

THE SECOND BOOK

MEANWHILE the new-baptized, who yet remained
At Jordan with the Baptist, and had seen
Him whom they heard so late expressly called
Jesus Messiah, Son of God, declared,
And on that high authority had believed,
And with him talked, and with him lodged--I mean
Andrew and Simon, famous after known,
With others, though in Holy Writ not named--
Now missing him, their joy so lately found,
So lately found and so abruptly gone, 10
Began to doubt, and doubted many days,
And, as the days increased, increased their doubt.
Sometimes they thought he might be only shewn,
And for a time caught up to God, as once
Moses was in the Mount and missing long,
And the great Thisbite, who on fiery wheels
Rode up to Heaven, yet once again to come.
Therefore, as those young prophets then with care
Sought lost Eliah, so in each place these
Nigh to Bethabara--in Jericho 20
The city of palms, AEnon, and Salem old,
Machaerus, and each town or city walled
On this side the broad lake Genezaret,
Or in Peraea--but returned in vain.

Then on the bank of Jordan, by a creek,
 Where winds with reeds and osiers whispering play,
 Plain fishermen (no greater men them call),
 Close in a cottage low together got,
 Their unexpected loss and complaints outbreathed:--
 "Alas, from what high hope to what relapse 30
 Unlooked for are we fallen! Our eyes beheld
 Messiah certainly now come, so long
 Expected of our fathers; we have heard
 His words, his wisdom full of grace and truth.
 'Now, now, for sure, deliverance is at hand;
 The kingdom shall to Israel be restored.'
 Thus we rejoiced, but soon our joy is turned
 Into perplexity and new amaze.
 For whither is he gone? what accident
 Hath rapt him from us? will he now retire 40
 After appearance, and again prolong
 Our expectation? God of Israel,
 Send thy Messiah forth; the time is come.
 Behold the kings of the earth, how they oppress
 Thy Chosen, to what highth their power unjust
 They have exalted, and behind them cast
 All fear of Thee; arise, and vindicate
 Thy glory; free thy people from their yoke!
 But let us wait; thus far He hath performed--
 Sent his Anointed, and to us revealed him 50

By his great Prophet pointed at and shown
In public, and with him we have conversed.
Let us be glad of this, and all our fears
Lay on his providence; He will not fail,
Nor will withdraw him now, nor will recall--
Mock us with his blest sight, then snatch him hence:
Soon we shall see our hope, our joy, return."

Thus they out of their complaints new hope resume
To find whom at the first they found unsought.

But to his mother Mary, when she saw 60
Others returned from baptism, not her Son,
Nor left at Jordan tidings of him none,
Within her breast though calm, her breast though pure,
Motherly cares and fears got head, and raised
Some troubled thoughts, which she in sighs thus clad:--

"Oh, what avails me now that honour high,
To have conceived of God, or that salute,
'Hail, highly favoured, among women blest!'
While I to sorrows am no less advanced,
And fears as eminent above the lot 70
Of other women, by the birth I bore:
In such a season born, when scarce a shed
Could be obtained to shelter him or me
From the bleak air? A stable was our warmth,
A manger his; yet soon enforced to fly
Thence into Egypt, till the murderous king

Were dead, who sought his life, and, missing, filled
With infant blood the streets of Bethlehem.
From Egypt home returned, in Nazareth
Hath been our dwelling many years; his life 80
Private, unactive, calm, contemplative,
Little suspicious to any king. But now,
Full grown to man, acknowledged, as I hear,
By John the Baptist, and in public shewn,
Son owned from Heaven by his Father's voice,
I looked for some great change. To honour? no;
But trouble, as old Simeon plain foretold,
That to the fall and rising he should be
Of many in Israel, and to a sign
Spoken against--that through my very soul 90
A sword shall pierce. This is my favoured lot,
My exaltation to afflictions high!
Afflicted I may be, it seems, and blest!
I will not argue that, nor will repine.
But where delays he now? Some great intent
Conceals him. When twelve years he scarce had seen,
I lost him, but so found as well I saw
He could not lose himself, but went about
His Father's business. What he meant I mused--
Since understand; much more his absence now 100
Thus long to some great purpose he obscures.
But I to wait with patience am inured;

My heart hath been a storehouse long of things
And sayings laid up, pretending strange events."

