



ALSO BY TONY PROST

BATRACHOMYOMACHIA (1999)

ETAS OF THE LOST BETA (1987)

# NONNI PANOPOLITANI

PARAPHRASIS S. EVANGELII

IOANNEI

translated into English by M.A. Prost  
S. Diego, MMII



# NONNOS of PANOPOLIS

PARAPHRASE OF THE GOSPEL OF  
St. JOHN

translated into English by M.A. Prost  
S. Diego, MMII

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without whom none of this would have been possible!*





## EXILES by C.P. Cavafi

It goes on being Alexandria still. Just walk a bit  
along the straight road that ends at the Hippodrome  
and you'll see palaces and monuments that will amaze you.  
Whatever war-damage it's suffered,  
however much smaller it's become,  
it's still a wonderful city.

And then, what with excursions and books  
and various kinds of study, time does go by.  
In the evenings we meet on the sea front,  
the five of us (all, naturally, under fictitious names)  
and some of the few other Greeks  
still left in the city.

Sometimes we discuss church affairs  
(the people here seem to lean toward Rome)  
and sometimes literature.

The other day we read some lines by Nonnos:  
what imagery, what rhythm, what diction and harmony!  
All enthusiasm, how we admired the Panopolitan.  
So the days go by, and our stay here  
isn't unpleasant because, naturally,  
it's not going to last forever.

We've had good news: if something doesn't come  
of what's now afoot in Smyrna,  
then in April our friends are sure to move from Epiros,  
so one way or another, our plans are definitely working out,  
and we'll easily overthrow Basil.

And when we do, at last our turn will come.

*Translated by Edmund Keeley & Philip Sherrard*

The anonymous exiles of the poem cannot be identified precisely, yet their situation falls within what Cavafi called "historical possibility." The scene is set in Alexandria, obviously after its conquest by the Arabs (641) and probably shortly after the murder of the Byzantine Emperor Michael III by his co-emperor Basil I (867-886), founder of the Macedonian dynasty. The mention of Christians who "seem to lean toward Rome" further points to the period of the Photian schism (867-870), when its initiator, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Photios, had been deposed by the emperor and most of his friends had been driven into exile. The "Panopolitan" of line 17 is of course the Egyptian-Greek poet Nonnus (5th c. A.D.?) mentioned in line 15.

While in reading the Gospels—particularly that of St. John himself, or whatever early Gnostic took his name and mantle—I see the continual assertion of the imagination as the basis of all spiritual and material life. I also see that to Christ imagination was simply a form of Love, and that to him Love was Lord in the fullest meaning of the phrase.

Oscar Wilde: *De Profundis*



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## CAVEAT

This poem is a paraphrase, in verse, of the Gospel of John. It was written in Greek, in the Fifth Century, by Nonnos of Panopolis, probably in Alexandria, Egypt, during the last days of the Western Roman Empire. Of the writer, nothing is known.



# The Life and Times of Nonnos of Panopolis

## I

Panopolis is the oldest city of Egypt. According to local tradition, and who is more likely to know, the town was founded by Kush the Son of Ham and grandson of Noah, and the father of Nimrod the mighty hunter.

It is a dry, dusty town, in a dry, dusty landscape, beneath a dome of brilliant azure spanning from the Eastern Desert to the Western Desert, in a land far, far from the ocean, with a river running through it.

But the Nile is not only one River, it is the happy confluence of two Rivers. The people say: "The White Nile makes the Nile and the Blue Nile makes Egypt." If there were only the White Nile, the river would run all year but Egypt would be parched during the summer. If there were only the Blue Nile, the river would flood between July and October, then fall to a trickle for the rest of the year.

The Nile is at its lowest in June, then, slowly but with increasing rapidity, it begins its life-giving flood. As the summer passes, the river rises and the muddy waters overflow their banks and flood out into the flatland on either side. All the biomass of deep continental Africa is carried by tributaries into the Nile, and swept far downstream to be deposited, year after year, on the banks of Egypt and the rich

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Delta. After the surge has passed and the waters recede, they leave a smooth trackless waste of thick rich mud as far as the eye can see. The farmers tramp barefoot out into the muck to re-plot their fields and plant their seeds. So it has been forever under the golden sun.

The Bible tells us of years of plenty and years of famine in Egypt. There were also years of watery devastation. Every spring, the townsmen and the farmers would begin nervously to watch for the rising of the river. They celebrated the arrival of the little crocodiles washed down from their southern homes to the soft waters of Egypt. The priests recorded the various stages of the flood at the Nilometers, and at the solemn moment when the water reached the top of the banks and began to creep over the dry land, they offered prayers and sacrifices, and sang: "Hail, O River, that comest to give life to Egypt!"

In the year 400 A.D. the town was a provincial capital supported by a small population of peasants serving a fabric industry: weaving, embroidery, tapestries. Legend has it that the pharaohs were buried in shrouds woven in this town. There was enough agriculture to support local needs, and maybe a little for export down the river to Alexandria, if a farmer were hardworking, and lucky, and if Nilus was gracious. The town is located on the east bank of the Nile, but, because the Nile sweeps in a huge bend at this spot, it sits paradoxically west of the river. An unending current of traffic floats by the town, sometimes dropping off merchandise brought down the river from Luxor, one hundred twenty miles to the south, sometimes carrying officials the three hundred-plus miles from Alexandria,

upstream to these rural regions. Most vessels glide by without drawing a second glance, unless perhaps the locals line the bank to watch a one hundred fifty foot red granite obelisk strapped to a barge, trying to negotiate the bend in the River. Like a small city built next to the railroad in the middle of the Great American Desert, Panopolis was connected by a lifeline to the outside world, a freeway with a greenbelt on either side. But hike a short ten minutes from the river east or west, and the landscape, then as now, is the same timeless, unremitting landscape over which Ra has been navigating his Solar Boat from the day he first set sail and time began.

It is one of the world's sacred places.

To this day the locals insist that the Holy Family, in their flight into Egypt, traveled as far as Panopolis, and took shelter in the Wadi-Bi'r el Ein, nearby the town. They say the infant Jesus blessed the spring, and the Bedouins today mix its water with water they bring back from the miraculous well of Zemzem in Mecca, after their Hajj. The Apostle Thomas passed this way on his journey home from India, and the Virgin Mary appeared to him here.

It has gone by many names. In the beginning it was called Ipu. During the age of the Pharaohs it was called Khent-Min, and was the cult center of the god Min. The mother of the heretic Pharaoh Akhenaton had estates in the area. When Nonnos was born here in 400 A.D., it was known to the Egyptians as Khemnis, to the Greeks as Panopolis.

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Min was many gods, but he was always a god of fertility and sexuality. He was drawn as a human male with an erect penis. The statues of the god show him with his hand grasping his penis. Min, Bull of the Great Phallus; the Great Male, the Owner of All Females. The predynastic ruler, Scorpion King, worshiped Min.

After Alexander the Great died in 323 B.C., of sepsis from an arrow wound received on the bloody battlefields of Pakistan, (or from poison), his General Ptolemy claimed Egypt as his personal fiefdom. The Macedonian Greeks moved in and efficiently displaced the four thousand year old Egyptian power structure. They also tried to analogize their own gods to the very peculiar Egyptian gods. Min was easy. The only Greek god shown with an erect penis was Pan, the randy mountain god of the Attic goat herders, so the City of Min became the City of Pan, Panopolis.

By the time Nonnos was growing up and beginning his education, Panopolis was a thoroughly Christian town. But it had been an important religious site for thousands of years, and had been lavishly endowed by the builder Pharaohs. The Temple of Min had been built and rebuilt and enhanced over the millennia, and it still stood, in the north-western part of the town, not yet demolished by the destructive Christian monks. The monumental standing statues of Rameses II and his daughter/consort Meritamun had been pulled down and broken up, showing the other ancient demons dwelling inside what would be their inevitable fate under the reign of Christ, but the Temple

itself still stood, desecrated, abandoned, vandalized, and still too huge for the puny monks to destroy utterly.

Life hugs the river. Death beckons from the desert. The town sits surrounded by tombs, 7000 years of accumulated tombs, tombs of all the people who have ever lived in this little outpost since Time began. And each one of them was, in his time, carried out of town and buried in a dry hole in the desert, or in an elaborate tomb cut into the cliffs. There are far more dead people interred around Panopolis than living people dwelling within it.

Alas, in 1884 local licenses were authorized by the absentee Turkish rulers of Egypt to excavate the eastern necropolis of the town, now called Akhmim. These were issued to wealthy citizens, who engaged the local militia for the actual digging. In short order, as many as 8,000 to 10,000 mummies were unearthed, most of no value, merely the peasants who had been laid to their eternal rest outside the town in which they had been born, lived, labored, prayed and died. Many of the mummies were sold to the Egyptian Railway as fuel for its engines. Others were purchased by American paper mills, for the linen wrappings. By 1888, the necropolis was thoroughly despoiled. A visitor in 1895 wrote, "As far as you can see, there are black holes, cavities, where tombs were opened; other black spots are bodies, mummies that were robbed of their textiles. Everywhere the necropolis has been systematically plundered."

But this Industrial Age sacrilege had not yet been committed at the time Nonnos would have begun his religious training, perhaps in one of the new Christian

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monasteries, very possibly the White Monastery founded by the great Abbot Shenouda in the Western Desert, across the Nile and some ten or fifteen miles on foot from Panopolis. Outside of town, out past the cemeteries where the ancient ghosts and devils howled on windy nights, back up the cliffs and into the harsh desert table-land, new Christian communities were growing, clean, whitewashed mud brick communities, mostly of men, who wanted to retire from the world to think about spiritual matters.

There was already a long anchorite tradition in Egypt, but those first hermits had lived apart from humanity, solitary in the wasteland, talking to God, and getting answers from devils. The innovator monk Pachomius had founded several monasteries near Panopolis in the previous generation, and by the time of Nonnos these were well established. Shenouda's own White Monastery held two thousand monks at this time, and was probably the most prestigious. Although nominally a hermit in retreat, Shenouda kept in close touch with the Bishops of Panopolis, and he attended the Council of Ephesus in company with Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria, in 431 A.D.

Nonnos grew up in a town suffused with spirituality. In his time, this took the form of rigorous Christianity. The Desert Fathers preached Rules of Living to defeat the constant temptations of Satan, who raged everywhere, and delighted in nothing more than the sins of monks. Not for them the sophisticated theological wars raging down river in the great cities. Those who came to the desert came to avoid the World, to mortify the Flesh, and to beat the Devil in

hand to hand combat. Some of them were anti-social psychopaths, unable to live in society. Some of them were sophisticated persons of power and influence, who had left the blandishments of civilization when they recognized that all was vanity without God. Some were the aimless, some were the shiftless, some were escaped slaves, some were saints.

Panopolis was a small city, and Nonnos' native talent must have been recognized at an early age. He would have been sponsored by someone with education and culture, and was probably sent as a teenager to family or connections in Alexandria, for further studies at the Library, perhaps hitching a ride on a barge loaded with fabric, or baskets of dates.

One can imagine him lying on his back on the barge, the sweet smell of dates heavy in the humid night air, watching the stars unmoving overhead while the black river banks swept by his peripheral field. The first sixteen years of his life had been spent in Panopolis, learning to read and write, learning to carve pens and mix ink and trim a page of papyrus, learning Greek from Homer and the classics, as well as memorizing the Gospels and the Letters of the Apostles, at the insistence of Bishop Serapion, who oversaw his education. From time to time, the frightening Abbot Shenouda came from across the River to visit the Bishop, and he never failed to quiz Nonnos on his Christian training.

One afternoon, Nonnos was busily carrying a couple buckets of kitchen garbage to the compost pile, while the

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Abbot and the Bishop sat in the courtyard and talked about ecclesiastical politics. He was mindlessly whistling a cheerful tune, when he turned a corner, and ran smack into the bulk of the Abbot.

Nonnos was knocked back on his seat, garbage was everywhere, and one of the buckets went clattering down the corridor. The Abbot glared down at him over his immense grey beard. Bishop Serapion stood shortly behind the Abbot, a quiet smile on his face.

“Aha, young Nonnos,” boomed the Abbot.

“Excuse me, Your Eminence, Your Holiness,” Nonnos stammered, bowing to Serapion and Shenouda, “I am so sorry. I was not watching where I was going.”

“Yes, where are you going, young Nonnos? Where indeed?”

“To...to the compost pile, Your Holiness...,” his voice trailed off. What if this should make the Bishop change his mind about Alexandria!

“I pray that you may go to greater places than the compost pile, young Nonnos. Are you ready for your journey to Alexandria?”

“Oh, yes, Your Eminence...I mean, Your Holiness...I mean... yes, Your Holiness, all ready.”

“Hmmm. Very well. Let us see if you will reflect well on us, here upriver.” Shenouda began to stroke his beard as he contemplated for a moment. Serapion stood by. “Young Nonnos, what did Abba John the Dwarf say on how to conquer the passions of the flesh?” He continued running his fingers through his heavy beard.



Nonnos' blood rushed in his ears. Abba John the Dwarf. He had studied that during Lent last year, when he had been sent to the White Monastery for spiritual training. As soon as Lent was over, he had returned to town, gratefully abandoning Abba John the Dwarf. Presently, he was reading the Iliad, and had been making his own copy, to have whenever he wanted it. He began to nod his head in rhythm as he sat back on his knees, waiting for the verses to come to him. He chanted: "BEGIN. Abba John the Dwarf said: If a king wanted to take possession of his enemy's city, he would begin by cutting off the water and the food, and so his enemies, dying of hunger, would submit to him. It is the same with the passions of the flesh; if a man goes about fasting and hungry, the enemies of his soul grow weak. THANKS BE TO GOD."

He bowed and remained prostrate on the floor in front of the Abbot.

"Excellent. Now, stand up and I will give you my blessing. Do not forget this lesson, young Nonnos," Shenouda said, as the boy clambered to his feet. "What they call fasting in Alexandria will seem to you like Easter Feast. Remember, according to St. Gregory the Sinaite there are three degrees in eating: temperance, sufficiency, and satiety. Temperance is when one wants to eat still more food but abstains, and leaves the table still somewhat hungry. Sufficiency is when one eats what is necessary and sufficient for normal nourishment. Satiety is when one eats more than enough and is more than satisfied. Now if you cannot keep the first two degrees and you proceed to the third, then, at least, do not become a glutton, remembering the words of

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the Lord: Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger.”

The Abbot placed his calloused hands on Nonnos’ head, and prayed softly, “Lord God, we send this boy out into the world, as your instrument of holiness. His innocence is untested. Let him find a worthy guardian in Alexandria, to take him under his care, and make him into the man You created him to become. We have rough-hewn him as best we can, now You shape him into a fitting ornament of Your glory, to shine like a heavenly star across the ages, out of the black night of the world.”

Now, looking up at the night sky, Nonnos wondered which star he would become. He picked out the constellations Brother Olympiodorus had shown him. Brother Olympiodorus had told him that the stars were watch fires burning far, far away in the sky, and that the pagan Greeks had given them names, and drawn pictures of their gods with the stars.

But, three more days until Alexandria! He knew it was the greatest city in the world, and had more people in it than any other city besides Rome. He tried to imagine ten Panopolises lined up in a row along both sides of the river. He thought about all the boats that ceaselessly traveled upstream and downstream, and he tried to imagine a wharf large enough to accommodate all of them. The gentle slurp of the river, the buzzing of the flies chasing the load of dates, the dark night and the bright stars, lulled him to an easy sleep.

Three days slipped frictionlessly by.

## II

Alexandria, Egypt. A brilliant, sun-soaked city of alabaster, marble and sandstone, for seven hundred years it had collected the limitless wealth of Egypt which floated on an unbroken train of barges down the Nile, across the vast Lake Mareotis, to the greatest port city in the world. Every precious thing on the continent of Africa somehow made its way to the Nile, and inevitably down the Nile to Alexandria. And on land, a perpetual stream of busy walkers, palanquins, over-laden asses, irritated camels, placid elephants, met and merged and passed, squeezing up stairs and around corners and along the streets leading to the harbor, a vast semi-circle of blue sea, ringed with marvelous palaces and towers of marble and gold, copper and bronze. The overwhelming vastness, multiplicity and magnificence of the whole scene, the range of buildings, the extraordinary variety of form, the pure Doric and Ionic of the earlier Ptolemies, the barbaric and confused gorgeousness of the newer Romans, and here and there an imitation of the grand elephantine style of Old Egypt, its gaudy colors relieving the effect of its massive and simple outlines; the eternal repose of that great mile long jetty contrasting with the restless ripple of the glittering harbor, and the busy sails which crowded out into the sea beyond, like white doves taking their flight into boundless space; all dazzled.

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Alexandria, Egypt. For seven hundred years the city had been the light of the Græco-Roman world. Although the Alexandrian Library had been partially burned during Cæsar's adventure in Egypt, that had been five hundred years before. It remained the unchallenged intellectual capital of the Mediterranean community of scholars. But the last Library Mathematician, Theon, who edited our standard text of Euclid, had died recently without appointed successor, as the Christian State refused to fund the vestiges of the pagan past.

It was home to the largest, most sophisticated, most transnational, most literate population in the ancient world. It was home to a thriving international Jewish colony, some 40,000 strong, whose ancestors had helped build the city. It was home to a diverse community of sectarian Christian congregations, co-existing in an uneasy tension under the jurisdiction of the orthodox Patriarch. There was no people who loved a fight more than the Alexandrians.

Alexandria, Egypt. Christianity had been the Imperial Cult for less than a century. The city was full of newly built Christian churches thrown up on the foundations of old pagan sites, or temples appropriated outright by the Alexandrian Patriarch.

The forlorn efforts of the Emperor Julian the Apostate, fifty years before, to restore the State Religion and to disestablish Christianity, had ended in treachery and assassination on the bloody battlefields of Persia in 363 A.D. In the offices of the Bishops and high Church officials,

international power politics was now being played, using the language of theology in the way the language of political philosophy is used today. Rome versus Constantinople. Antioch versus Alexandria. Ephesus versus Nicæa.

