death,
For love of country. So have other men
Won immortality, despising life.
But all such heroes sacrificed themselves 895

To spare their fellow-men impending woe.
 Thou choosest for thyself the cruel cross,
 But carest not for those who, by constraint,
 Shall share thy doom. Is this thy love for Man ?
 Our enmity, if unallayed, must work 900
 Revolting desolation in all forms
 Throughout the world until the close of time.
 A sword, O Christ, thou sendest on the Earth !
 Dividing houses, kindreds, countries all,
 By fiercer hatreds than the human heart, 905
 With all its innate virulence, has yet
 Developed. Never since the world began
 Was writ such history, in blood and fire,
 As thou shalt give material for, alas !
 By choosing suffering. The arm of Rome 910
 Shall lift itself to crush the myriads
 Who fondly hailed thee as their Prince of Peace :
 Prelude to persecution in all times,
 Consigning thousands, all reluctantly,
 To death in shapes appalling as thine own. 915

But not the wolf without the helpless fold
 Shall ravage ruthlessly thy trustful ones,
 As those within shall wage between themselves
 Relentless war, for conscience' sake toward thee.
 For in thy name invoked shall every root 920
 Of bitterness in man's hard hating heart
 Be cultured into growth of wantonness ;
 Watered, forsooth, by prayer-sought showers of Heaven,
 And forced by seven times fiercer fires of Hell,
 So choice the plant within thy blood-bought Church ! 925
 Far keener than the tried Damascus blade
 Shall thy Religion, peace-bearing in name,
 Set sharp the edge of dark malevolence
 In every breast. So vainly shalt thou teach—
 ' By this shall all men know my followers, 930
 That they each other love.' For their sakes, then,
 Pity thyself. To me it matters nought.
 My throne is lost, what course soe'er thou tak'st.
 But even Satan has a heart to feel
 For such gratuitous calamity." 935

Jesus indignant to him thus :

“ Thou foe
Of God and man, how lie on lie thou heap'st,
In fabric baseless as this kingdom is
Of which thou boastedst. Durst thou cast on me
The infamy of innocence outraged 940
In many a form of death—of human strife
Intensified through preaching of my Cross ?
Who else but thou is author of such woe
To World and Church ? Thou art, as from the first,
Archliar and Archmurderer. Feign not 945
Compassion for the many sufferers
Who, following me, shall share my Cross and Crown :
Their blood is on thy head. Safe shall I keep
Their precious souls, and their slain bodies raise
Again in deathless life. Hence, thou foul fiend ! 950
Freight as thou wilt, for me and them, the scale
With agony : a far exceeding weight
Of everlasting joy ——— ”

Sudden retreat

The Tempter made, having exhausted quite
His repertory of tried artifice :

955

And seeing, with confusion, as the sun
Dipped his last crimsoned thread softly beneath
The purpled wave—closing the fortieth day
Of abstinence—the hastening approach
Of angels under Michael's leadership,
Divinely charged to minister to Him
Who now at length, released from ecstasy,
Exhaustion felt, and craved for sustenance.

960

Despairing rage sat on the clouded brow
Of the departing Tempter : on his lip,
Writhing in scorn, foul malediction hung :—

965

“ I'll come to him again,” he cried, “ but then
With gathered terrors of grim Death and Hell.

Henceforth I hold not back the demon hosts :
Be they like hornets round him till my hour 970
With him is come. Then, Jesus, hold thine own.
The Nazarene impaled—KING OF THE JEWS—
Shall be a spectacle to Earth and Heaven
Of my expiring power. My kingdom falls :
But I, like Samson in extremity, 975
Will havoc make, freezing in fright all lips
Prepared to chant a pæan in his praise.”

Jesus meanwhile partook of food supplied
By angel hands :—bread of the new first-fruits
Of Judah's golden harvest, gathered then ; 980
Choice clusters culled from Eshcol's luscious vine ;
And crystal draught from Jordan's limpid stream.
When ministered sufficiently, then sang
The host of heavenly ones triumphally,
Accompanied on lyres invisible, 985
Harmonious in celestial resonance :—

“Laud to our KING : Who hath in righteousness
This victory retributive ordained.
Laud to the SON : Who hath, as Second Man,
Wrought blest reversal of the first man’s Fall. 990
Ye trembling hearts of Earth, Fear not : be strong
In your Defender’s strength. His panoply
Be yours, and be abundant conquerors.
Laud to the SPIRIT—without measure given :
Whose might temptation measureless hath foiled. 995
Now shall the fiery circuit of Life’s Tree
Safeguard eternally each tempted one
Who, through resistance, wins the right to eat,
With us, the vital fruit. Great SUFFERER,
Great CONQUEROR, all angels worship Thee. 1000

THE END.

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