Thus Mary, pondering oft, and oft to mind
Recalling what remarkably had passed
Since first her Salutation heard, with thoughts
Meekly composed awaited the fulfilling:
The while her Son, tracing the desert wild,
Sole, but with holiest meditations fed, 110
Into himself descended, and at once
All his great work to come before him set--
How to begin, how to accomplish best
His end of being on Earth, and mission high.
For Satan, with sly preface to return,
Had left him vacant, and with speed was gone
Up to the middle region of thick air,
Where all his Potentates in council sate.
There, without sign of boast, or sign of joy,
Solicitous and blank, he thus began:-- 120

"Princes, Heaven's ancient Sons, AEthereal Thrones--
Daemonian Spirits now, from the element
Each of his reign allotted, rightlier called
Powers of Fire, Air, Water, and Earth beneath
(So may we hold our place and these mild seats
Without new trouble!)--such an enemy
Is risen to invade us, who no less
Threatens than our expulsion down to Hell.

I, as I undertook, and with the vote
Consenting in full frequence was impowered, 130
Have found him, viewed him, tasted him; but find
Far other labour to be undergone
Than when I dealt with Adam, first of men,
Though Adam by his wife's allurements fell,
However to this Man inferior far--
If he be Man by mother's side, at least
With more than human gifts from Heaven adorned,
Perfections absolute, graces divine,
And amplitude of mind to greatest deeds.

Therefore I am returned, lest confidence 140
Of my success with Eve in Paradise
Deceive ye to persuasion over-sure
Of like succeeding here. I summon all
Rather to be in readiness with hand
Or counsel to assist, lest I, who erst
Thought none my equal, now be overmatched."

So spake the old Serpent, doubting, and from all
With clamour was assured their utmost aid
At his command; when from amidst them rose
Belial, the dissolutest Spirit that fell, 150
The sensualest, and, after Asmodai,
The fleshliest Incubus, and thus advised:--
"Set women in his eye and in his walk,
Among daughters of men the fairest found.

Many are in each region passing fair
As the noon sky, more like to goddesses
Than mortal creatures, graceful and discreet,
Expert in amorous arts, enchanting tongues
Persuasive, virgin majesty with mild
And sweet allayed, yet terrible to approach, 160
Skilled to retire, and in retiring draw
Hearts after them tangled in amorous nets.

Such object hath the power to soften and tame
Severest temper, smooth the rugged'st brow,
Enerve, and with voluptuous hope dissolve,
Draw out with credulous desire, and lead
At will the manliest, resolute'st breast,
As the magnetic hardest iron draws.

Women, when nothing else, beguiled the heart
Of wisest Solomon, and made him build, 170
And made him bow, to the gods of his wives."

To whom quick answer Satan thus returned:--
"Belial, in much uneven scale thou weigh'st
All others by thyself. Because of old
Thou thyself doat'st on womankind, admiring
Their shape, their colour, and attractive grace,
None are, thou think'st, but taken with such toys.
Before the Flood, thou, with thy lusty crew,
False titled Sons of God, roaming the Earth,
Cast wanton eyes on the daughters of men, 180

And coupled with them, and begot a race.
Have we not seen, or by relation heard,
In courts and regal chambers how thou lurk'st,
In wood or grove, by mossy fountain-side,
In valley or green meadow, to waylay
Some beauty rare, Calisto, Clymene,
Daphne, or Semele, Antiopa,
Or Aymone, Syrinx, many more
Too long--then lay'st thy scapes on names adored,
Apollo, Neptune, Jupiter, or Pan, 190
Satyr, or Faun, or Silvan? But these haunts
Delight not all. Among the sons of men
How many have with a smile made small account
Of beauty and her lures, easily scorned
All her assaults, on worthier things intent!
Remember that Pellean conqueror,
A youth, how all the beauties of the East
He slightly viewed, and slightly overpassed;
How he surnamed of Africa dismissed,
In his prime youth, the fair Iberian maid. 200
For Solomon, he lived at ease, and, full
Of honour, wealth, high fare, aimed not beyond
Higher design than to enjoy his state;
Thence to the bait of women lay exposed.
But he whom we attempt is wiser far
Than Solomon, of more exalted mind,