The Empire was Christian, there was no question about that. Not quite twenty years earlier, the Christian Emperor Theodosius had ordered the world-wide suppression of paganism. Sensitive to the Imperial wishes for the Empire to recreate its identity as a Christian polity, Theophilus, the Patriarch of Alexandria, incited a mob of desert monks to destroy the Serapeum, a major annex of the Library, and the most important city temple for the declining remnant of pagan Alexandrians. Serapis was the patron deity of Alexandria. He had been the god of the city for seven hundred years. Acting under the color of Imperial edict, in a series of violent confrontations with the citizens trying to protect their edifice, Bishop Theophilus' Christian street mob tore down the Temple, and destroyed the Library annex. All they left was an aisle of two hundred columns still standing on their podium.

Theophilus fully committed Alexandria to Imperial interests—to the extent Imperial interests meant the imposition of Christian Rule on the city. Vestiges of paganism were now policed by roving gangs of monks, illiterate but for the Bible, imported into the city from the caves and monasteries of the Nitrian desert. There would be no more Serapis. There would be no more Mithras. There would be no more of those evil demons with animal heads worshipped by the ignorant peasants.

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The Patriarch Theophilus died October 15, 412 A.D., and three days later his thirty-six year old nephew, Cyril, a former monk and student of the Desert Fathers, was consecrated his successor, but only after a vicious riot between his supporters and those of his rival Timotheus, who was supported by the Imperial Præfect, Orestes. Cyril inaugurated his episcopal career by shutting down all the rival churches, outlawing their congregations and seizing their assets. He followed this with an order expelling all Jews from the city. Cyril claimed Imperial authority for this, but Orestes, furious over the loss of the important Jewish population, complained to the Emperor. Cyril sent out his militia of monks, five hundred strong, to stir up the Alexandrians now against the Præfect, and the city was swept with street violence. Orestes' cavalcade was ambushed by Cyril's militia, and one of them, a monk named Ammonius, attempted to assassinate the Præfect with a well thrown rock.

Orestes received a severe head wound, but recovered. His lictors were able to capture Ammonius, who died during questioning. Cyril's monks recovered Ammonius' body, and the Bishop had the assassin carried to the main altar of the Church of St. John the Baptist, erected on the site of the Serapeum which his uncle had destroyed, and canonized the would-be killer as a holy martyr, renaming him as Hagios Thaumasion (Holy Miracle). (His feast day is April 28.) Cyril then propped up the body in a chair, dressed it in sacred vestments, and sent it out surrounded by chanting monks with bells and censers for procession through the already agitated streets.

Also dwelling in Alexandria at this time was one of the most remarkable figures of the Late Empire, a woman named Hypatia. She was the daughter and colleague of that Theon the Mathematician mentioned above, and was renowned as the Empire's leading astronomer, geometer and moral philosopher. Although she was reputed to have been a great beauty in her youth, she practiced celibacy, and preached it to those of her disciples who were so inclined. She had been educated by her father, and her natural talents and intellect drew students and admirers to her private academy, to train in Mathematics and Philosophy.

But it was not a safe time to be an intellectual in Alexandria. The intellectual world of Alexandria was polarized between the Christian schools, and the schools of Philosophy, which covered anything not Christian. And anything not Christian was, *ipso facto*, pagan. Hypatia's popularity, her international reputation despite her blithe rejection of Christianity in favor of rationalist Neo-Platonic Philosophy, inflamed the jealousy of the Cyril.

Hypatia was a close friend of the Præfect Orestes, so Cyril circulated a rumour that it was Hypatia's evil influence that prevented the Christian Orestes from accepting Cyril's spiritual direction and so becoming reconciled with the holy Patriarch. She was slandered as a woman "devoted at all times to magic, astrolabes and instruments of music, who beguiled many people through her satanic wiles, and the governor through her magic."

One day, soon after the martyrdom of Ammonius, as Hypatia was returning home she was set upon by a gang of

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Cyril's monks, torn from her carriage and dragged into the Patriarch's church, where she was stripped naked and battered to death with ceramic roof tiles, and while she was still feebly twitching they put out her eyes. They then orgiastically defleshed her body with the broken roof tiles, tore her limb from limb, took her mangled remains out from the church, and burned them in public.

The Coptic bishop John of Nikiu writes, approvingly: "After Hypatia's death, all the people surrounded the Patriarch Cyril and named him 'the new Theophilus', for he had destroyed the last remains of idolatry in the city."

After this public murder by Cyril's monks, and the apparent inability of the civil authorities to check them, scholars began to abandon the city, and Alexandria became steadily less stable. It was overrun by the monks, who enforced their Patriarch's prejudice against any scientific or classical knowledge.

Cyril proceeded to rule an orthodox Alexandria in the face of ineffectual local governors, patrolled by the posse of monks inherited from his uncle. It was to this city that the young Nonnos now came, to spend the next two decades of his life. Here he would study the remnants of classical culture and literature, despite the rising prejudice against such accomplishments. Here he would try, brilliantly, to reconcile Christian substance with pagan style, and would elevate Christian literature to its zenith in a work combining the Truth of the Gospel with the Beauty of Art.



### III

One may imagine young Nonnos having arrived in Alexandria, in his teens, to stay at the home of an influential family member, or perhaps the urban patron of his own father. The city was now under the complete sway of the Patriarch. Like Geneva under Calvin, or Florence under Savonarola, or England under Cromwell, discipline was strict and entertainments were few. Encounters in public were nervous, and assemblies, except in Church, discouraged. Azar Nafisi describes a city in a not dissimilar situation, Tehran under the Mullahs in the 1980's, "There were only two forces in the world, the army of God and the army of Satan. Thus, every event, every social gesture, also embodied a symbolic allegiance."

Nonnos probably went to school at the Library, which may be thought of as a sort of University, and then came home to study indoors and stay out of trouble. And anyway, the Library would have been enough to keep a likely young man busy. It was in the northeast sector of the city, adjacent to the ancient Ptolemaic palace complex, although a Ptolemy had not ruled in Egypt for more than four hundred years. It was a spacious campus of courtyards and gardens, both botanical and zoological. The Great Hall of Scrolls dominated the prospect. Attached to the Hall was a circular domed dining hall, with a celestial observatory on its roof. (It should be noted that on this roof Eratosthenes, seven hundred years before, had calculated the diameter of the

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Earth at 7,850 miles (7,927 miles actual diameter); here Aristarchos of Samos had proposed the heliocentric theory; and here Claudius Ptolemy, two hundred years before Christ, had developed the elaborate geocentric system which bears his name and was successfully used in preference to the heliocentric hypothesis for seventeen hundred years, until the advent of modern times. On that very rooftop, Hypsicles first divided the circle of the zodiac into 360 degrees, developing concepts he inherited from the ancient Babylonians.) Classrooms surrounded the Great Hall. There were facilities for as many as fifty staff scholars, although the sciences were now understaffed.

What Nonnos would have studied would have been little different in kind from his studies back at home. After the murder of Hypatia, professors ceased to profess, and students to study, Philosophy, either Moral or Natural. But he would have had a treasure trove of literature available to him.

It had been Ptolemy I Soter's (circa 300 B.C.) ambition to own every book in the world. This facially laudable goal must be placed in the context of the general Ptolemaic megalomania. The Ptolemies wanted the biggest and most of anything you might care to think of. Ptolemy IV Philopator (circa 210 B.C.) built the largest ship in the ancient world, a monstrous oared vessel with 40 ranks of rowers on each side. Ptolemy II Philadelphus built the Pharos, the three hundred fifty foot tall lighthouse, the Wonder of the World. The ruins of this lighthouse have been recently discovered at the bottom of the harbor of modern Alexandria.

It was this King's command that every book everywhere in his jurisdiction be confiscated, copied, and the copies returned to the owners. Ships entering and leaving the harbor were searched for books. Scholars were required to provide copies of everything they published. Foreign monarchs flattered the King with rare donations.

Crooked diplomacy added to the collection. Around 230 B.C., Ptolemy III Euergetes sent to Athens to borrow for copying the unique and sacred original edition of the ninety-seven plays of Æschylus. The suspicious Athenians demanded a bond of fifteen silver talents—a talent weighing about two thousand pounds—compared to which, that year's tribute from the kingdom of Judea to Egypt was twenty silver talents. The King deposited the bond, the Athenians reluctantly delivered the manuscripts, the King forfeited the cash and kept the volumes. In fact, now Ptolemy refused to permit a copy to be made, desiring, in a way only a collector can understand, to have a unique treasure. Of the ninety-seven tragedies of Æschylus in Ptolemy's collection, today we know of nine.

Then, happily, around the time of Nonnos, while studying that same purloined edition of Æschylus still in the Library six hundred years later, St. Jerome discovered a passage in the *Prometheus*, which he took to be a prophesy of Christ: "Look not for any end, moreover, to this curse, until God appears to accept upon His head the pangs of thy own sins vicarious," and again, "Go and tell Zeus that nothing shall make me name the one who is to dethrone him!" Later Doctors of the Church would adoringly and prayerfully pore over that hoary volume of Æschylus, witnessing the

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testimony of the pagan Greek, which proved the mysterious workings of God. For a period of time, the Doctors of the Church were quite taken with Pagan Testimonies, and found prophecies of Jesus in Vergil (for which he was graced to be Dante's escort), and in the Sibylline Books of Rome (*teste David cum Sibylla*). Perhaps Nonnos justified his close study of classical texts on the grounds that he was searching for Pagan Testimonies. It is certain that Nonnos was immensely well read. In his *Dionysiaka* he out-Ovids Ovid with his encyclopædic knowledge of Bacchic mythology. When he wrote that vast work in his old age, he was drawing on the wide reading he had begun as a youth.

As well as Greek books, the Library had Roman manuscripts, including the only copy of the Ancient Laws of Rome, written seven hundred years before Christ, as well copies of astronomical, mathematical and medical texts in the Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Indian and Persian languages. The Library actively sponsored translations. The Septuagint, which was the first translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek, was commissioned by Ptolemy II Philadelphus during the Third Century B.C., to serve his large community of Jewish subjects. This Greek Septuagint became the standard edition of the Scripture for centuries, preferred over the Hebrew Scripture which the Jews of the Greek Diaspora could no longer read.

The Librarian Callimachus, six hundred years before Nonnos, catalogued nearly 500,000 scrolls in the main collection, and 42,000 in the Serapeum. He classified every field of learning according to subject (Rhetoric, Law, Epic,

Tragedy, Comedy, Lyric Poetry, History, Medicine, Mathematics, Natural Science and Miscellanea). Under each subject, authors were listed alphabetically, with a short biographical note and an epitome of the work. Although the Library had seen rough times over the centuries, in these early Christian years there is reason to suppose that the majority of the collection still survived.

The question for us, of course, is what has since been lost?

Certainly, nothing remains. The site itself is not even known exactly. There is nothing that can be pointed to today as a relic of the Library. Of the as many as one million scrolls in the collection at its height, not one survives.

On the other hand, one million scrolls does not equal one million books. For instance, the *Iliad* was published on twenty four scrolls. The standard blank papyrus scroll was more like a modern college bluebook, holding no more than twenty pages, about fifteen feet long. A book scroll, on the other hand, could be as long or short as needed, but was generally no longer than thirty-five feet, sufficient to contain a single dialogue of Plato, for example, of forty to fifty pages, and the whole of the *Peloponnesian War* could be published on eight long scrolls. Typically, the papyrus scroll was written in columns eight to ten inches high, and two to four inches wide, containing between twenty-five and forty-five lines, with margins of about half an inch between the columns, and wider margins at the top and bottom. The usual way of reading a scroll was to unroll it with the right

hand, while winding back up with the left the portion that had been read. To give the scroll stiffness and to prevent creasing, it could be attached to a wooden or ivory rod, the *umbilicus*, that was handled by projecting knobs at both ends. Often, too, a heavier sheet of papyrus would be attached at the beginning of the scroll to wrap around the outside and protect it when it was rolled up. A label, or *titulus*, was written on a separate piece of paper and glued to the roll to identify its contents. The Paraphrase, here, could have been published on about four scrolls.

However, by this time, and thanks to the Christians, the codex, or actual book, had begun to supplant the scroll. Although centuries earlier Julius Cæsar, himself, had promoted the book format, the codex was not widely accepted until the Fathers of the Church began to appreciate its practicality in the transmission of religious texts. The Gospels fit more handily in a single volume than on four cumbersome scrolls. Constantine, to standardize the Scriptures, had ordered fifty great presentation Bibles to be copied, in codex format, and distributed to the fifty greatest churches throughout the Empire. Two very old Bibles, called Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, are believed by some scholars to be surviving Constantinian bibles. And last but not least, the Jews traditionally wrote their Scriptures on scrolls, and Christians didn't want to do anything Jews did.

So, one million scrolls more likely amounts to about 75,000 books. If we count all the Greek and Roman works which survive today, including everything in the American Loeb Classical Library (which publishes the *Dionysiaka*), and the German Teubner Editions (from which this translation of

the Paraphrase was made), and the French Collection Budé, we have somewhat fewer than one thousand ancient volumes, by a few hundred authors. That appears to tell us that we have lost almost 99% of classical literature. But this must be viewed in the context of all classical literature. Go to your city library, imagine the Visigoths are going to be there in three hours, and you have to save whatever you can carry away before they arrive.

The fact is, it is generally the writers of the second or third rank that have been lost. We know of their works from extensive catalogues which still survive, and from citations by other writers, or from fragments of papyrus that have turned up here and there. But generally we can say that the greatest works by the greatest writers have survived. There was only one Homer, only one Plato, only one Æschylus (although it is true that we have lost eighty-eight of his plays). The references to lost works are tantalizing, but the ancients do not taunt us with some second Homer, whose work is otherwise unknown to us.

It is probable that Nonnos' host had a private library, and there is no way of knowing what was contained in private libraries. A library of charred scrolls was discovered two hundred fifty years ago during the early excavations at Herculaneum. This turned out to be the library of Lucius Calpurnius Piso, father of Julius Cæsar's wife Calpurnia. It is possible that modern conservation technology can open and read these cylinders of charcoal, to discover perhaps a complete set of the lost books of Livy, or even Cæsar's missing long poem, the *Anti-Cato*, in his own hand. Who knows if perhaps an unknown play of Æschylus sits a

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carbonized lump in a bag in box on a shelf. All we can know of Nonnos' reading is what he, himself, wrote. When he alludes to lost works, we modern readers will never know.

Nonnos discovered to his dismay in Alexandria a debased literature. He was brought up on Homer, and now in his studies he found that the language of Homer, which had inspired him as a child, had become the weary, stale, flat but profitable language of Greek internationalism and cultural hegemony.

For the ancients, and not only for Nonnos, literature began and ended with Homer. For the ancients, Homer was the Bible. Homer was Shakespeare. Homer was Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom. The ancients looked to Homer for *le mot juste*, for a psychological understanding of humanity, for religious assurance, for adventure, pathos and drama.

Every poet wanted to be Homer.

Consequently, there were scores of ancient epics which amount to little more than knock-offs of Homer. Few of them survive.

Both Nestor of Laranda and Triphiodorus wrote leipogrammatic paraphrases of Homer, in which, in each of the 24 Books, one letter is avoided. For instance, Book I is written entirely without alphas, Book II is written with no betas, etc. There were a number of these leipogrammatic Iliads and Odysseys produced. Then, there were poets who wrote about the side episodes which don't actually appear in Homer, but are merely referenced. For instance, Quintus Smyrnæus' *Posthomerica* tells of events occurring between



the Iliad and the Odyssey, and Colluthus' *Harpagê Helênês*, composed somewhat later than Nonnos, tells the story of the abduction of Helen of Sparta. One unknown poet wrote a mock-heroic epic called *Batrachomyomachia* (The Battle of the Mice and the Frogs), in which these creatures set off to war against each other with predictably comic results. This burlesque was traditionally attributed to Homer by the ancients, although modern scholars reject that attribution.

This is not to say that epic was the only form of literature being written. There were, indeed, lyric poets, elegiac poets and didactic poets, and prose writers of all sorts. But this sort of product shows that the richness of ancient epic, Nonnos' chosen genre, was a thing of the past. These writers worked from poetic conventions out of mythological handbooks and formularies. There is a collection called Love Stories by Parthenius, an Alexandrian who taught Vergil, which is an epitome of obscure myths collected for the use of poets who liked to introduce mythological characters into their works without having to read the original materials. These writers were producing the "B" movies of the day: sequels, spin-offs, and parodies.

At the same time that the poetic imagination of the late Empire was stagnating, endlessly re-working ancient themes and tropes, the Greek language itself had changed. The Iliad and Odyssey had been composed (collected, assembled) perhaps 1500 years before Nonnos' time, and over those long centuries the living language had evolved into a simpler, more streamlined version that became the lingua franca of the eastern half of the Mediterranean and a second language to the Latins. This was the language in which the Gospels

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were written, and it is called *koinê*, meaning the “common” tongue, what everyone speaks.

One might look at the *Canterbury Tales*, then Shakespeare, and now modern English, to appreciate the equivalent evolution of the language from Homeric Greek, through the classical Attic Greek of Plato, up to the brusque and straightforward *koinê* of the New Testament.

This was the linguistic problem that Nonnos faced when he began to write serious poetry. He wanted to write Shakespeare, but the ambient language was the language of *Time* or *Newsweek*. Perhaps he was a bit of a snob. Most of his contemporaries were not bothered by this anomaly, and wrote their “Homeric” sequels and pastiches without regard for the ancient standards of grammar and rhythm used by Homer. Perhaps his classmates looked at him as a country bumpkin with a head a little too big for his shoulders. A provincial putting on airs. Highfalutin’. But Nonnos set himself to restore the purity of classical Greek poetry, and he succeeded so well that he inspired a brief school of Nonnians who emulated his revived ancient stylistics. These include Colluthus, Musæus, Quintus of Smyrna, and John of Gaza.

Even while Nonnos was pursuing his literary studies, he had to decide what to do with himself when he grew up. A young man from a wealthy family or with an influential patron did not have to labor, of course. Apparently he decided to enter the clergy, a smart career move in Cyril’s Alexandria. Although nothing is known for certain of Nonnos, he is variously identified with a Nonnos whose son

is mentioned in a letter by Bishop Synesius, a former student of the murdered Hypatia; with a Deacon Nonnos, a secretary at the Council of Chalcedon in 452 A.D.; with Bishop Nonnos of Edessa; and with Pseudo-Nonnos, the commentator on the works of Gregory Nazianzus, all of them clerical gentlemen. The name Nonnos, itself, means “monk” or “holy man”, and is cognate with our word “nun.”

Navigating one’s way in a theocracy can be nerve wracking. One’s orthodoxy is under constant scrutiny. In order to rise in Alexandrian ecclesiastical circles, Nonnos would have had to be, as they say, more Catholic than the Pope. And it is to this that we can perhaps attribute the composition of the Paraphrase. This is a work of youthful virtuosity, written to show what the young Nonnos could do; it is a frank confession of the particular orthodoxy being propounded by Cyril during the second quarter of the Fifth Century; and while it is a faithful paraphrase, at the same time it is a little cheeky in dressing sacred themes in pagan clothes.

There was already a tradition of scriptural paraphrase in Late Antiquity. About fifty years before, the Emperor Julian had forbidden Christian lecturers to teach pagan classical literature, intending that the prohibition would cause students to abandon Christian schools. Requiring new teaching materials, Christian poets began to paraphrase the Old Testament stories into the classical forms of Greek poetry. Most notably, a father-son team, both named Apollinaris, wrote twenty-four books of Homeric hexameters out of the Historical Books of the Bible, from Genesis up to the kingship of Saul. These works have been lost.

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And so Nonnos gave himself a challenge worthy of his potential. The ambitious young cleric selected the orthodox touchstone, the fourth Gospel, of John, which contains much of the basis for the theologically dense issues over which the great Doctors of the Church were wrangling at this time. He then set out to render this simple, yet sublime story in the style of his ancient model, Homer, in as rigorous and faithful a manner as he could.

How well he succeeded is a matter of literary history. Scholars have studied the influences of the ancient poets on each other, and among his contemporaries Nonnos was to become a giant. He would be acclaimed as one of "the New Poets" by admiring colleagues, much like Monteverdi and his *Stile Nuovo*, and for many of the same reasons. He was trying to restore the debased classics, and to create something modern at the same time. This was the urge that saw its florescence in English poetry among the Augustans. The marriage of classicism and modernity is epitomized in Alexander Pope's translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. (For which he was twitted by the brilliant classicist Richard Bentley, "It is a very pretty poem, Mr. Pope, but you must not call it Homer.")

But bigger things were afoot in Alexandria than literature.

## IV

Once paganism was vanquished throughout the Empire, new enemies appeared. Early Christians, daily expecting the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in triumph, were alert for the signs. They made more, perhaps, of Christ's injunction to beware of false prophets than of his command that they love one another. The times were rotten with heresiarchs, who gave their all but forgotten names to heterodox exegeses.

The disputes were generally over the big question of Who Was Jesus? Was he a god? Was he God? Was he a man? Was he just a man? Did God possess him in the way the devil possesses sinners? Did he have a human father? Did he have a human body? During the first four hundred years of the Church, these issues had been worried over by Eastern Bishops, Western Bishops, Desert Fathers, and the Pope in Rome. However, when Constantine had replaced the State Religion with Christianity, these issues became political as well as theological.

Cyril's uncle Theophilus had successfully allied Alexandria with the Imperial interests, when the powerful Theodosius I was the Emperor. But the Empire had become bi-polar, divided between the declining Rome, and the rising Constantinople. Theodosius had in his will split the empire east and west between his two sons, Arcadius and Honorius. The Pope still sat in Rome, in the See of the Fisherman, but, shockingly, Rome had been sacked and burned by Alaric just a few years earlier, and was soon, and very soon, to fall

to barbarian conquerors. Constantinople, on the other hand, was in the ascendant, not to fall for another thousand years. Still, Theophilus had in his day challenged the orthodoxy of John Chrysostom, the powerful Bishop of Constantinople, and Cyril had inherited his uncle's animadversion to the parvenu prelates of New Rome. Cyril was aware of, and courted, the similar jealousy of the Roman Pontiff, and that Pontiff courted Cyril as a counterweight to Constantinople and still the most powerful Patriarch of the Eastern Church, the upholder of orthodoxy.

In 428, Cyril made his move. He went on the attack against Nestorius, the newly enthroned Bishop of Constantinople, accusing him of preaching heresy. Cyril was acting in concert with Pope Celestine in Rome, who was already, behind the scenes, preparing orders to excommunicate Nestorius and give the supervision of Constantinople to Cyril. At the same time, Cyril attempted to intimidate Nestorius' supporters in the Eastern Churches, by threatening them with sanctions from Rome and Egypt.

The beginning of Nestorius' tenure at Constantinople had been auspicious. He had been personally selected by the young Emperor Theodosius II, in the face of strong opposition by his powerful sister Pulcheria, who had been his regent when he had assumed his throne at age seven, some twenty years earlier. The Emperor had brought Nestorius from a monastery in Antioch as an outsider, untainted by the bitter internecine court and chapel politics. The new Bishop was properly appreciative.

"Give me, O Cæsar!" Nestorius exclaimed in his first public sermon, "Give me the earth purged of heretics, and I

will give you in exchange the kingdom of heaven. Exterminate with me the heretics, and with you I will exterminate the Persians."

Five days later, Nestorius began purging the earth of heretics. There was a small congregation of Arians in Constantinople who met quietly in a private house for worship; they were surprised and attacked, their house sacked and set on fire. The rest of the neighborhood caught fire as well, and from then on Nestorius was called "The Arsonist." The Patriarch next moved against the Quarto-Decimans, who celebrated Easter on a day other than the orthodox Sunday, and his fury raged unmolested against Quarto-Decimans throughout Asia Minor. Multitudes perished in the tumults which he stirred up over the proper day to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ. Memnon, Bishop of Ephesus, particularly opposed Nestorius for pursuing heretics into Ephesian ecclesiastical areas. Ephesus, in modern Turkey, was one of the oldest Christian churches. According to tradition, the Ephesian Church had been founded by St. John the Evangelist, who wrote his gospel there. Recently it had declined as an ecclesiastical center because of the increasing importance of Constantinople.

It was in Ephesus that Cyril had found his opportunity.

Besides his social reformation projects, Nestorius had recently begun preaching that Mary was the biological mother of only the human being Jesus of Nazareth, but not the mother of God, the Eternal Logos. He reasoned that God

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could not be encompassed in a human womb, and that to call Mary the Mother of God, Theotokos, was heresy. He would admit to calling her the Christotokos, Mother of the Anointed One, but not certainly not Mother of God.

The powerful See of Ephesus had a particular affection for Mary. According to local tradition, St. John had brought Mary with him to Ephesus in her declining years, and her bones were said to be preserved in the Ephesian Church. They proudly, and familiarly, called Mary the Theotokos, the Mother of God. Now there was Nestorius over in Constantinople preaching against their beloved Blessed Virgin Mary the Theotokos. Cyril saw that he could exploit the Ephesian love of their Theotokos to gain political advantage over Nestorius on theological grounds and at the same time curry favor with the Ephesian Bishop Memnon, who already hated Nestorius.

Cyril's opening salvo was a Letter to Nestorius, circulated among the Churches, calling on him to abjure his doctrinal errors, and for a period of time the two men exchanged several superficially mild, but barbed public correspondences couched in the language of deep theology.

Cyril strongly contested Nestorius' views, and expounded the orthodox doctrine of the indivisible union of the divine and human natures of Christ. He argued that if Jesus Christ is God, it follows that His mother who bore Him is the Mother of God. And just as the human mother has no share in creating the soul of her child, yet is considered the mother of the whole person and not merely the mother of his body, so it is with Mary who is the Mother of Christ in His entirety.



Nestorius refused to recant and published a more truculent condemnation against the title Theotokos. He wrote: "If Mary is called Mother of God, she is made a Goddess." "A mother cannot bear a Son older than herself." "The man Jesus is the temple, the vesture of the Word." "God did not die." This was treading on thin ice.

Although on the surface the correspondence was professional, meanwhile each side was seeking to cement support among the far-flung bishops of the Church. Cyril was conniving with Rome to depose Nestorius as a heretic so he could take control of Constantinople, and at the same time he was importuning the Emperor to call a Council to "hear" the "charges" and "judge" Nestorius' "orthodoxy".

Emperor Theodosius was not at all convinced that Nestorius was a heretic and he was reluctant to call for a general Council. He finally gave in to Cyril's demand, partly as a result of the unrest which was growing daily in the streets of Constantinople, stirred up by Cyril's agents in collaboration with local opponents of Nestorius, principally the Emperor's sister, Pulcheria. Theodosius issued a letter calling for a Council and ordered all Metropolitans of the Empire to meet in Ephesus at Pentecost, June 7, 431, to hash out these weighty theological matters. The site selection shows that the Emperor clearly did not understand the politics underlying the theological dispute.

Of all the locations in the Empire, Ephesus was the very one where it would be the nearest to an impossibility to obtain anything like a fair examination of the theological question. Having easily displaced Diana, the Theotokos was

now the patroness of Ephesus, and the Christian Ephesians were as fanatically devoted to her as the pagan Ephesians had ever been to Diana. But a fair examination of the theological question was not part of Cyril's plans. His goal was either the unconditional surrender or the humiliation and ruin of Nestorius.

Nestorius arrived in Ephesus with plenty of time, on Easter, along with sixteen bishops and an armed imperial escort. He knew the reputation of Cyril and knew that the Council's host, Bishop Memnon, was allied against him. Cyril arrived from Alexandria shortly afterward, accompanied by a contingent of about fifty-five bishops and a considerable number of his desert monks. They were still expecting the Oriental delegation of thirty or so bishops headed by John of Antioch. Nestorius was counting on this delegation for crucial votes, for he was presently dangerously out-numbered by Cyrillians. The general convocation had already voted to wait until July 10 for John of Antioch, but on June 21, armed with letters from Pope Celestine, Cyril proposed to open the Council under the pretense of concern for the health of some of the elderly bishops. Sixty-eight bishops, along with the envoy of the Emperor Theodosius, presented letters protesting the decision and demanding that Cyril wait. Cyril ignored them.

The next day, June 22, dawned, and Cyril opened the Council presiding over a quorum of some sixty of his own partisan bishops. He dispatched four bishops to summon Nestorius. Nestorius refused to appear without his own allies present. Notwithstanding these circumstances, Cyril and the now one hundred and fifty-nine bishops who were

with him proceeded to convoke the Council, and to read in open session the letters which had passed between him and Nestorius. Almost immediately the entire assembly with one voice cried out anathema on the heretic Nestorius and his heretical doctrines, and after various pertinent extracts from the writings of the Church Fathers had been read into the record, the prewritten Decree of Deposition was solemnly produced and signed by all present, whose numbers had by this time swelled to one hundred and ninety-eight.

Not to be outdone, Nestorius assembled a group of forty-three of his own bishops in a different church and issued a similar verdict of anathema against Cyril and his bishops.

Finally, four days too late, the Oriental delegation arrived under the leadership of John of Antioch. John was aghast at the situation, and wrote to the Emperor describing Ephesus in a state of civil war. In his letter, he placed the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of Cyril and Memnon.

Under the hot Levantine sun of July and August in the Year of Our Lord 431, the two sides lobbed denunciations against one another: from the one side for not accepting the condemnation of Nestorius which the Cyrillians had passed in their Council, from the other for the impropriety and basic injustice of the proceedings.

Nonnos winced against the glare as he squeezed out through the great bronze doors of the cool, dark Basilica of St. John, and into the blasting heat of the plaza below. He

held his folio over his forehead to block the sun, but for a moment he had to squint so tightly he couldn't see. A light sheen of sweat was already beading up on his skin. There was no breeze. When he was able to open his eyes, he saw the crowd had grown. There were as many as a thousand people waiting at the foot of the broad stairway leading down from the portico. The mass of people shimmered as they waved fans in front of their faces. Some of Bishop Memnon's men were keeping them in line, but they were a good-natured crowd. They expected a favorable outcome. A group of women, modestly veiled, had set up a shrine before a large terracotta statue of the Theotokos, and were busy tending candles and passing out prayers and Marian symbols written on little pieces of papyrus. A couple vendors with wheeled carts had moved into the square from the nearby intersections where they normally stood, and were doing a brisk business in grilled meat on skewers. Three boys were weaving through the mob with buckets of honeyed water and tin drinking cups on chains.

Nonnos descended the long flight of white marble steps. A pair of episcopal guards came to attention, and escorted him through the crowd. People shouted to him, "Are they done yet?" "When will they be through?" "What's happening in there?" "God bless Patriarch Cyril!" "Death to Nestorius!" The women took up that call, and soon the crowd was chanting: "Long live the Theotokos! Death to Nestorius!"

As Nonnos made his way across the plaza and into a side street, the roar of the crowd behind him was muffled, and then fell away. The nearby streets were empty of people,

but still full of the evidence of recent weeks of rioting. The stone pavement was littered with broken roof tiles and cement gravel, the only debris not worth picking up. Houseboys had already collected any broken wood for the kitchen stoves, metal fragments were scavenged by blacksmiths' apprentices, anything edible was snatched by the dogs, pigeons and rats. But gravel and broken roof tiles needed to be swept up by the civic slaves, and the city was not yet settled enough for routine street cleaning.

There was some relief from the sun in the narrow side streets, which were shaded during most of the day. When he had first arrived with Cyril's entourage, he had made the trek back and forth from the Basilica of St. John on the hill, where the Council sat, to the small Church of the Good Shepherd, where Nestorius was established, by going along the main thoroughfare, a vast paved promenade one hundred fifty feet wide that ran the length of the city down to the harbor. Quickly he discovered that pedestrians took the side streets. Now that they had been here a few weeks, he knew his way around the city as well as he knew Alexandria.

He stopped for a bite at a lunch shop run by an Alexandrian expatriate named Ptolemy, who claimed to be a descendant of Cleopatra's sister, and the rightful heir of all Egypt. Ptolemy amused the Ephesians, and his shop was popular. He and Nonnos had quickly made friends, and Nonnos stopped by regularly.

Ptolemy asked him, "What is going on in there? I thought Nestorius was condemned."

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Nonnos sighed, and popped an olive in his mouth.  
“Well, he was...but Candidius—”

“The Emperor’s Envoy?”

“Yes, Candidius keeps saying that the Council was illegal, and against the Emperor’s orders, so I don’t know. And Patriarch John—”

“The one from Antioch?”

“That’s right, he won’t support what Cyril did with the Council, but he won’t come out and support Nestorius’ theology, and he won’t condemn it either. So I am running back and forth from St. John to Good Shepherd to the Antiochenes, delivering ultimatums and intransigent bargaining positions, and pages and pages of extracts from the Doctors to prove each side’s position. Look at this,” he said, and opened his portfolio.

He pulled out an impressive document on vellum, with dozens of seals attached, each seal with a ribbon and a signature of a bishop.

“Very pretty,” said Ptolemy. “What is it?”

“Don’t touch it! You have olive oil all over your fingers! It’s just the latest version of the Council’s Anathema, with another eight bishops endorsing it. This is the fifth revision I have delivered. And then Philemon hands me one back from Nestorius. One time they just copied exactly what we sent them, but added a “not” in the middle of every sentence!” Nonnos sighed again, and put the document back inside the folio. “I don’t know how this is going to end.”

“Cyril will win, of course!”

“I suppose so.”

“You don’t sound very enthusiastic.”

“Oh, Ptolemy, I am just hot and tired. I wish I were back home in the shade by the River.”

“Ah, yes, along a canal in the Botanical Gardens, with a glass of palm wine! It’s been a long time since I have done that!”

“No, I mean home in Panopolis. All I had to do there was study and learn the scripture and keep the Bishop’s kitchen clean. ‘Substance’ and ‘Nature’ and ‘Person’...they used to be normal words. ‘Substance’ was what stuff was made out of. A ‘Person’ was someone you met on the street.” He took the last swig of heavily diluted wine, and stood up. “Well, off to Good Shepherd. Maybe Nestorius will submit this time!”

“Ha ha,” said Ptolemy, not laughing. “Come back tomorrow, a ship from Alexandria arrived this morning, and I may have something good for you!”

“Wonderful. Maybe I can stow away under an empty date barrel, and go back home.”

“God be with you, Nonnos.”

“And with you, Ptolemy!”

Regretfully he stepped back out into the street, and headed on to Good Shepherd.

Theodosius, when he learned of the brouhaha in Ephesus, dispatched a letter condemning the Council and scolding the bishops for not having waited for the Oriental contingent. Then, on July 10, the Apostolic Legate from Pope Celestine finally arrived and officially declared, to no one’s great surprise, the Pope’s full endorsement of Cyril.

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Cyril immediately wrote back to Theodosius, insinuating that his continued support of Nestorius was contrary to the decision of the Pope in Rome, not to mention that of the very Œcumenical Council that Theodosius himself had called.

The words of Nestorius sum up the situation:

“When the followers of Cyril saw the vehemence of the Emperor, they raised a disturbance and discord among the people with an outcry, as though the Emperor were opposed to God. They rose up against the nobles who would not acquiesce in what they had done and they were running back and forth. And they brought with them men who had been expelled from their monasteries by reason of their lifestyles and their strange habits, and anyone who was possessed with fanaticism and with hatred against me. And one passion was in them all, Christians, Jews and pagans: they insisted that everyone should accept without question the things which were done against me. And at the same time all of them, even those that had before joined with me at table and in prayer and in opinion, went conspiring against me and taking oaths one with another against me. In nothing were they in disagreement.”

Cyril’s condemnation of Nestorius and Nestorius’ counter-condemnation of Cyril were not the end of the matter. Cyril, Memnon and Nestorius were all put under



arrest and each side was summoned to present its case before the Emperor, personally sitting in Chalcedon. It was not until 435 that the Emperor finally ruled, in favor of Cyril and against Nestorius. Cyril's position was no doubt strengthened by the influence of Pulcheria, and clinched by bribes distributed by Cyril to members of the Imperial Court amounting to nearly a ton of Egyptian gold. One can only guess at the ancient Pharaonic treasures which were melted down to buy the support of Constantinopolitan courtiers.

Now, as the ultimately victorious Champion of Orthodoxy in the Church, Cyril had the support of the Pope in Rome and of the highest tiers of Imperial influence in Constantinople, since the only person standing in the way of his becoming the most powerful of prelates after the Pope had been Nestorius. But shortly after the condemnation of Nestorius, Pope Celestine died. (His Feast Day is April 6.) With the death of Pope St. Celestine perished Cyril's great plans as well.

## V

Did Nonnos accompany his Patriarch to Ephesus? Did he participate in these great events? One can easily speculate that he did. On the registers of attendees there are listed at least nine people named Nonnos.