Made and set wholly on the accomplishment
Of greatest things. What woman will you find,
Though of this age the wonder and the fame,
On whom his leisure will voutsafe an eye 210
Of fond desire? Or should she, confident,
As sitting queen adored on Beauty's throne,
Descend with all her winning charms begirt
To enamour, as the zone of Venus once
Wrought that effect on Jove (so fables tell),
How would one look from his majestic brow,
Seated as on the top of Virtue's hill,
Discountenance her despised, and put to rout
All her array, her female pride deject,
Or turn to reverent awe! For Beauty stands 220
In the admiration only of weak minds
Led captive; cease to admire, and all her plumes
Fall flat, and shrink into a trivial toy,
At every sudden slighting quite abashed.
Therefore with manlier objects we must try
His constancy--with such as have more shew
Of worth, of honour, glory, and popular praise
(Rocks whereon greatest men have ofttest wrecked);
Or that which only seems to satisfy
Lawful desires of nature, not beyond. 230
And now I know he hungers, where no food
Is to be found, in the wide Wilderness:

The rest commit to me; I shall let pass
No advantage, and his strength as oft assay."
He ceased, and heard their grant in loud acclaim;
Then forthwith to him takes a chosen band
Of Spirits likest to himself in guile,
To be at hand and at his beck appear,
If cause were to unfold some active scene
Of various persons, each to know his part; 240
Then to the desert takes with these his flight,
Where still, from shade to shade, the Son of God,
After forty days' fasting, had remained,
Now hungering first, and to himself thus said:--
"Where will this end? Four times ten days I have passed
Wandering this woody maze, and human food
Nor tasted, nor had appetite. That fast
To virtue I impute not, or count part
Of what I suffer here. If nature need not,
Or God support nature without repast, 250
Though needing, what praise is it to endure?
But now I feel I hunger; which declares
Nature hath need of what she asks. Yet God
Can satisfy that need some other way,
Though hunger still remain. So it remain
Without this body's wasting, I content me,
And from the sting of famine fear no harm;
Nor mind it, fed with better thoughts, that feed

Me hungering more to do my Father's will."

It was the hour of night, when thus the Son 260
Communed in silent walk, then laid him down
Under the hospitable covert nigh
Of trees thick interwoven. There he slept,
And dreamed, as appetite is wont to dream,
Of meats and drinks, nature's refreshment sweet.
Him thought he by the brook of Cherith stood,
And saw the ravens with their horny beaks
Food to Elijah bringing even and morn--
Though ravenous, taught to abstain from what they brought;

He saw the Prophet also, how he fled 270
Into the desert, and how there he slept
Under a juniper--then how, awaked,
He found his supper on the coals prepared,
And by the Angel was bid rise and eat,
And eat the second time after repose,
The strength whereof sufficed him forty days:
Sometimes that with Elijah he partook,
Or as a guest with Daniel at his pulse.

Thus wore out night; and now the harald Lark
Left his ground-nest, high towering to descry 280
The Morn's approach, and greet her with his song.
As lightly from his grassy couch up rose
Our Saviour, and found all was but a dream;
Fasting he went to sleep, and fasting waked.

Up to a hill anon his steps he reared,
From whose high top to ken the prospect round,
If cottage were in view, sheep-cote, or herd;
But cottage, herd, or sheep-cote, none he saw--
Only in a bottom saw a pleasant grove,
With chaunt of tuneful birds resounding loud. 290

Thither he bent his way, determined there
To rest at noon, and entered soon the shade
High-roofed, and walks beneath, and alleys brown,
That opened in the midst a woody scene;
Nature's own work it seemed (Nature taught Art),
And, to a superstitious eye, the haunt
Of wood-gods and wood-nymphs. He viewed it round;
When suddenly a man before him stood,
Not rustic as before, but seemlier clad,
As one in city or court or palace bred, 300

And with fair speech these words to him addressed:--

"With granted leave officious I return,
But much more wonder that the Son of God
In this wild solitude so long should bide,
Of all things destitute, and, well I know,
Not without hunger. Others of some note,
As story tells, have trod this wilderness:
The fugitive Bond-woman, with her son,
Outcast Nebaioth, yet found here relief
By a providing Angel; all the race 310

Of Israel here had famished, had not God
Rained from heaven manna; and that Prophet bold,
Native of Thebez, wandering here, was fed
Twice by a voice inviting him to eat.
Of thee those forty days none hath regard,
Forty and more deserted here indeed."

To whom thus Jesus:--"What conclud'st thou hence?
They all had need; I, as thou seest, have none."

"How hast thou hunger then?" Satan replied.

"Tell me, if food were now before thee set, 320

Wouldst thou not eat?" "Thereafter as I like
the giver," answered Jesus. "Why should that
Cause thy refusal?" said the subtle Fiend.

"Hast thou not right to all created things?
Owe not all creatures, by just right, to thee
Duty and service, nor to stay till bid,

But tender all their power? Nor mention I
Meats by the law unclean, or offered first

To idols--those young Daniel could refuse;

Nor proffered by an enemy--though who 330

Would scruple that, with want oppressed? Behold,
Nature ashamed, or, better to express,

Troubled, that thou shouldst hunger, hath purveyed
From all the elements her choicest store,

To treat thee as beseems, and as her Lord

With honour. Only deign to sit and eat."

He spake no dream; for, as his words had end,
 Our Saviour, lifting up his eyes, beheld,
 In ample space under the broadest shade,
 A table richly spread in regal mode, 340
 With dishes piled and meats of noblest sort
 And savour--beasts of chase, or fowl of game,
 In pastry built, or from the spit, or boiled,
 Grisamber-steamed; all fish, from sea or shore,
 Freshet or purling brook, of shell or fin,
 And exquisitest name, for which was drained
 Pontus, and Lucrine bay, and Afric coast.
 Alas! how simple, to these cates compared,
 Was that crude Apple that diverted Eve!
 And at a stately sideboard, by the wine, 350
 That fragrant smell diffused, in order stood
 Tall stripling youths rich-clad, of fairer hue
 Than Ganymed or Hylas; distant more,
 Under the trees now tripped, now solemn stood,
 Nymphs of Diana's train, and Naiades
 With fruits and flowers from Amalthea's horn,
 And ladies of the Hesperides, that seemed
 Fairer than feigned of old, or fabled since
 Of faery damsels met in forest wide
 By knights of Logres, or of Lyones, 360
 Lancelot, or Pelleas, or Pellenore.
 And all the while harmonious airs were heard

Of chiming strings or charming pipes; and winds
Of gentlest gale Arabian odours fanned
From their soft wings, and Flora's earliest smells.
Such was the splendour; and the Tempter now
His invitation earnestly renewed:--

"What doubts the Son of God to sit and eat?
These are not fruits forbidden; no interdict
Defends the touching of these viands pure; 370
Their taste no knowledge works, at least of evil,
But life preserves, destroys life's enemy,
Hunger, with sweet restorative delight.
All these are Spirits of air, and woods, and springs,
Thy gentle ministers, who come to pay
Thee homage, and acknowledge thee their Lord.
What doubt'st thou, Son of God? Sit down and eat."

To whom thus Jesus temperately replied:--
"Said'st thou not that to all things I had right?
And who withholds my power that right to use? 380
Shall I receive by gift what of my own,
When and where likes me best, I can command?
I can at will, doubt not, as soon as thou,
Command a table in this wilderness,
And call swift flights of Angels ministrant,
Arrayed in glory, on my cup to attend:
Why shouldst thou, then, obtrude this diligence
In vain, where no acceptance it can find?"