And, as this is entirely an essay in speculation, one can imagine the effect on Nonnos of this scandalous business. As an Alexandrian priest he had cast his lot with Cyril, but one can also imagine him shocked to the marrow by the way things had been run, and by the outcome of events. Cyril had triumphed, but the whole affair must have left a bitter taste in the mouth of Nonnos. He had been a boy when he first came to Alexandria, and had missed the actual events leading up to Cyril's conquest of the city: the ethnic cleansing, the riots, the attack on the Præfect, the slaughter of Hypatia. All he had known was the heyday of Cyril's reign, whom he knew to be a bigot, but at least he was God's bigot. During his adolescence, Nonnos had pursued his studies and graduated into the church hierarchy. He had made his mark with his well received Paraphrase, and easily worked his way into the inner circles of the Patriarch's court.

But Cyril's ambition and his drive to be the first among the prelates of Christendom, deferring only to the Pope; the lengths to which Cyril was willing to go to destroy Bishop Nestorius; the exquisite fineness of the theological warfare, backed up by a battalion of desert monks brandishing clubs; all this must have embittered poor Nonnos, and left him to

wonder how long he, himself, could survive the cold, ever turning gaze of his Patriarch, how long he would be able to bite his tongue and refrain from shouting out the Gospel verses which leapt to his mind, and which would shame any honest man, but perhaps not Cyril.

Cyril returned to Alexandria to spend the last decade of his life defending the extreme theological positions he had asserted at Ephesus against recurring challenges by new and rival theologians. Those positions, exaggerated, were to become the heresy of the next generation of the Church, ultimately resulting in the Great Schism between the Eastern and Western Churches after the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Cyril died in the odor of sanctity in 444. He remains one of the most venerable of the Church Fathers. His feast day is on June 27.

As for Nestorius himself, immediately after his deposition he withdrew to his old monastery in Antioch. After the trial in 435, the emperor ordered his banishment to Petra, an Arab city in what is now Jordan. A second decree sent him to Oasis, probably the city of the Great Oasis in Upper Egypt. He was kidnapped by the Blemmyes, a desert tribe that gave much trouble to the empire in Africa, and they eventually set him free near Panopolis, exposed to further persecution from Abbot Shenouda who still ruled the White Monastery. He died in the village of Psoumbeled near Panopolis in 451.

According to a thirteenth century Moslem account, "Nestorius the Heretic, who had been Patriarch of Constantinople, was buried in the city of Panopolis, after he had been in banishment there for seven years. Now, when

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rain falls, it does not descend upon his tomb, because he was the cause of the Great Schism."

The final speculation in this biography is that Nonnos chose to retire from the world, as many disenchanting men had done before and since, returning to Panopolis and the simple life he had known there as a youth. One can even imagine Nonnos spending the last years of his life eschewing theological controversy, and, rather, bending his efforts to the creation of that baroque and elaborate summit of the Late Antique epic, his massive *Dionysiaka*, a worthy closing volume on that noble bookshelf which begins with Homer, and into which he now poured out all the classical learning he had been accumulating over his years of study. It is pleasing to think of him sitting in the sun-baked courtyard of a monastery, not Shenouda's, in the shade of a cluster of palm trees, surrounded by sheets of papyrus and a few vellum-bound codices strategically placed to keep the stacks of paper from taking off in the playful gusts of bone dry air.

He put his pen between his teeth and leaned over to chase a page that had just blown away from him. When he sat back up, a young novice was standing at a respectful distance in the arch opening from the corridor.

"What is it, Simeon?"

"Abba, there is a hermit to see you." The boy looked very nervous.

"A hermit? Who is it, Simeon?"

"I don't know, Abba, he just walked out of the desert, and he asked for you."

“He asked for me?” Nonnos echoed, stupidly. What hermit did he know? He searched his mind. “Did he say his name?”

The boy mumbled.

“Speak up, Simeon! What is his name?”

“Abba, I don’t know...”

“Simeon, answer me, what is his name!”

The boy fell to his knees. “Abba, I dare not say it.”

Nonnos was completely bewildered. “Get up, boy. Where is he? Go get some clean water and wash his feet. Give him something to drink, whatever he wants, and to eat, if he wants it. Tell him I will pray with him at sunset, and then bring him to me at the tomb of Bishop Serapion outside the wall.”

The novice, still on his knees, began to weep. “Abba, don’t make me serve him. I am afraid!”

Inexplicably, Nonnos began to feel his patience tried. “Simeon, our savior served the least among us. Why did Jesus wash the feet of his disciples?”

Simeon rocked miserably back and forth on his haunches while he tried to recall. The rocking rhythm brought the words to him. “THE WORDS OF THE HOLY GOSPEL OF JOHN. BEGIN: He said to them: Know you what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord; and you say well, for so I am. If then I, being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also. Amen, amen I say to you: the servant is not greater than his lord; neither is the apostle greater than he that sent him.” Simeon had now hit full

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stride. "If you know these things you shall be blessed if you do them. I speak not of you all—"

Nonnos interrupted him. "Yes, yes, that's fine Simeon, just the part about washing feet." He threw up his hands, resignedly.

Simeon sat up on his haunches and finished with a shout: "THUS ENDETH THE GOSPEL READING!"

Nonnos stepped back and said pointedly, "Simeon, go serve our guest, and I will prepare for evening prayer."

It was fifteen minutes after sunset by the time Simeon and the hermit arrived. Simeon stood back, clearly not happy in the necropolis, but the hermit slowly advanced toward the base of the cliff in which the beloved former bishop of Panopolis was laid to rest. The cliffs were on higher ground than the monastery, and looked across the Nile to the Eastern Desert, where the lower regions of the sky were darkening to cobalt. Overhead the sky was still a brilliant blue, and Saturn alone could be seen, palely shining. Even as Nonnos looked, stars began to appear. The old hermit stumbled a little on the loose rubble leading up the slope. Nonnos hurried down to meet him.

"Come, sit here, Father," Nonnos said, taking his arm and leading him to the open door of a long vacant tomb. The stoop was at comfortable sitting height, and was wide enough for the two of them, although, truth to tell, the hermit was not a large man.

"Did Simeon take care of everything for you, Father?" Nonnos began, foolishly. The hermit did not answer, but simply looked at Nonnos.

“Who are you, Father? I apologize that I don’t recall how I know you, but I am sure I do.”

“You know me, Nonnos, although it has been half a lifetime.”

Every word the man spoke raised Nonnos’ hackles. Almost fearfully he asked, “Where?”

“Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” the hermit whispered.

Nonnos drew in his breath. “Your Eminence!” He stood up.

The old man chuckled, wonderingly. “Yes, they used to call me that. Once.” He looked at Nonnos. “I believe you are the first person to call me that in twenty years. I have been called a lot worse, for a lot longer.”

“Why are you here? How did you know I was here? How...why...?” Nonnos was at a complete loss for words.

“My priest Philemon told me how kind you always were, out of all the Cyrillians.”

“Philemon...,” the name brought back a long pale ascetic face framed in lank black hair, a face he had not thought about in twenty years, himself.

“Philemon stayed with me through my trials all these years, may God grant him peace at last!”

“At last?”

“Those devils, the Blemmyes. They tortured and martyred him. But they were too afraid of me to lay a hand on me, and they just turned me loose into the desert. I suppose that is the only good thing that has ever come to me from being declared Anathema and an Arch-Heretic! I was the very devil to these poor benighted pagans. They thought that if the Christians were afraid of me, I must be a very

powerful demon. I suppose I should thank Cyril. What he set in motion all those years ago has been my salvation at last!”

“So, Your Eminence, what will you do here, now?”

“I have been walking for three days to reach the River. Philemon recalled that you had retired here, and when the Blemmyes released me in this vicinity, I set out to find your monastery. I don’t imagine the Ancient Evil Nestorius will be made very welcome by your abbot.”

“No, I don’t think so, Your Eminence. Is there anything I can do to help you?”

“Ah, young Nonnos, I don’t need very much these days. Anything I put in my body just makes me too heavy to float away to heaven.” The old man looked about him. “This looks like a secluded, peaceful location. I think I will stay in this chamber and pray, until the Lord sees fit to take me. Then you can brick me up and no one will remember my name.”

“I will see that Simeon brings you bread and water every day.”

“Ah, Nonnos, I fast every other day. I spent half my life as a vile sinner, and now I fast half my life as penance.”

“Nonetheless, I insist. St. Gregory the Sinaite taught us the three degrees in eating: temperance, sufficiency, and satiety. You must eat to sufficiency, Your Eminence. You are not a young man, and your other mortifications will easily outweigh any such indulgence.”

“Ha! I should have learned by now never to quibble with an Alexandrian theologian,” laughed Nestorius. He took on the tone of an orator: “What is the need for



robustness of flesh and an abundance of blood if their future is to be delivered over to the common corruption of the body? For this reason I constrain and deprive my body, otherwise my blood becomes so robust and overzealous that it makes my flesh to sin."

"Robust and overzealous?" Nonnos scoffed, looking at the frail, bony old man in the twilight. "Who wrote that?"

"I don't remember," Nestorius cackled. "I have studied too much, but thank God, I have forgotten most of it." His voice softened. "But now it is time for me to put away the last vanities, even life itself, and prepare for my eternal throne."

The two men sat talking until the late moon rose. Its half disc was a blinding silver, and cast long black shadows of the funerary monuments westward across the desert. Nonnos finally gathered himself up, and, making his respectful farewell, walked thoughtfully back to the monastery, its walls looming white and ghostly under the moon. A jackal broke the silence with a shrill bark.

So, thenceforth, every day Nonnos walked out to the tomb of Bishop Serapion for evening prayer, carrying a loaf of bread and a skin of fresh water for the strange hermit who had taken up residence in the empty tomb next door.

One day Nonnos came back to the monastery earlier than usual. He spent the night in the chapel, praying alone, face down on the cool stone floor, arms outspread, chanting under his breath.

The next morning he collected Simeon, and sent him to several of the monastery workshops on errands. Heavily laden, the two of them headed out in the direction of the

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necropolis just before sunset. They worked all night by the light of the full moon, performing tasks done here in the same way for thousands of years. Nonnos showed the boy what to do, and between the two of them, they were finished by midnight. They sat for a brief rest, and then set about to collect stones from here and there, to fill the doorway of the ancient tomb. After they heaved the last large stone in place, and pounded a few smaller ones in the gaps, Nonnos stood back and said, "Well done, Simeon. God will bless you for this night's work."

"Thank you, Abba," the boy said, wearily. "He was not an evil man, was he, Abba? No matter what the other monks say?"

"He tried to obey God, as I do, and as I hope you do, yourself, Simeon."

Simeon crossed himself. "Abba, I think he was not a better man than you are."

"Ah, Simeon, if every man was as great a sinner as I am, God would destroy the world with fire."

The next day Nonnos went with Brother Alexandros the plasterer, and sealed up the rubble-filled doorway.

In the same way I arbitrarily placed Nonnos' birth in 400 A.D., I symbolically place his death in 476 A.D., the year in which Odoacer deposed the boy Emperor Romulus Augustulus in Rome, traditionally recognized as the Fall of the Roman Empire. Nonnos was a brief light in the dusk of the Classical World. His effort to restore the glory days of Greek Literature bore brief fruit, but it was doomed to inevitable failure. Late Antiquity declined into Dark Ages of

sheer illiteracy in the West, and the brilliant court at Constantinople drew the international community of scholars and litterateurs who had once graced Alexandria.

Too turbulent to bow even to the Emperor, Alexandria eventually revolted against Constantinople, wound up with two factions contending between rival Patriarchs, and finally fell to Moslem conquerors with its surrender to the Arab general Amr ibn el Aas, in 642 A.D.

Nothing today remains of Classical Alexandria. The desert monasteries of Egypt are virtually unchanged.

## **POSTSCRIPT**

As a result of mechanization of the textile industry, the demand for manual weaving has slowed down dramatically. For the landless families in modern Akhmim, this has meant unemployment and poverty. In 1998 the Orthodox Youth Association started a program to maintain the old tradition of hand weaving in Akhmim and assist some of the poorest families in the area. They began with three looms and limited supply of raw materials. There are now more than twenty weavers and their families working for the association. The weavers work in family units. It takes two persons to operate the loom and several others in the preparation stage. Most weavers are men and the women assist in the finishing of products. Most products reproduce designs inspired by the Coptic tradition and motifs dating back to the birth of Christianity.

A Nestorian church still survives today in the Middle East. The largest community live in Iraq, where they were protected from religious persecution during the secular regime of Saddam Hussein. With the fall of that regime in 2003, they have begun to suffer a return of persecution from their Moslem neighbors.





THE PARAPHRASE OF THE  
GOSPEL OF JOHN

by

NONNOS OF PANOPOLIS





# Chapter I

In which occurs the Beginning. In which John fends off the Pharisees and High Priests.  
In which Jesus appears and recruits followers.

Ere time, ere space, ere speech dwelt the archaic Word,  
God's like in age and nature, motherless, this Son,  
The Word, the spawn of self-born God, light come from light,  
Inseparate, interminable and enthroned  
With God, conseated on God's sempiternal chair:  
The Word was God's first offspring. 2 Who from the beginning  
Compiled with God, the universal architect,  
(Himself far older than the world) ; 3 and all that is,  
Inert and breathing, all through him arose. And naught  
Which is, but through this workman's word was made. 4 In him,  
IO) Innate, was every life; his light was nourishment  
For short-lived men. 5 The earth-sustaining light of glory  
Flamed bolts into the murk from heav'n above, and lo,  
The dark could not enfold it. 6 From a bosky lair  
Where bees do suck, came one, a lonely citizen  
Of rocky crags, a mountain roaming wanderer,  
And herald of the ancient baptism; his name

Was John, a godly rouser of the crowd. 7 He came  
As messenger, as steadfast preacher, as reproach  
To mortal men, so that, called by his herald's cry,  
All might believe in God, creator of the world.  
20) 8 Though not himself the Light of mind, yet still he was  
A God-filled mouth who preached to all who came,  
Forerunner, bringing secret, hidden Light to light,  
And testifying to the God-receptive crowd.  
9 The Word himself, the sole begotten Son of God,  
Was that true first-born Light who purifies all men,  
Illumining their natures with his ghostly beams,  
Men dwelling here on earth. 10 He, in the faithless world,  
Was unforeseen: the boundless world was made through him,  
But did not know the Word, the foreign vagabond.  
30) 11 He was among his own: his own, insensate, mad,  
No honor showed him as a guest. 12 But those steadfast  
And sane, whoever did receive him, those without  
A straying mind, to them he gave the heavenly prize:  
To be called children of the everlasting God,  
13 (Not, as in nature, born through labor on a bed,  
(The products of man's will, or offspring of the flesh  
(Begot of love upon the bridal marriage couch,  
(But children born of God, the unbegotten getter).  
14 The self-accomplished Word became enfleshed, as God

40) And man, first-born and last-made, by some secret rite  
Were joined together in a human-seeming shape.  
And God dwelt in a house with men, and all his deeds  
We saw with our own human eyes: such was the glory  
Bestowed upon His only Son by God most high;  
And he was filled with all his Father's grace and truth.

15 The Word incarnate was predicted by a man,  
By holy John who preached with prophet's voice: "Behold:  
"The one is here, of whom I spoke my words of truth;  
"He came before me who comes after me; he was

50) "The first to come before me; I6 so that we, his own,  
"Belonging to him, might be lifted up, and, from  
"His fullness, later grace upon first grace be laid;

17 "E'en as the book of the entire natural law,  
"By Moses writ, was laid upon the Hebrew crowd,  
"Just so, the grace of Christ, and truth, come to the world."

18 The self-producing deity has ne'er been spied  
By any person, face to face, but John described  
The Son as safely hid within his Father's lap,  
Companion of a parent who may not be seen.

60) 19 So, trusty John the herald gave a true report:  
The tale of a witness with ambrosial voice.  
The Hebrews sent their Levites forth, and wakeful priests,  
Into the back of the deserted forest where

The man had taken refuge from the madding crowd,  
There at the mountain's roots, and underneath the sky.  
The hierophants, in vinegary words, inquired:  
"Who are you then? Are you not Christ?" 20 And he replied,  
And he did not conceal, and he did not deny:  
"I am not Christ the king." 21 The Hebrew company  
Required again an answer from the man inspired.  
70) "Say, then, who are you? Citizen of Thisbite lands,  
"Elias, have you come?" And he cried out aloud:  
"I do not walk the earth as newly come Elias!"  
The swarm of eager priests once more inquired of him:  
"But you, of whom they say you are a God led prophet,  
"Are you a messenger of things that soon will be?"  
And he responded with this double-yolked reply:  
"I come not as Elias, and I am not God's prophet."  
22 Again the swarm of God-selected priests demanded:  
"Who are you, then, that we might bring back news to all  
"The men, the holy priests, who sent us here on foot  
80) "In stormy weather, with your answer in return?  
"So, what report of you unto the curious folk  
"Shall we return to them regarding your remarks?"  
23 Then, quoth he to them from the ancient sacred book  
And cried the words sent to the holy man by God:  
"A booming voice am I within the rocky desert:

“Make straight the highway leading to the King of All!

“And let that highway run directly unto him!”

(As writ in wise Isaias’ prophetic book.)

24 Another crowd of faithless, sinful Pharisees

25 Arrived and issued challenge to the God-led man:

90) “And wherefore (from what power or source) do you baptize?

“And whence by water do you purify the tribes,

“If you are not the high-throned Christ, nor yet Elias,

“Rapt up away within a chariot of fire,

“Nor any prophet, swept in spirit like the wind,

“And pregnant with the very voice of God?”

26 Then cried the wondrous man to his inquisitors:

“I came to you with pure and holy lustral water,

“Baptizing you; 27 but one is coming after me:

“Today among us he is present now, but I

“Unworthy am to place my hand upon his foot,

“To loosen e’en the strap of his God-fashioned sandal.”

100) 28 To pious Bethany he went, through fields of corn,

Along the fruitful banks across the Jordan river.

29 But when Farshooter led Dawn through another course,

Pure John now noticed Jesus right in front of him,

Before his eyes, approaching near him down the road,

And with his finger pointed him out to the crowd:

“Behold right there the prudent lamb of Father God!

30    "This is the one of whom I said: A man will come  
 "Behind me, who before me came; 31 I saw him ne'er  
 "Before this with my eyes. But even so, to all  
 110) "Blind Israel, the ones delivered leaderless,  
 "He now will be made manifest. I came foretelling  
 "The unannounced campaign, baptizing all the crowd  
 "Of wanderers, untutored and unquestioning."  
 32    Then, opening his mouth before the watching crowd  
 He shouted out these words in a spell-binding voice,  
 That, coming from the æther, nodding in assent,  
 He spied the feathered spirit carried, fluttering  
 Down from the lap of God, which to his vision seemed  
 The antitype and copy of a dove, until  
 It came to Christ and loitered on the very spot;  
 33    "I saw him not ere now, but in his lordly voice  
 120) "He sent me to baptize the bodies of these men,  
 "Men born again, but not by fire or the spirit.  
 "To him alone you might see, full of wind, descending,  
 "God's intellectual spirit, floating, steadfast, on the spot.  
 "Those unenlightened men he will guide to the light,  
 "And he will baptize them in fire and in spirit. 34  
 "Now seeing him I speak these testimonial words:  
 "He is the Son of God, the ever living parent."  
 35    But when the Dawn led Daylight on another round,

The holy man stood by with two of his disciples  
130) Who had not yet seen Christ's divinely wondrous form:  
36 When, seeing Christ approaching, that he trod the earth,  
Who drove the chariot of heaven in the sky,  
John cried aloud once more in his inspired voice:  
"The speaking lamb of heav'nly God walks down the road!"  
37 And hearing from the honest man this holy cry,  
His two disciples stopped behind him, turned, and went  
To follow Christ. 38 Christ, looking back and noticing  
The brothers, then retraced his steps toward the pair  
140) And said, "Who do you seek here?" 39 And together both,  
In chorused voices cried, inquiring of the king:  
"Rabbi!" (or "Teacher!") "Whither do you dwell?"  
40 To both the speakers gave the king the same reply:  
"Well, come and see." They went as far as to his house  
And found out where he lived. And so his new disciples  
Then finished out that day within the house of Christ,  
So close to God. Night came, swift as the wind.  
41 Then someone else arrived at the divine courtyard.  
'Twas sailor Andrew, done with harvesting the lake,  
150) The brother of spear fisher Simon, one of those  
Whom God was hosting there. He was among the men  
Who'd heard John's preaching words, and he arrived at last  
With his companion: Both obedient to John's words,

They'd followed Christ. 42 Then Andrew, first of the apostles,  
Sought out his brother, Simon, searcher of the sea,  
And having found him, told him this, in dazzling speech:

"O Brother, we have found the wise messiah, who,  
"Both God and man, is called, in Greek, the Christ, by Jews."

43 This said, he quickly escorted his brother to  
160) Where Jesus dwelt. Then Christ, with a serene demeanor,  
On seeing Simon, welcomed him with clever words:

"Once you were called the Son of John, you now are Simon,  
"Who labors in the lake; be called by me Cephas.

"Receive a second, newer name, which foreigners

"Call Peter; Peter is a signifying name,

"A higher, more important name, concealed by Simon,

"A sign of faithfulness unbreakable!" 44 But when

Approaching Dawn with dewy darts empurpled Zion,

Then Jesus, after darkest night, desired to go

170) Into the long-haired Galileans' fruitful city.

And nearby he found Philip. So the King called him

To follow him and be his faithful fellow teammate:

"You, too, O Philip, follow!" Even while the words

Rang in his ear, his footsteps overtook the voice.

45 Now, Philip had a common fatherland, Bethsaida,

Where Andrew and stout hearted Peter also dwelt.

46 Then Philip told Nathaniel in these gladsome words,



On finding him beneath a tree in summer green:  
 “What Moses, chief of all our race, wrote in his book,  
 180) “Him have we found, whom all the prophets past agree,  
 “Those heralds, those believing in the things to come:  
 “Tis Jesus, widely thought to be the Son of Joseph,  
 “Native of Nazareth and Son of God.” 47 To him  
 Nathaniel, ready-witted, tossed a proverb back:  
 “Can any good thing come from Nazareth?” To which  
 Replied his partner Philip in these simple words:  
 “Then, come and see!” 48 Nathaniel, nimbly following,  
 The traveling King displayed him to the crowd at large:  
 “This is an honest child of Israel, to none  
 190) “Nor fickle trickery nor crooked counsel showing!”  
 49 Nathaniel, seeing that Christ dealt in marvels, spoke:  
 “How did your soul know one you never met before?  
 “Come, tell me where you saw me.” Like an oracle,  
 With most miraculous organ, he erupted now:  
 “Ere Philip called you, ‘neath the shadow of the fig,  
 “With eyes and heart I saw you, under foliage  
 “And clustered flow’rs, reposing even there, away.”  
 50 Nathaniel, easily convinced by wonders, shrieked  
 And struck his faithful forehead with his pious hand.  
 200) “O Rabbi, highest throned in heav’n’s most secret chamber,  
 “You are the shepherd king of Israel, Christ at hand,

“Son of the ever living God, the Word. And both  
“As God-King of the sons of Israel I hail you,  
“And true Son of the living God I will proclaim you!”  
51 The king encouraged him unto a stouter hope:  
“You yet have faith, who heard one simple tale told,  
“That I beheld you ‘neath the fig tree, at its root;  
“With eyes more faithful, greater wonders will you see.  
52 “Amen, amen, in reverential awe be sturdy witness:  
210) “Look close at Heaven, ope’d by sacred impetus,  
“Invisible and empty, see, unfurling like a wreath  
“Well winged angelic troops, a flock of travelers,  
“See for yourself, descending the ætherial road,  
“Now coming down from heaven, now returning thence  
“To heav’n on high, and rising up and going down,  
“Conducting ministers unto the Son of Man!”

## Chapter 2

In which our Lord turns water into wine to cheer the boozy Wedding Guests. In which he harrows the Temple.

But when the nuptial third dawn painted rose the rocks  
Around the Canan land in verdant Galilee,  
There was a wedding, and the start of fruitful life.

2     A wedding rich it was, and to the bridal hall  
Christ, by the feasting crowd of pony-tailed folk,  
Was asked to dine as guest. His mates, invited too,  
Reclined on couches. Later, well into the feast,  
The virgin mother of Christ/God reached out and with  
10)   Her undefiled palm rapped on the wedding table,  
The fruitful virgin who had spurned the marriage bed.

3     Large amphorae of fragrant wine, wine sweet to drink,  
Lay empty, set aside, into the many cups  
Having been drained, and round about the bridal hall  
The gloomy waiters, circling the sober tables,  
Were vainly carrying dry goblets in their hands.  
Now halfway through the feast and wanting fruity wine,  
His mother spoke to Christ, the guest and neophyte:  
“This wedding needs your voice to break its evil luck  
20)   “For it no longer streams with floods of lovely wine.”

4 And Christ said: "Madam, what is that to me or you?  
"The hour of my challenge has not yet arrived."

5 Still, Mary told the waiters to attend, and do  
Whatever Christ might say. 6 Against the farther wall  
Were six amphorae, leaning propped against each other,  
Once having held three measures in their ample laps,  
Or maybe two, and, for the Jews each had contained  
Within its hollow core a gush of cleansing water,  
Of holy water. 7 So, Christ, urging on the staff

30) Who served the thirsty feast, cried in wine-saving tones:

"These bellied amphorae, with water freshly poured  
"Fill them for me!" And one by one and each in turn  
The servants filled them from the stream, until the rims  
Turned dewy from the sudden flush of limpid water.  
Then, swift, a marvel, to a flood of sparkling wine  
The crystal water changed, into a blood red stream  
Of vintage, and the very air about the well  
Redoled of undiluted wine and loud carouse.

8 And then the Lord, in vinous tones, commanded them:

40) "You water bearers, from the spring beneath the vat  
"Serve this sweet water to the captain of the feast!"

Abundantly they drew the water in their cups;

9 And when the steward had tasted with his expert palate  
Of the rubescent and intoxicating stream --

None knew from whence it came; the water bearers, though,  
The servants, were aware how from the wat'ry well  
The changeling water poured itself in stony jugs --  
10 Surprised, the feast's conductor summoned to the hall  
The bridegroom from his dancing, warmly greeting him:  
50) "Lo, every other man pours out his sweet wine first.  
"He sets it out dilute, and only when the guests  
"Are plainly drunk with nodding heads, the lesser wine  
"He later serves. You, though, have hid this finer wine  
"To save until the final hour has arrived!"  
11 This early marvel at the winy bridal feast  
Jesus accomplished first, where lofty Cana saw,  
The high seat of the Galileans with long hair.  
And it proclaimed his stately honor to the Jews,  
Those at the thirsty feast ...

*--Lacuna according to Koechly--*

60) Steadfast in disposition, his pupils then believed.  
12 Nor did the Lord continue long in Canan land  
Among the drunk and reeling hymeneal singers;  
But rather, to Capharnum and the coastal towns  
His wending footsteps followed the descending road,  
He, and his crew and fam'ly: with her self-made Son  
His virgin mother, Theotokos, walked along;  
And journeying with him a dozen, dressed alike,

A train of God-like men behind him on the road.  
But there he did not linger very many days  
70) For it was close to Passover. 13 To sacrifice  
He went up to the Temple in Jerusalem  
With his associates. 14 Inside God's chosen Temple  
He found well-hornéd oxen, and a flock of sheep  
And parti-colored doves; and cash dispensers, too,  
Set up behind the greedy money changers' bench;  
And saw a throng of businessmen perched over all,  
Engaged in trade and sales. 15 Then, cracking in his hands  
A makeshift whiplash wound of tightly braided reeds,  
The cattle he stampeded, and the flocks of sheep,  
80) Out of the house of sacrifice; then, tossing them  
Head over heels, he hurled the traveling salesmen  
Out of the High Priest's court; and last, with juggling hands  
He dumped the change from broken tables to the ground.  
16 Then he cried out aloud to all the pigeon sellers:  
"Remove ye from this marble Temple all these things  
"Lest, weighed down by the frenzy of a greedy mind,  
"You make my Father's holy house a house of sales,  
"For it should be a house of prayer." 17 His men recalled  
That it was written in their God-inspired book:  
90) "My zeal for your sacred house devours me."  
18 The crowd shot back at him in menacing uproar:

“What other signs will you display unto the Jews  
 “To show why you did this?” 19 To the combative throng,  
 Those ignorant and stunned, the king spewed out aloud:  
 “Tear down this temple: I, myself, will raise it up  
 “On the third day!” 20 The crowd, in unison, called out:  
 “What Solomon has built of ornamented stone,  
 “Constructing from its start through long and whirling time,  
 “Six years and forty from the day of its foundation,  
 100) “Will you raise up new buildings from bare ruined choirs  
 “After so little as the run of three days’ laps?”  
 21 (His body was the temple that he spoke about  
 (Which by such tremulous rite, Christ was, one day, to raise.  
 22 (But when, from deep within the pit of no return,  
 (Safe back from Hades with his fate to live anew,  
 (Back up to heaven’s ancient honor he emerged,  
 (Then, only, his disciples recollected how  
 (That house he spoke of was his flesh; they understood  
 (The Holy Writ of God and so were more convinced  
 110) (By Christ’s remark.) 23 They stayed near by the God-built Temple  
 Until they crossed the precinct of Jerusalem  
 To celebrate the Pasch; the loud and raucous crowd  
 Joined in the solemn priestly rite of eating sheep;  
 And many from their storms of faithless frenzy turned  
 To faith, now, in Christ’s name. 24 Still, to his trusty men

He did not trust his thoughts; 25 He needed not to hear  
The sounds of other strangers speaking all at once  
To test the mind of man: The works of men, indeed,  
He saw himself, how much within his heart a man  
Keeps hidden, unannounced, beneath a cloak of silence.



## Chapter 3

In which Christ tells Nicodemus preposterous things. In which he baptizes, thus irking John's disciples.

There was a certain priest of Pharisaic blood,  
Of Jews a Lord, a propertied and upright man.  
His name was Nicodemus. 2 Walking unobserved,  
He came to Christ at night, on surreptitious feet.  
By night he crept into the house of light; Jesus,  
Describing to the man the splendors of baptism,  
By words enlightened Nicodemus in the dark.  
The ritually orthodox man said to him:  
“O eloquent Rabbi, your miracles we see,  
10) “How, sent by God, you came, a teacher for the world,  
“And champion of men. For truly, no mere man,  
“No mortal, can contrive to work these divers wonders  
“Which you, with sacred words of healing, bring to pass,  
“Unless our saving God cooperates with him.”  
3 But Jesus then continued in confusing words:  
“Unless a man, long after parturition's pangs,  
“Be born again a mortal man a second time,  
“That man will never see the King of Heaven's court.”  
4 And Nicodemus cried, amazement in his voice:

20) “How can an aged man whose hair has turned to white  
“Pass once again, and late, through labor and travail?  
“Can one, without a father, through her fruitful womb  
“Crawl back inside the stomach of his aged mother  
“To suffer the ordeal of another birth?”

5 Then Jesus answered him, instructing the instructor:  
“Unless a man with cleansing waters cleanse his frame,  
“In sacrament of water and the Holy Spirit,  
“Unless he, unimpregnate, has a second birth,  
“A perfect duplicate of female childbirth,

30) “That man will never see what soon will come to pass:  
“The endless Æon of great heavenly reward.

6 “For every man who once has burst out of the womb,  
“And so is made from mortal flesh, is merely flesh;  
“The soul, however, is the part which, with pure baths  
“Initiated in the self-made Spirit’s vapor,  
“Becomes a life sustaining spirit, unmidwifed,  
“The sprout spontaneous of this, his second birth.

7 “Nay, be ye not amazed at these portentous words  
“Wherein I tell you that it is a needful thing

40) “For you to see in truth another wat’ry birth.

8 “The ever whirling wind on feet invisible,  
“You know it blows about wherever it desires;  
“You hear the coming rush of airy whirring sound

“Go whipping past your ears; but, still, you cannot know,  
“By seeing, whence it comes or whither it may go!  
“Likewise it is for ev’ry man whose spirit comes  
“From out of flickering flame and not from wind-tossed dust.”

9 He spake, and Nicodemus answered: “How can these  
“Things be?” 10 And Christ announced this awesome oracle:

50) “Do you not know then, you, a teacher of the Jews?  
“And all these things I said, you do not understand?

11 “Amen, amen again, let it be testified:  
“Whatever truth I know, filled with the sacred voice  
“I preach to the rebellious ears of men, and speak  
“With lips unstinting; and they learn however much  
“Of news about my Father, master of the skies,  
“As I can teach with herald’s skillful words of art;  
“The uninstructed minds of men, intractable,  
“Do not accept my faithful witness. 12 If the tales

60) “I told you about fixed and earthly groundling things  
“Are tidings hard for you to credit, when I shout  
“Of wingéd expeditions or ætherial deeds,  
“How likely are you then to rush into belief  
“In unseen creatures made of heav’nly stuff?

13 “For never man, feet leaping, lofted by the wind,  
“Bestrode the distant orbit of the heav’nly sphere,  
“Save marv’lous he, who, finding his immortal frame

“Conjoined in mortal flesh, came down from Heav’n above,  
 “The only Son of Man, who on the starry roof  
 70) “Resides, th’ eternal sky his royal patrimony.  
 14 “And just as Moses, in the desert mountain heights,  
 “Raised up th’ obnoxious snake before the folks distress’d,  
 “A graven effigy worked keenly into bronze,  
 “In just such manner, as a cure for sore disease  
 “The Son of Man will be raised up in front of men,  
 “Just like the serpent’s face that offered them relief.  
 15 “And then whoever might submit to sacrament  
 “Will find therein the cure unto a life of glory  
 “Until broad bearded Time spins out eternity.  
 80) 16 “For so much did He love the vastly varied world,  
 “The high throned scepter’d King dispatched His only Son,  
 “The Savior of mankind, the Word, into the world,  
 “So that whoever, in return for this free gift,  
 “Should bow his head in free, unshaken, willing faith,  
 “That man will join the endless choir of heav’nly life  
 “In an eternal house, in a green paradise.  
 17 “For God did not send down His Son, the Word, to judge  
 “The world before its time; but as mankind has fall’n,  
 “That all the human race should be raised up by him.  
 90) 18 “Whoever prays to him, heart steadfast in the law,  
 “And casting raving disobedience to the gales

“And having upright faith, will not be judged; but he,  
 “Perverted, being mindful only of his flesh,  
 “And boldly thrusting out his chin, defying God,  
 “He has been judged already, since, with laggard heart  
 “He has not yet believed, and did not change his lust  
 “Into belief in most high God the Father’s Son,  
 “Or in his name, the darling of the Lord. 19  
 “The impious inhabitants of earth are judged.  
 100) “The Light from heaven came to earth, but fickle men  
 “Prefer the gloom far better than the glaring light.  
 “They yearn not for the light, but rather shade, for dark  
 “Their deeds! 20 For every man who turns to outlawry  
 “Esteems the dark and hates the light; he never walks  
 “The highway in the day, for fear the light proclaim  
 “His deeds, the very deeds he hides in secret silence.  
 21 “But he who watches what he does and fears the Lord,  
 “He comes self bidden to the light so it can show  
 “The deeds he does, perfected by the will of God.”  
 110) 22 He spoke, and soon thereafter leaving Galilee,  
 He stole into the holy Jewish countryside,  
 And with his intimates there God remained, with them  
 Inhabiting a foreign land. The pressing tribes,  
 Come from nearby, he baptized in the holy stream,  
 Erasing filth from human hearts. 23 Also was there  
 Saint John, obedient to God, the migrant crowd  
 Baptizing, in the mighty river nearby Salem;  
 For thither from the wide and rolling river surged

Abundant water and in streams unending,  
 120) Enough for one and all. The pious crowd drew round  
 The holy man, and with repentances at last,  
 Were washed by him in water and were cleansed of sin.  
 24 (He had not yet been sent by the adult'rous King  
 (To his eternal prison, conduit of doom,  
 (The holy man in heavy fetters.) 25 Now a spat  
 Broke out between John's cultists and a Hebrew man  
 About purification. 26 So, on hurried sandals  
 They came up to the godly man and prayed to him,  
 A man dressed meanly, covered in a ragged robe:  
 130) "O Rabbi, you who first preached watery redemption,  
 "The man who was with you across the flowing river  
 "And whom you promised us was born the Son of God,  
 "He now is copying your cleansing ritual,  
 "And many he baptizes; eager and excited,  
 "The people, like the scudding clouds, all hie themselves  
 "Intent on suffering his holy ritual."  
 27 And to the ones inquiring, the true man said:  
 "A man can not snatch anything from Heaven's purse  
 "Unless this bounty comes by grace of God.  
 140) 28 "You all were there, and witnesses, when to the crowd  
 "I publicly announced in my own honest words:  
 "I am not Christ, not the redeemer king, but his  
 "Mere escort on his journey, sent by God on high.  
 29 "The groom is him who has the bride; but standing by  
 "The happy celebrant, and listening to him,  
 "And hearing that familiar voice with joyful ears,

“His faithful friend exults in his delight; for me  
 “My much prayed for delight at last has been achieved. 30  
 “For him it is to have unending eminence  
 150) “As God immortal in the clouds: for mortal me,  
 “I must diminish by degrees, for I am less.  
 31 “And he who from above came out of heaven’s lap,  
 “He has bestrode all things. Now, one with earthly blood,  
 “Who speaks of earthly things, he is an earthly man;  
 “While he who through the air comes from the lap of God,  
 “Reveals what was reveal’d in heaven. 32 And no man  
 “Can add unto his holy testimony. 33 He  
 “Received his testimony from the mouth of God;  
 “This man affirmed it by his oath and does not lie,  
 160) “That God alone is true. 34 And he came down from heav’n,  
 “Whom God sent to the earth as savior of the world,  
 “And he rains down a torrent of his Father’s wisdom,  
 “For God does not hoard wisdom from the Word, but gives  
 “The spirit to him always, a stream of oracles.  
 35 “High ruling God the Father loves His Son, and He  
 “Conveys all things into his hands. 36 And he who would  
 “Grow even greater in his firm, unbending faith,  
 “Possessing glory and renown, he will see life,  
 “And live recurring lifetimes. To that other man,  
 170) “Rash bravo, him who disobeys God’s living Son,  
 172) “Comes an avenging rage on him from God on high  
 “To lash his foolishness.”