And with my hunger what hast thou to do?
Thy pompous delicacies I contemn, 390
And count thy specious gifts no gifts, but guiles."
To whom thus answered Satan, male-content:--
"That I have also power to give thou seest;
If of that power I bring thee voluntary
What I might have bestowed on whom I pleased,
And rather opportunely in this place
Chose to impart to thy apparent need,
Why shouldst thou not accept it? But I see
What I can do or offer is suspect.
Of these things others quickly will dispose, 400
Whose pains have earned the far-fet spoil." With that
Both table and provision vanished quite,
With sound of harpies' wings and talons heard;
Only the importune Tempter still remained,
And with these words his temptation pursued:--
"By hunger, that each other creature tames,
Thou art not to be harmed, therefore not moved;
Thy temperance, invincible besides,
For no allurements yields to appetite;
And all thy heart is set on high designs, 410
High actions. But wherewith to be achieved?
Great acts require great means of enterprise;
Thou art unknown, unfriended, low of birth,
A carpenter thy father known, thyself

Bred up in poverty and straits at home,
Lost in a desert here and hunger-bit.
Which way, or from what hope, dost thou aspire
To greatness? whence authority deriv'st?
What followers, what retinue canst thou gain,
Or at thy heels the dizzy multitude, 420
Longer than thou canst feed them on thy cost?
Money brings honour, friends, conquest, and realms.
What raised Antipater the Edomite,
And his son Herod placed on Juda's throne,
Thy throne, but gold, that got him puissant friends?
Therefore, if at great things thou wouldst arrive,
Get riches first, get wealth, and treasure heap--
Not difficult, if thou hearken to me.
Riches are mine, fortune is in my hand;
They whom I favour thrive in wealth amain, 430
While virtue, valour, wisdom, sit in want."
To whom thus Jesus patiently replied:--
"Yet wealth without these three is impotent
To gain dominion, or to keep it gained--
Witness those ancient empires of the earth,
In highth of all their flowing wealth dissolved;
But men endued with these have oft attained,
In lowest poverty, to highest deeds--
Gideon, and Jephtha, and the shepherd lad
Whose offspring on the throne of Juda sate 440

So many ages, and shall yet regain
That seat, and reign in Israel without end.
Among the Heathen (for throughout the world
To me is not unknown what hath been done
Worthy of memorial) canst thou not remember
Quintius, Fabricius, Curius, Regulus?
For I esteem those names of men so poor,
Who could do mighty things, and could contemn
Riches, though offered from the hand of kings.
And what in me seems wanting but that I 450
May also in this poverty as soon
Accomplish what they did, perhaps and more?
Extol not riches, then, the toil of fools,
The wise man's cumbrance, if not snare; more apt
To slacken virtue and abate her edge
Than prompt her to do aught may merit praise.
What if with like aversion I reject
Riches and realms! Yet not for that a crown,
Golden in shew, is but a wreath of thorns,
Brings dangers, troubles, cares, and sleepless nights, 460
To him who wears the regal diadem,
When on his shoulders each man's burden lies;
For therein stands the office of a king,
His honour, virtue, merit, and chief praise,
That for the public all this weight he bears.
Yet he who reigns within himself, and rules

Passions, desires, and fears, is more a king--
Which every wise and virtuous man attains;
And who attains not, ill aspires to rule
Cities of men, or headstrong multitudes, 470
Subject himself to anarchy within,
Or lawless passions in him, which he serves.
But to guide nations in the way of truth
By saving doctrine, and from error lead
To know, and, knowing, worship God aright,
Is yet more kingly. This attracts the soul,
Governs the inner man, the nobler part;
That other o'er the body only reigns,
And oft by force--which to a generous mind
So reigning can be no sincere delight. 480
Besides, to give a kingdom hath been thought
Greater and nobler done, and to lay down
Far more magnanimous, than to assume.
Riches are needless, then, both for themselves,
And for thy reason why they should be sought--
To gain a sceptre, ofttest better missed."