## Chapter 4

In which Christ asks a Samaritan woman for water, and jests with her. In which the general's son is healed at a distance.

But when the Lord found out  
That, of the God-inspired baths, the dastardly  
Unholy crowd of zealous Pharisees had heard,  
How Jesus, drawing all the roving men to light,  
Baptized in water, and had more disciples now  
Than John, 2 (though truth to tell, the Lord did not himself  
Baptize in water, rather, his disciples did)  
3 He thereupon forsook the Jewish highland towns  
And came back to the land of friendly Galileans,  
10) Escaping the inexorable Pharisees.  
4 Still, business drew him to nearby Samaria  
To travel through the midst of irrigated lands;  
5 And quickly moving south on his ambrosial feet,  
He reached the ancient town of the Samaritans,  
To high built Sichar, where Jacob the gardener  
Had vineyard acres which he gave Joseph, his son.  
6 There was an ancient well, where holy Jacob once  
Affixed its wat'ry roots amidst the hollow furrows,  
And nether water filled the muddy reservoir.  
20) So, stopping briefly on his long and winding road,



Christ, weary of the travel, rested from his labor,  
And sat down on the ground, by where, through hidden channels,  
The water fountain wetly gushed outside the town.

The sixth, and thirsty, hour, fluttering, arrived.

7     There a Samaritan, a woman with a jug  
Drawn from the hole, now set it down beside the well;  
The Lord of Waters begged for water from her jar:

“Come, woman, to a tourist in your fatherland,

“Give thirsty me, in friendship, water I may drink.”

30)   8 He sat there all alone, for since the turning point  
Of noon, on seeing the lunch hour galloping apace,  
His entourage turned back to go up to the town.

9     The woman spoke to him with curiosity:

“Why do you, knowingly, from a Samaritan

“Beg water, all unheeding, from a stranger’s hand,

“As you derive from closely guarded Hebrew stock?

“What link is there between Samaritans and Jews

“That you might drink from me? Does not your law forbid it?

“For most respectfully I label you a Jew;

40)   “And as by common custom, Jews do not consort

“With us Samaritans, nor do we intermix.”

10    And Christ replied to her in these confusing words:

“If, by the grace of God, you recognized the gift,

“And who it is who said: From this spring underground

“Give thirsty me to drink your temporary water,  
 “You eagerly would beg from me eternal water,  
 “And I would pour my living water for your drink.”  
 II But she, not knowing of this living water, said:  
 “O Lord, I am perplexed: Here at the fountain’s lip  
 50) “You do not draw a pail, you do not pull a rope,  
 “To let it down into the caverns underneath,  
 “And draw th’elusive water up, hand over hand;  
 “The well is very deep; from what gulf underground  
 “From which to draw some other strange and fruitful water  
 “Can you obtain a different draught? 12 You cannot be  
 “A greater man than Jacob, our progenitor,  
 “Who left this spring as a Samaritan bequest,  
 “And he drank water from it, water from the earth,  
 “Sufficient for himself, his sons, his mountain goats,  
 60) “And all his herds of quadrupeds!” 13 So Jesus taught  
 The woman, drawing her from darkness into light:  
 “Whoever drinks from pools of water in the ground,  
 “From springs or from sweet floods of water from the earth,  
 “That man will thirst again. 14 But when I give to him  
 “Eternal water, drinking, he will never thirst,  
 “For in his beating heart, the fountain will remain,  
 “Upwelling from his mental depths, and sent by God,  
 “Replenished from a fount within, a certain source

“Of ever flowing life, not from an earthly stream.”

70) 15 And so the woman begged in a compliant voice:

“Give me, O Lord, to drink some of that lively water,

“That, drinking of the water from that other spring,

“I never more shall thirst, nor, having drunk your water

“Ever have to pass this way to draw again.”

16 She spoke, and with a disingenuous reply

The much too married maiden Jesus then provoked:

“Now get ye hence and go invite your spouse. From town

“Haste ye your husband speedily to come here next.”

17 She, taken in, about her many nuptials lied,

80) But lying, the Samaritan spoke real truth:

“How shall I call my husband, as I follow none?

“I have no loving spouse.” 18 And God accused the woman:

“I know that after five, your sixth bedmate is sham.

“For you collected five men, one after the next,

“And now the man you tend is not a real spouse.

“So what you said to me is true.” 19 And then, amazed,

The good for nothing woman feebly replied:

“I see, Lord, that you are a prophet led by God;

20 “Our ancient fathers going up this very mount

90) “Bowed down among the rocks, fragrant with roasting fat,

“And with burnt offerings propitiated God.

“But great Jerusalem is more appropriate,

“You people said, that place which God is pleased to cherish,  
 “In which, around the altar set by God, to God  
 “All must incline their heads in witness of their prayer,  
 “Kowtowing head foremost.” 21 The Lord replied aloud:  
 “Believe you me, Samaritan, in my true words:  
 “The hour has arrived which ushers in new life,  
 “The path of piety, so never more in rites  
 I00) “Around God’s special altar in your mountain heights,  
 “Nor in the valleys ‘neath Jerusalem’s steep cliffs,  
 “Will you, with blood of bulls led by the horn, make prayer,  
 “Or genuflect in supplication to the ground;  
 22 “For you, with doubting hearts, unto a doubtful law  
 “You do not feel inside, revere a mere report,  
 “Initiates into the semblance of the truth;  
 “While we ignite on sacred altars secret rites,  
 “And praise with mystic cries what we know to be truth,  
 “And with inspired hymns we pray the self made God.  
 I10) 23 “But comes the hour of sacrifice in mystery,  
 “And now is almost here, when genuine adepts  
 “Will bow their heads down to the earth in common prayer,  
 “With necks bent low and heads deeply inclined  
 “Before the Spirit and the Truth. Such wise adepts  
 “High ruling God desires, such ones as will to Him,  
 “With feet firm on the ground, there deeply genuflect

“And testify aloud before the Holy Spirit,  
“Prostrated on the floor, and with their heads bowed low;  
24 “God is the spirit irresistible, which draws  
120) “All men, and speedily, by truth and in the spirit  
“To honor God the Father of the spinning world.”  
25 Thus he; and she, unknowing, in a voice possessed,  
Spoke unto Christ, of Christ the savior of the world,  
While he who was to come sat there in front of her:  
“Lord, we have learned from God, who gives us all our laws,  
“That the divine Messiah is to come, he whom  
“The crowd calls Christ, and he, whenever he may come,  
“Will teach all truth to us who live in ignorance.”  
26 The woman spoke, and Christ returned this testimony,  
130) And signaled silence with a finger to his lips:  
“That Christ am I, the one who speaks to you; at last  
“You see me with your eyes, the one of whom you heard;  
“I am the only Christ, no second other comes.”  
*--Lacuna according to Koechly--*  
27 Nor did brash Peter ask him, nor had anyone  
The courage to ask: “What lack ye, or why with her  
“Do you converse?” 28 But she, on swifter sandals going,  
And leaving in his care her vessel by the fountain,  
Went back into the town and said to all the folks:  
29 “Go all ye out and see the boding man, the prophet,

140) “Who told me everything I ever did, perhaps  
“The so-called Son of noble David has now come?”  
30 So, hearing her report, all the Samaritans  
Then hurried on fast feet, all walking in a band,  
Approaching from the city the adjacent well,  
All driven unto God by their enchanted hearts.  
31 But in the meantime, ere the citizens came out,  
The dense surge of their thronging multitude like clouds,  
His students and disciples circled Christ and said:  
“Pray, Rabbi, take these things and eat.” 32 Without a word  
150) He waved his silent hand to signal his intention,  
Rejecting this brief meal, crying out to them:  
“I have some other sustenance of which your hearts  
“Give you no knowledge.” 33 And they said to one another:  
“Perhaps some other local man gave him to eat?”  
34 The Father-loving Lord corrected them, and said:  
“My food, it is His word, my drink, the Father’s work;  
“My only food is this: whatever His command,  
“That I might do it, and accomplish holy deeds.  
35 “Do not you all use this old common turn of phrase,  
160) “As men who know the seasons: that there yet remain  
“But four more months to spin their stormy passage out,  
“Until the fruitful summer comes? Look, all of you,  
“Turn back and raise your eyes up to the city there,

“How all the people ripple like bright fields of crops.  
 “They only need good preachers now to harvest them  
 “So they can blossom into wisdom. 36 If a man,  
 “Not waving with his hands the swinging scythe, but with  
 “His lips, might gather in the bounty of this land  
 “He is well paid, and he collects the fruit of wisdom,  
 170) “Preserving them eternally for God the Father,  
 “So that the man who sows, and he who reaps,  
 “Together might rejoice and offer their first fruits,  
 “And God will honor both the ploughman and the reaper.  
 37 “In which respect this word is true: The one man ploughs,  
 “And strews, like falling snow, the seed corn through the rows,  
 “Another thresher with his scythe then reaps the corn;  
 38 “Here, other husbandmen have preached among the furrows,  
 “Until they sowed the seed; I set you now to work  
 “Unpracticed, unto crops sown by another man;  
 180) “And now you must, with words, reap rows of ripest fruit,  
 “Not having sown the field or irrigated it.”  
 39 And many citizens, a swiftly faithful crowd,  
 Constructed tow’rs of faith on firm foundations set,  
 All on the tale recounted by th’excited woman,  
 Who said that all the things I did the prophet knew.  
 40 But when all the Samaritans approached en masse,  
 They begged Christ with affectionate and humble pleas

To visit there a while, and so he left the well  
And joined the company and quickly came to town,  
190) And God stayed with them for the time it took two days  
To spin away in rapid eddies there.

43 And during those two days, the speedy sandaled Lord  
Sowed sermons, planting words in their believing ears.  
But then he left when certain of the natives spurned him,  
And came back to his home in friendly Galilee.

44 And only his old neighborhood he did not walk,  
Because he knew, regarding his own kin, the phrase  
And customary aphorism, that a sage  
Cannot have fame and honor in his own homeland.

200) 45 But when Christ came up to the Galilean seat,  
Behold, appearing there before him on his road,  
The happy throng of pious Galileans met him.  
For ev'rything he did up in Jerusalem  
On holy holiday, they'd seen with their own eyes,  
Those hours of festival, mothers of piety,  
For they as well as he had gone to celebrate.

46 And Jesus came and dwelt there, and he visited  
The land of Cana, where into a stream of wine  
He'd changed the water's brilliant nature in a flash.

210) Now there was then a royal man, a general,  
In maritime Capharnum, and his son



Was laid low by an illness, loosening his knees,  
And the devoted father, equally was pained  
As his afflicted son, and maybe even more. 47

214a) And, hearing, he returned to sculling Galilee

215) And to the settlement of Cana; coming near  
He begged Jesus to come and save his little boy,  
And take the trip on foot to the adjacent town.

48 But, with indignant words, the Lord upbraided him:

“Unless you see the many marvels of my word,

220) “You never will believe me.” 49 Then with hotter tears

Than any fever, the poor weeping man replied:

“Go down from Cana, hasten Lord, depart with speed,

“My son, so soon to die, has sore need of your voice.”

50 And so the Lord encouraged him with saving words:

“But go, and you will find, alive and safe and sound,

“Your only son; and there, seated around your table

“Feast gladly with your child, and share a banquet with him.”

Thus said the Lord. And instantly man believed

What Jesus said, and so he left with hope and faith.

230) 51 And he, along his journey on the road back home,

Met his elated servants, nor did he

Ask the rejoicing slaves, for plainly from their faces

He knew his son was living, even without words.

And all together they told him the sweetest news:

“He lives, O doting father, speedy traveler,  
“More healthy now than e’er before.” 52 Rejoicing, he  
Next asked his slaves about the fortunate event,  
In which bright life and calm had come over his son.  
And one and all the servants cried aloud to him:  
240) “The illness left your son around noon yesterday  
“About when passed the seventh, salutary hour.”  
53 He knew, since he was there, the analgesic time  
At which the sacred king said in his healing voice:  
Go get ye to your home, your son is without pain.  
And he received unbending faith in his pure heart,  
Which drew the whole household into the pious light.  
And he and his, whom he supported, through his words  
Were brought beneath the yoke in steady bonds of faith.  
54 This other second miracle, with healing voice,  
250) In Cana in the land of tow’ring Galilee  
Again Jesus performed, while going from Judea  
Up to the Galileans’ town with its fair sons,  
This after his first feat there at the tipsy wedding,  
Where water turned into a ruddy flood of wine.

## Chapter 5

In which Christ imprudently cures a cripple on the Sabbath. In which he promises eternal life, and chides disbelievers.

Then Jesus climbed the nearby Temple heights, up where  
Its colored palisades and marble columns gleamed.

2 And just inside the Sheep Gate was a watered spot

Within the vaulted Temple vestibule and, girt

About with cunningly wrought stones, arched overhead,

An ample bathing pool, 4 in which a man, diseased,

Seeing the dancing water splashing by itself,

Might cleanse his body in the percolating bath

And rinse away his malady with soothing heat,

10) Preferring, o'er the surgeon, this watery relief.

5 A man there was in constant pain beside the fount;

Three decades ridden with a horrible disease

And eight more rolling years than that, as well, he pined.

6 Observing him stretched motionless upon his cot,

Jesus remarked how on his longtime bed he lay:

His knees locked up by an incurable disease.

Then to him said the Lord, compassion in his voice:

“Do you desire again to be unscathed?” 7 To which,

Beset with feeble lungs and straining for his breath,

20) The sufferer replied in slow and painful tones:

“O Lord, I lack a loving tender nurse attendant,  
“For I have no such one to minister to me,  
“Who, seeing, in the frantic fountain, curling waves,  
“Might quickly place me in the sacred bathing pool.  
“For when I walk on my unsteady, sluggish feet,  
“Just then one younger far than I, with speedy bound,  
“This other quicker, lighter brute himself steps down  
“Into the floating spume above the sloshing tub.”

8 The King then challenged him with life sustaining words:

30) “Arise, hoist thou thy bed and be a nimble walker!”

9 The invalid sprang up; feet planted on the ground

He stood; seizing his cot, he set it on his back  
And marched with shaky, unused knees into the Temple,  
The heavy bed on steady neck and shoulders laid.

And this was on the Sabbath. 10 In the Temple yard,  
There men stood glaring at the man whom from disease  
The King had liberated with a swift command,  
Demanding who was he, who, with imperious hest,  
Charged him to heft his bed and travel to and fro.

40) 11 Obeying God, he answered to those jealous ones:

“He who from bed recalled me, fallen, back to life,  
“Twas he enlisted me to rise and journey here.”

12 The crowd of haughty Jews again said unto him:

“But who was he who ordered you audaciously

“To rise and take this couch you carry on your back?”

I3 But he did not know who had healed his disease.

I4 Christ, seeing him approaching in the Temple yard,

Reminded him how ancient sin caused his complaint.

Arresting him, he charged him with the evidence:

50) “Behold, once ill, you were made whole. Accomplish not  
“Another such offense, lest worse disease befall!”

I5 So, boldly he returned, an envoy to the Jews,

Shouting his story to the jealous, spurning crowd,

How for him, unasked, with a mystic voice, a cure

Jesus effected; now, a new pedestrian,

He laid aside the burden of his bed of pain.

I6 For which the frantic Jews, because their minds were mad,

Pursued Jesus, because nigh to the sacred House

He’d dared to do those things while it was Sabbath day:

60) Infringing on the law, which charged all men to rest,

Commanding every labor of mankind to cease.

I7 And then, in stately tones, Jesus began to speak:

“The Father even now is busy at His work,

“And I, His Son, as antitype, perform His work.”

I8 For which the Hebrews sought, by vile homicide,

To despatch Christ, because not only did he flout

The Sabbath’s reverential awe of idleness,

But also later on that very Sabbath day,

He'd dared to call the self-made God his own begetter,  
 70) And make his glory equal to the heav'nly King's.  
 19 Jesus announced: "Amen, let it be testified:  
 "By his own will the Son is able to do naught,  
 "Unless he look to do the things his Father wills;  
 "And all whatever things the Father does, at once  
 "His Son does, imitating God the genitor.  
 20 "The Father loves His Son: whatever He may do  
 "He shows His precious Son, and still more will reveal  
 "That you may be astonished by His final works.  
 21 "For as the Father can raise corpses after death,  
 80) "Revivifying carcasses of lifeless men,  
 "Just so, likewise the Son shall raise whom so he will,  
 "Restoring life to risen bodies of dead folks;  
 22 "My Father judges no one; nay, but, rather to  
 "The Son He gave the judgment of mankind. 23 All men  
 "Should reverence the Son as equal with the Father  
 "Just as they glorify the maker up on high.  
 "Whoever has a vacillating mind, he honors not  
 "The Father's Son, the Word, nor honors yet the Father.  
 24 "Amen, amen, once more let this be taken down:  
 90) "Whichever man will, in his mind, obey the law  
 "And likewise be persuaded by my Father's words,  
 "Unto the coming judgment he comes not, but to

“Undying life, which time knows not how to destroy.  
 “He will come back from death! 25 For, unexpectedly  
 “The time of resurrection and of men’s rebirth,  
 “Tho’ happ’ning late, will come, then, when the silent dead  
 “Will live again, back from the pit whence none return,  
 “Who hear his single cry, victorious over death,  
 “The only Son begotten by the Source of life.  
 100) 26 “For just as God plies life, the universal source,  
 “Distributing to all with His lifesaving breath,  
 “This same He gave His Son, the universal king.  
 27 “He gave him holy life and equal honor, too,  
 “And judgment, to accomplish what he will, like God,  
 “For which he is, indeed, called living Son of Man.  
 28 “And be ye not amazed at any wondrous sooth  
 “I told ye, which shall come. That final hour draws nigh,  
 “And now is nearly here, when all the dead in throngs,  
 “Delivered from the tomb from which no one returns,  
 110) “On hearing the awaited sacred voice of Christ,  
 “From everywhere will rush, and one after the next,  
 “Their reborn feet return’d to ancient fatherland.  
 29 “Those steady in the struggle, irreproachable,  
 “Arising unto deathless life; those having led  
 “Lives of transgression and perverted frenzy, soon  
 “Arising unto coming judgment. 30 While from heav’n,

“Far from my parent, I can nothing bring to pass  
 “Myself, still, I can judge whatever I might hear;  
 “My judgment is infallible. For I come not  
 120) “To bring about my own renown, but only His;  
 “My glory I do not discuss. 31 For, if I did,  
 “Those hearing me would not believe my own account;  
 “For my own words would not be evidence were I  
 “My only touter of my reputation. 32 But  
 “I have another witness, and I know he is  
 “A witness true and faithful. 33 You inquisitors,  
 128) “You sent a troop of mountain roaming travelers  
 127) “Directly from the high priests out to holy John,  
 “Who preached with voice divine. This blameless sacred man  
 130) “Set forth the word of truth with bonds unbreakable  
 “And witness probative. 34 From voices on the earth,  
 “Men’s testimony I do not expect, but I  
 “Go teaching all these things among the Jews, and hope  
 “To save you with my words, all you who hear me preach.  
 35 “That very John, who blazed with spiritual flames,  
 “He was a pious beacon, beaming light to men.  
 “You all, in the brief eddy of one spinning hour,  
 “Yourselves, with shining testimony were washed clean  
 “In water. You were dazzled by that blinding flame  
 140) “And awesome flood. 36 However, greater witness than



“The voice of John I seek, and greater oracle:  
 “Whatever work my Father gives me I will do,  
 “And, like a trumpet blasting in the silent still,  
 “These things proclaim me in terms unequivocal.  
 37 “Think not the Father who dispatched me from above  
 “Forsakes me with His silent lack of premonstration.  
 “For, through the mouths of men with tongues of gods He spoke  
 “A living testimony in the sacred book,  
 “The One who sent me forth. For you have never seen  
 150) “The Father’s holy form, nor have you heard His voice,  
 38 “Nor do you heed His Word with never-failing ears,  
 “He whom my Father sent as savior of the world;  
 “God’s Son you did not hail, though sent you by the Father.  
 39 “Ye seek for written rules from God-dictated books;  
 “From them you hope to have, in future time to come,  
 “Eternal life. But see, those very books you prize,  
 “They shout my prophecy in voice oracular  
 “Like deathless trumpets. 40 But, relying on your books,  
 “You do not will yourselves to hasten unto me.  
 160) 41 “Acclaim from men I do not seek. 42 For I perceive  
 “You lack all natural affection, and you feel  
 “No love for Him, the Father and the king of all.  
 43 “I came announcing to the world my lineage;  
 “You did not hail me God, you do not trust the Father.

“And should another with a false, deceptive name  
“Rise up against God, this incongruous deceiver  
“You gulled ones flatter straight away, as it is said:  
“The real they declined, they took the counterfeit.  
44 “How then can you pretend to praise the Son of God  
170) “Who glorify each other? For, not having learned,  
“How can you try to honor God, who made you all?  
45 “Perhaps you vainly fear that with accusing lips  
“I will, in fury, scream about you to my Father.  
“Another one, in all his books, accuses you:  
“Tis legislator Moses, he, on whom, alone,  
“You set your God believing hopes. 46 For if in his  
“Steadfast commandments you reposed your steadfast trust,  
“Then you adherents would believe in me, for he  
“Wrote godly truth concerning me. 47 But if strong faith  
180) “You have not in his writings, which God gave the world,  
“How could you possibly accept, against your lusts,  
“The yet unwritten words that issue from my mouth?”

## Chapter 6

In which our Lord miraculously multiplies loaves and fishes. In which he walks on water.  
In which he self-identifies as the Bread of Life. In which followers begin to leave him.

He spoke, and quickly crossing Lake Tiberias  
Within a mighty galley cutting through the sea,  
Escaped to the adjacent land. 2 The crowd rushed in,  
Who had observed the miracles his words had wrought:  
Delivering men from the lash of sore diseases.  
3 So from the hilly desert region journeying,  
He walked inland to lofty mountains, sat amidst  
His students, and they circled round him like a crown.  
4 'Twas nigh the ritualistic Hebrews' holiday,  
10) The one they called Passover. 5 Through the leafy hedge  
11 He raised his eyes, and, vast and crowded on each other,  
He saw the mob of travelers that followed close.  
In teasing words he spoke to Philip who sat by:  
"Say, where is to be bought such huge amounts of bread  
"For lo, so many men?" 6 He hid his true intent,  
And, not discovering his mind, he tested Philip.  
But even then he knew what he was going to do.  
7 Thus being teased, poor Philip mixed his voice with wonder:  
"For such a crowd, as many as the grains of sand,  
20) "Not two hundred denarii will e'en suffice

“For each to have a meagre share.” 8 Then one of them,  
One of the holy comrades, bringing news, cried out;  
‘Twas Andrew, shouting to the Lord about some food,  
The brother of the waterfarer, fisher Simon:

9 “There is here now some youth who has five barley loaves,  
“And has besides a couple fish from yonder sea,  
“A pair of roasted fish. But who can manage to  
“Divide these paltry things for this great host of mouths?”

10 Then Jesus called to his enthusiastic friends:  
30) “Let all our guests recline at will upon the ground.”

The spot was covered with a grassy lawn. The vast  
Assembled swarm sat down to dine upon the turf,  
Five divers thousand of all kinds there were by count  
Of guests invited. Each beside his neighbor leaned,  
Reclining in long lines around the grassy table.

11 Then, taking, one by one, the several barley loaves,  
Christ, giving thanks to the eternal Father, raised  
His hands and quickly broke each with a rapid twist.

And he distributed the bread to all the guests,  
40) And did the same again with both the roasted fish.

12 But when the hungry crowd had all been fed, and well,  
To his attentive servants, Jesus gave command:  
“Now swiftly like a whirlwind gather ye at once  
“The fragments left from this extraordinary feast

“So nothing may be lost.” 13 Then, stumbling through the crowd,  
The ministering swarm of wandering apostles,  
First one and then the next, raised up, quite full of bread,  
Their deeply hollowed hands. And from the bright green grass  
On every side, remains of broken food they found,  
50) Whatever there was left. And from those first five loaves  
They gathered in their baskets as they wound around  
More than a dozen bushels of assorted things.  
14 And many folks from here and there cried out aloud  
Who saw the miracle Christ wrought before the throng,  
Bestowing on them self replenishing provisions:  
“This is the man they say to be a very prophet,  
“Who is to be an oracle, and pilot of the world!”  
15 But in his heart the Lord, divining by instinct  
That on the spot the congregation wanted to  
60) Abduct him and then set him up to be their king,  
He crossed the wooded hills to reach the desert rocks.  
16 But when the twilight shadow crept over the place  
His students hastily took to the hostile sea  
17 Aboard a sleek sea runner, chariot of the deep.  
So did his students travel to the other shore,  
Returning to the city of Capharnum. Soon,  
Dark battlements of fog descended o’er the earth  
And, like a colored garment, clung there to the waves

Beneath the twinkling stars. Still to his worried friends  
70) Christ had not yet appeared. 18 The mighty storm  
Tossed towering waves of briny sea up to the clouds;  
The rowers gouged the water with their massive oars  
Against the fury of opposing winds. 19 When, out to sea  
Some twenty five or thirty stadia, the tars  
Beheld Christ Jesus wending cross the vasty deep  
And wandering the waves, but walking with dry feet.  
In fear whereof they screamed. 20 To his distraught disciples  
Jesus remarked: "Cast out your fear into the blast!  
"For I am Christ, and I tread lightly on the surf!"  
80) 21 They tried to grapple him into a dinghy--in  
Mid-ocean--far from port; then by the hand of God  
Without wind, without oars, like lightly winged thought,  
The ship came by itself unto the distant harbor.  
22 But when, empurpling the rocks around the lake  
The sudden dawn sliced through the insubstantial mist,  
The crowd, assembled on the cobbles of the beach,  
Soon noticed that, beside the holy sacred lake,  
Close by the damp and battered shore were not  
The rows of little boats all tied down to each other,  
90) But rather only the unnavigable boat  
On which Jesus had not, as passenger aboard,  
Set sail with his companions, for without him they

Had sailed off alone toward the distant shore.

23 (But having taken other boats, to reach that beach  
(They'd rushed upon the sea, and sailed back to where  
(Th' enormous crowd had picnicked on the verdant field  
(And ate prodigious bread, which the immortal hand  
(Of Christ broke, thanking God the Father, Pantocrator.)

24 But finding neither Christ, the life bestowing king,  
100) Nor his apostles there, returning to their ships  
With foaming oars they churned the waters of the lake,  
Migrating to the city of Capharnum. 25 There

Across the never silent sea, discovering  
Christ, they surrounded him and asked him pleasantly:  
"O Rabbi, Lord, when did you sail here?" 26 The crowd,  
Still greedy for a banquet, Jesus sought to shame,  
And he addressed them; from mere transitory food  
Attracting these stray men unto life-giving cheer:

"I know why you petitioners have come: Not on account  
110) "Of cures miraculous, which I wrought with my words,  
"Do you admire; your appetite drags most of you  
"Back for more sacred bread, on which you gorged yourselves,  
"With countless servings at my dining table.

27 "But to the vagrant breezes let that meal go,  
"It having quickly rotted; rather, finish ye  
"The lasting banquet from the ever-living table

“At which is served the life-bestowing Son of Man,  
 “On whom the Father God has set His seal.” 28 But then,  
 The crowd of Jews spoke out in curious inquiry:  
 120) “Say, what, then, shall we do? By what divine precepts  
 “Might we perform the works of God?” 29 The Lord replied:  
 “When you have upright faith, receive the One who comes,  
 “Whomever God has sent.” 30 The crowd responded back:  
 “What sign will you perform for us who wait for him,  
 “That, seeing it, we might thus know the work is God’s?  
 “What can you do like our ancestors did? 31 They once  
 “Provided us, from air, imperishable food  
 “Out in the waste, with manna most remarkable.  
 “So it is written. There, to the colossal crowd  
 130) “He offered bread from heaven, lavish, as to guests.”  
 32 Reproaching the impulsive troop, Jesus replied:  
 “It was not Moses there within the rocky desert,  
 “Who gave you bread and honey for your feast,  
 “But rather did my Father, who yet still to you  
 “Another, better bread of wisdom will bestow.  
 33 “He is the bread, who, coming down from heav’n, will give  
 The life which all desire, unto th’ entire world.”  
 34 And once again in chorus cried the train of Jews:  
 “O Lord of Life, you tell us of this true  
 140) “Ætherial bread, grant us to feast withal on Truth!”



35 Then Jesus opened wide his mouth which taught of God,  
 And bellowed from his lips a voice abounding grace:  
 "I am the deathless bread of life! With hunger keen  
 "No mortal man who comes to me shall ever crave.  
 "And all those growing in unshaken faith in me  
 "Shall never thirst, even until old, creeping, bent  
 "Broad bearded Time can round the boundless turning post.  
 36 "But I said unto you, the wonders of my voice  
 "You see before your eyes, but trust not in the Father.  
 150) 37 "For any man my Father sends to me will turn  
 "His footsteps unto me, divinely born; nor will  
 "I drive those men away who come with recent faith,  
 "But I, rejoicing, will receive them. 38 Not for my  
 "Own ends came I from heaven down, but for the Father's.  
 39 "And this is the desire of my Father, King of all:  
 "That I might never lose one whom my Father gave,  
 "But rather I should raise him from the gloomy pit,  
 "Recovered from the dead, upon the final day.  
 40 "For this is the command of my effulgent Father:  
 160) "That all those seeing me, who cast a friendly eye,  
 May join th' eternal chorus of the life to come.  
 "And I will raise him up, recalled to life, when that  
 ---- *Nonnos omits 6 : 41 through 54* ----  
 "Last dawn will come to rise on that ultimate day.

55 “For, verily, my flesh, it is the food of life,  
 “My blood indeed is drink. 56 Whatever man  
 “Might taste my blood and body in one sacrament,  
 “This man in abides me, and, likewise, I in him  
 “Will firmly be ensconced, supported and supporting.  
 57 “My Father made me His lieutenant to this world,  
 170) “I live by gracious favor of the King on high;  
 “I live, and that man joined to me by sacrament  
 “Will live off me, by banqueting upon my flesh.  
 58 “My flesh, it is the true undying bread of life,  
 “Not like the sort before, amid the desert rocks,  
 “The luscious bread on which your fathers therein dined,  
 “And died, still roaming wanderers in mountain crags.  
 “The man, though peasant serf, who eats of that true bread,  
 “He shall see life, until the beard of old man Time  
 “Turns silver, spreading full of venerable gray.”  
 180) 59 He said these teachings in the well-paved synagogue  
 There in Capharnum, deeply founded in the earth.  
 60 Then, several of them, almost in a mindless rage,  
 His followers, in torment bitterly complained:  
 “These words are hard for me, which he has preached to us,  
 “And who can stand to hear his outburst?” 61 Knowing that  
 The crowded congregation muttered secretly,  
 In treacherous and unrestrained vociferation,

Christ forced his words on his perverted followers:  
“Do these words rip into your disobedient hearts?  
190) 62 “Then what an if ye see, resplendent with the Father  
“From whom he came, one springing from the throne on high,  
“The Son of Man returned, what will you say to this?  
63 “The spirit is the nobler source of life. But flesh  
“Is different: the human nature counts for naught.  
“The stream of my inspired commands which I pronounce  
“Is life and spirit and the voice of truth divine.  
64 “But certain faithless ones of you are mad with rage.”  
For he knew who those were who had a roving mind,  
Who yielded their faith to stormy winds of change,  
200) And who the man was, soon to hand him to the Jews,  
A man made mad in mind, possessed by silver sickness.  
65 And so the Lord announced to them: “Wherefore I said,  
“No man is able of his own to come to me  
“Unless, because of me, that man is loved by God,  
“And He, indulgent Father, will give him the prize.”  
66 For which, unsettled, walking on the road away,  
A group of his disciples drew a distance back,  
Not crowding him around; they turned aside, they did  
No longer closely follow Christ. 67 Beholding this,  
210) The mob of former followers unfaithfully  
Pulling aside, away, self-exiled from the crowd,

He said to all his twelve most intimate disciples:

“Indeed do you make haste to go with all of them?

“Are you true sons? Or are you bastards like the rest?”

68 Then to him Simon Peter, booming, made reply:

“To whom else greater shall we go? For you provide

“The overflowing cup of honeyed words of life.

69 “But mainly, having learned from the loquacious books,

“We firmly are persuaded, and to one result:

220) “That you must be the holy one of God.” 70 And soft

The Lord to faithful Peter in responsive turn:

“Did I not, having learned the hearts of men, choose you,

“E’en you from many? Still, is there not one of you

“Unhappy and deceitful? And he shares your board,

“Whom later men will call another, second devil.”

71 He meant Iscariot, who ate at the Last Supper,

That Judas, thievish Son of unblest father, Simon,

For he would soon connive at his life giving death,

One swept into the wily snare of lust for gold,

Though having been among the company of twelve.

## Chapter 7

In which Jesus absent-mindedly cures on the Sabbath, again. In which the people discuss him, and the proposition that no prophet can come from Galilee.

The Lord with guarded steps remained and dwelt therein,  
Residing in the seaside land of Galilee.

He did not want to roam the Jewish lands by road,  
Because they longed by ambuscades to work his death,  
The Jewish sons, complotting towards his evil fate.

2 Now it was almost the religious holiday  
Named after eating meals outdoors in tents. 3 There came  
Four sons of Joseph, four sham relatives of Christ,

10) Who, hastening, cried out aloud, as one, to him:

“Remove yourself from here, and for the holiday

“Haste ye to travel neighborly Judæawards,

“So that the straying hearts of those inconstant ones,

“Your students, might regain their faith as once it was,

“On seeing all the deeds done by your words of power.

4 “For no man does a deed and hides it ‘neath his cloak,

“A hidden deed, unnoticed in the fog of silence,

“But he wants bold publicity. You do these things:

“You should display your wonders to the watching world.”

20) 5 So they pronounced like fools, just like the other fools;

Though being brothers to the Christ, the king of all,  
 The laws of family and trust they thus disdained.  
 6 To them the Lord announced in these responsive words:  
 “Not yet has come to me my seasonable time,  
 “But it is always time for you. 7 The jealous world,  
 “As usual in constant storms of rage, does not  
 “Hate you; but me it loathes and boldly drives to chase,  
 “For I alone, unsparing in my testimony,  
 “Accuse the world of being gravid with all vice.  
 30) “I bellow forth its deeds, all done against the laws!  
 8 “Go, join in the carouse around the hymnic fest;  
 “I will not now, just yet, in honor of the tents  
 “Go up into the mystic services. For still  
 “The time of my last challenge has not come.” 9 He spoke,  
 And stayed himself among the long haired Galileans.  
 10 His brothers went off to the Temple, and at length  
 He took the road up to the choric festival.  
 11 The Jews, with friendly vigor, looked about for him:  
 “Where did he go? Where is he?” 12 From the noisy crowd  
 40) Came myriad confused accounts on every tongue,  
 And many cried God fearing testimonials,  
 That: “He is wise and many marvels he produces!”  
 But others countered this, as if with but one tongue:  
 “He is not wise, he is not truly wise. The minds

“Of rustic people with diversions he beguiled.”  
 And thus the masses to each other. 13 But no one  
 Was bold enough to speak of him with fearless voice,  
 Or publicly discuss with free and easy lips,  
 For due regard and terror of the Jews. 14 At last,  
 50) Arriving in the middle of the mystic rite,  
 Jesus went up; and in the Temple’s well paved court  
 He taught the gathered ranks of rural citizens.  
 15 Whereat the throng of learned Jews stood all agog,  
 And back and forth they chattered, each one to the other:  
 “How does he preach the written words all by himself?”  
 “How has he learned the Scriptures which he was not taught  
 “By one who has a special knowledge of that art?”  
 “How, untaught, does he know the scriptures?” 16 To these folks  
 The Lord cried out aloud, with lips oracular:  
 “My deep instruction is not mine, but comes from Him  
 60) “Who sent me. 17 Any man, if he might well desire,  
 “Will know from my instruction, whether from above  
 “This gift divine arrives, or whether all these things  
 “I preach to you are solely my own made-up words.  
 18 “For every man who talks about his notoriety  
 “Just talks about himself and his own cleverness.  
 “He seeks his own self glory. On the other hand,  
 “Whoever would obtain God’s nod walks blamelessly

“The path of truth, not recklessly all by himself.”  
 Again the Lord to them: 19 “Did Moses not, long past,  
 70) “Give you the laws regarding murder and revenge?  
 “Why then do breezes snatch the word of God on high?  
 “Not one of you obeys the law, and so much so  
 “That me you seek to kill in a clandestine doom.”  
 20 The people said: “A madness has beset your mind,  
 “A demon of the air. Who longs to overwhelm you?”  
 21 Referring, now, to holy law, and how the priests,  
 All facing in a mystic circle, secretly  
 Cut off the tip of modesty soon after birth:  
 “One single deed I did and for that holy deed  
 80) “You all object to me, amazed. 22 Nevertheless,  
 “’Twas Moses handed down the covenant of iron,  
 “(Not that from Moses came this gift, but from our fathers  
 “(Had we this bequest), and by that oldest law,  
 “No matter that it be the shining Sabbath day,  
 “E’en so, at birth you circumcise that child with iron,  
 “Lest you ignore the customary law of Moses.  
 23 “Why, if a man can take the customary snip,  
 “Do you raise loud and angry threats against me when  
 “Before you I cure putrid flesh of morbid taint,  
 90) “Albeit on the Sabbath, using healing words  
 “To cure the man, without resorting to the blade?



24 “Judge not, nay, punish not, with human eyes,  
“But, judging, parse the law into its very words,  
“And honor equity above the antique code.”

25 Then sev’ral burghers of Jerusalem replied:  
“Is not this man upright, whom they seek to subdue,  
“All in conspiracy, and with a steel blade?

26 “Behold how once again before the gaping crowd,  
“Unshaken, still he stirs them with his public words;  
100) “Perhaps the preachers, if they listen to his words,  
“The rulers of the people may together learn  
“If he indeed is Christ. 27 When comes the Christ  
“No man will know from whence he comes, but we know him.”

28 Then Jesus shouted from the shining silver Temple:  
“You know me and you understand my simple words,  
“You even know my source, although you dare not speak it.  
“For I have not come here among you for myself,  
“But on account of Him, the Father who sent me.

29 “And this I know for certain: that from by His side  
110) “I truly came, and He dispatched me here to come.”

30 Some, stung by this, began their plans to capture him,  
But not a one of them, with their unsparing grasp,  
Could lay their horrid frightful hands on him, because  
His bloody time had not yet from the Father come.

31 But many of the gathered throng believed him then,

And, all together, honored Jesus with these words:  
 "If ever comes the Christ, comes the redeemer king,  
 "He surely greater wonders will not work than these,  
 "Done with his healing words." 32 But from some other tongues  
 120) Resentful and unbridled muttering had reached  
 The faithless crowd of evil minded Pharisees;  
 The still more jealous high priests sent their servants forth  
 With stringent orders to arrest the fugitive.  
 33 Then said the Lord to them, by these mysterious words  
 Foretelling the proximity of his last day:  
 "But for a short time yet do I remain near you,  
 "And soon I will away to my dispatching Father.  
 34 "Then you will seek me back again; but ye  
 "Shall not then find me, and you have not strength  
 130) "To travel on that highway on which I will wend."  
 35 The crowd in groups spoke to each other on the spot:  
 "Where is he going to, to make a fast escape?"  
 "Perhaps he means to hurry to the neighbor towns  
 "Where dwell the scattered ranks of Panhellenes, to them  
 "To teach his laws of wisdom to the sons of Greece?"  
 36 "What meant these words he told the present crowd,  
 "Too late will you look back to find me on the road;  
 "You will not find me nor the map to where I go,  
 "For you who want to walk the road unreachable?"

140) 37 Then on the last day of the dancing festival  
Christ stood nearby the Temple's paved courtyard,  
And to the Hebrews poured his voice, full of delight:  
"If anyone has deadly thirst, and comes to me,  
"Let him imbibe the water from my saving spring.  
38 "All faithful will be saved." As in the ancient word  
Of God which says of him: Forever from his body  
Intelligence in rivers, streaming currents gush,  
Replenishing with water, inner and divine.  
39 He spoke about the coming and indwelling of  
150) The Spirit, which would come to God-receiving souls  
When all the wide spread peoples had been won to faith;  
For it had not yet been implanted in them all,  
Nor had Christ yet appeared beside his Father's throne.  
40 Then, many of the crowd there, being of one mind,  
Roared out, reverberating, from persuaded lips:  
"He truly is the prophet whom the Book describes!"  
41 A dutiful group echoed back, but doubtfully:  
"Yes, he is Christ the King!" Still, others argued this,  
Their chins a-flapping neath their scripture-spouting mouths,  
160) And quoted ancient laws as written in wise books:  
"He surely will not come from coastal Galilee,  
"This Christ the King? 42 Does not the prophecy run thus:  
"With royal blood of ancient David in his veins

“Will Christ first manifest himself unto the Jews,  
“And from the fatherland where dwelt harp-strumming David,  
“From sheep-grazed Bethlehem.” 43 In the divided crowd  
Was spreading doubt, and there was anger. 44 Suddenly  
Some foolish men attempted to lay hands on him,  
On Jesus, under orders of the evil elders,  
170) But still they could not snatch him, since to him  
His hour of death, though looming close, was not at hand.  
45 But back unto the impious high priests returned  
Their servants, staggered by their knowledge. Said the priests:  
“Why did you seize him not?” 46 They said in careful words,  
The underservants of dreadful necessity:  
“No other man has ever spoken words the like!”  
47 The crowd of reckless Pharisees boldly replied:  
“Are you not in your twisted minds confused by him,  
“Persuaded in your thoughts? 48 For certainly no one  
180) “Believes in him, the rulers or shrewd Pharisees,  
49 “But only this fanatical and misled mob,  
“Which, being ignorant, is frenzied, full of bane.”  
50 With an indignant voice, out of the wealthy ranks  
Came Nicodemus suddenly to counter them:  
51 “Surely the scrupulous and holy Jewish law  
“Will not condemn a man without a prior hearing.  
“The judge examines carefully the speaker’s words,

“Discerning from sworn testimony what he did.”

52 Back shot the Pharisees who minister the law,

190) Accusing blameless Nicodemus: “And yourself?

“Do you bear Galilean blood? The scrolls of law,

“Take them, unroll them, search them, you will find

“If ever eloquent prophets will rise from Galilee!”

## Chapter 8

In which Christ reveals himself as the light of the world, and assures the disciples that the truth shall make them free.

*Verses I —II were omitted by Nonnos.*

12 Then Jesus spoke, his rabble rousing voice poured out:

“The Light I am unto a world bereft of light.

“Who follows me and keeps his faith in me goes not

“On foot, confused, into the dark and misty shadows,

“But he will shine, as he has with him, in himself,

“The steady, everlasting light of life.” 13 Uncowed,

The crowd of Jews cried back and spoke in frenzied tones:

“You talk about yourself in overweening words,

“Self-serving stories cannot be believed.” 14 He said,

10) Words overflowing in a storm of inspiration:

“No matter that my preaching serves to spread my fame,

“My testimony is not false; there are two things

“I know, at least: from whence I came and whither go.

“You know not whence I came, nor whither I shall go.

15 “You all, beholding here my human-seeming shape,

“You judge in ignorance and with your appetites.

“I never would accuse aloud or judge a man;

16 “But if I were a judge, one laying down the law,

“My judgment would be sure and perfect. Not alone  
 20) “Speak I: I but corroborate my august Father,  
 “My joint accomplice. 17 Set among your many laws  
 “Inscribed from God’s dictation to the holy book:  
 “A story from two men shall be received as true.  
 18 “I am a faithful witness, myself, about myself.  
 “My Father, too, announces His complete concord.”  
 19 The Hebrews asked of him in these responsive words:  
 “Your father, who is he? Who got you?” And he said:  
 “You in your selfish schemes see neither one of us:  
 “Nor I the Son arriving, nor the sending Father.  
 30) “All you who know me, if you could put confidence  
 “In me, then you would recognize my Father, too.”  
 20 The Lord to one and all these splendid lessons taught  
 From where they listened in the treasury, a place  
 Where many people trafficked, bringing divers gifts.  
 But no one seized him, for to him had not yet come  
 The tread of his last, fatal season, sent by God.  
 21 To them the Lord announced: “My own road I will walk,  
 “But you who go your normal and unthinking ways,  
 “Grown old, will face the terrifying final end  
 40) “In sin, like all the other ancient white haired men!  
 “But where I haste to set my feet through mazy tracks,  
 “You have not strength to follow on pursuing feet.”

22 And the impulsive Hebrew crowd, on hearing, seethed,  
And from their vicious mouths a mindless torrent spewed:

“He either means to hang himself or, with a sword,  
“To plunge it through his guts unto his suicide.”

23 Then Jesus opened his divine inspired mouth  
In refutation of the scandalous array:

“You all are fugitives come from the nether pit:

50) “You all come from below, while from above I come.

“You are the sorry heirs of all the worthless world

“And carry earthly blood. I, to my endless glory,

“Came to the world a stranger, without mortal father,

“I am a stranger in the world, a citizen of air.

24 “But I say this to you: that in the coming doom

“You greedily will enter e’en the utter pit,

“Still following your sins: in truth, unless you come

“To know me: who I am and whom my Father, you

“Will die, gross with impiety.” 25 Audaciously,

60) The crowd of Jews unstopped their curiosity:

“Who are you?” Christ cried out: “Why did I talk to you

“E’en from the start, 26 when I have countless things to judge

“And teach? But He is true, who, to the human race

“Sent me; and whatsoever truth I hear from Him

“I faithfully relate it to the mindless world!”

27 They did not recognize he spoke about the Father.



28 Then opening his lips, Jesus went on, inspired:  
 “Whenever, with a sacred fervor, you exalt  
 “The prudent Son of Man, then you will know, yourselves,  
 70) “That without God the Father I can nothing do,  
 “But what my Father orders me I always do,  
 29 “So from on high, my Father is revealed in me.  
 “Nor does He e’er forsake me, for I closely look  
 “To do all things to please the Father, through all time.”  
 30 From his harangues, some scattered ranks of men  
 Submitted to the yoke of faith unshakeable.  
 31 Then Jesus preached unto the new converted crowd:  
 “If you, indeed, have been persuaded by me, my  
 “Commands you should obey. 32 Then you, yourselves, will learn  
 80) “The ways of truth, pleasing to God; this certainty  
 “Will bring emancipation to you converts, all!”  
 33 The Hebrews, in concordance, shouted out these words:  
 “From Abraham, our opulent progenitor,  
 “We bear unmastered blood, nor unto any man  
 “Have we abased ourselves, or cringed beneath the lash.  
 “So why said ye to us: You, dying, will be free,  
 “In certainty will you find calm tranquility.”  
 34 So Jesus, in reproach, taught the enormous crowd:  
 “Each man who goes about committing thoughtless sins,  
 90) “He is the slave of sin. 35 And in th’eternal home

“The slave of wickedness will not long linger there;  
 “The blameless Son, howe’er, the source of life, abides  
 “To dwell in his paternal home, ‘til, round the post  
 “Implacable, relentless Æon circles back.  
 36 “For if, releasing you from slavery’s constraints,  
 “The Son would crown your heads with leaves of liberty,  
 “You, manumitted, would throw off the bonds of sin,  
 “Possessing, then, at last, the freedom born of truth.  
 37 “You are the brood of sober Abraham, I know,  
 100) “But me you strive unto a stealthy doom to slay:  
 “For never do my words enter into your minds.”  
 39 The Hebrews then cried out in these responsive words:  
 “Our father and our patriarch is Abraham!”  
 And Jesus, in resounding oracles, replied:  
 “If father Abraham begat you clever stock,  
 “You surely would have done your pious father’s work,  
 “Unselfish Abraham. 40 Your race contends with God  
 “If you pollute your bloody hands with secret doom.  
 “You prove, in all your deeds, to be a stubborn breed.  
 110) “But Abram did not long to slay an innocent,  
 “And Abram did not strive to do the things God hates.  
 41 “But you forever plot your evil father’s works!”  
 And, hearing this, the crowd of Hebrews rashly said:  
 “We are not bastards born upon a bed of lust!

“We know one living Father, who is God alone.”

42 So Jesus further preached to the attending throng:  
 “If God in heaven were, indeed, your Father, then  
 “You would be yoked to me with sturdy bonds of love,  
 120) “For I have come here now, delivered here by God.  
 43 “And wherefore, by its cunning, know ye not my voice?  
 “You do not have the strength to listen to my words.  
 44 “You are the hostile children of a potent sire,  
 “A demon rival, and his troublesome desires  
 “You strive, all ye, to do, to please your haughty father.  
 “He ever was a murderer, from ere the world  
 “Was founded, nor stayed he within the institutes  
 “Of truth, obedient to God; for not in him  
 “Was truth. And when, for his perverted purposes,  
 130) “The wheedling sycophant dispatches his commands,  
 “He speaks as he is wont, and from his evil custom:  
 “A liar he was born, got by a lying father!  
 45 “But when I speak to you, you credit not my words.  
 46 “What man among you can, himself, report of me  
 “That I preach sin? And so, if I teach only truth,  
 “Why, then, do you not trust in my salvation? 47 Each  
 “Wise man who keeps the self-born God in mind can hear  
 “In thoughts the living God of heaven’s messages;  
 “You do not haste to hear the wondrous oracle

140) "Because you are not sons of the providing Father."  
48 This hearing, angrily the Hebrew crowd boiled over,  
And from their wretched lips they poured out senseless words:  
"Do we not rightly judge, when we declare we think  
"That God adopted you to some Samaritans,  
"Or are you lashed to madness by a tending demon?"  
49 Again Jesus addressed the disbelieving mob:  
"The whiplash of a fatal demon strikes me not,  
"But, rather, fruitful God, my Father, I revere  
"With honor undefiled: with great dishonor, me  
150) "You foolish men vituperate with stinging words.  
50 "I do not look for glory. But from clouds above  
"He sees to my renown, which every day accretes,  
"And judges over all. 51 Amen, amen, I say:  
"Whoever might take these inspired lines of verse,  
"If he will keep them safely in his understanding,  
"Then never will he see sharp death, as long as lasts  
"Spinning eternity." 52 And then crowd spoke out:  
"At last, we now have learned the truth: that you are mad,  
"And goaded by a fly, a demon of the dark!  
160) "In old age Abraham looked square at death, nor had  
"The prophets strength to flee the pain of heedless fate;  
"And you, in pouring out your arrogant pretension,  
"Now dare to say that: If a man might only keep

“My precepts, he shall not, at last, taste mortal doom.  
 53 “You surely are not more than faithful Abraham,  
 “The father of us all, who faced indifferent fate?  
 “And all the prophets, all, were tried, at last, by death.  
 “Say, who of our ancestors will you claim to equal?”  
 54 Then Jesus opened his inspired lips and said:  
 170) “Were I to flatter and to eulogize myself,  
 “Or overstate my claims, my words would count for naught.  
 “My Father honors me, He who dispatched me to  
 “The race of man, to come to straighten out the world,  
 “Your God, whom you invoke in your unrighteous words.  
 55 “But I, I know Him better. And, if I should say  
 “That I do not know Him, then I, myself, would be  
 “Called liar, just like you, with your deceitful ways.  
 “But Him, but Him I know, and what He orders me,  
 “Just so, as is my practice, certainly I do.  
 180) 56 “Your father Abraham, inspired patriarch,  
 “His heart rejoiced to see my much-desired day.  
 “He saw, and he made merry.” 57 Then the stupefied  
 Array of Jews cried out in a resounding roar:  
 “You cannot yet have passed through all the twists of time,  
 “Nor yet have finished fifty turnings of the year,  
 “Yet you saw ancient Abraham?” 58 And then he said:  
 “Before the birth of Abraham, I was.” 59 Enraged,

The hostile body surged, and seizing frightful stones,  
While yet he preached to them they sought to bury him  
190) Beneath a pelting hail storm of broken shards.  
But Jesus safely hid within the Temple nooks;  
Then, slipping through the midst of them on silent feet,  
Unseen, he thus escaped the lapidary mob;  
And so he got away.

## Chapter 9

In which Christ heals a blind beggar on the Sabbath. In which the formerly blind beggar twits the High Priests.

One day, as he was walking down along the road,  
He saw a man who at the moment of his birth  
Drop't sightless and convulsing from his mother's womb;  
He was a homeless man and wore an eyeless face,  
Both eyelids tightly fused, unopened and not split,  
Which nature had not scored; for in his round, blind face  
His strange and swollen eyes were covered with a pall,  
And never such blind baby to the spinning world  
Had Father Time escorted in his chariot.

10    2 The crowd of his assembled friends asked Jesus this:

“O Rabbi, tell your students, questioning, who sinned:

“Did he, or did his parents through their sins, vex God

“So that these horrid things were given him at birth,

“Ripped from his mother's guts into the gloomy dark?”

3       And Jesus preached aloud this testimonial truth:

“Nor he nor did his parents blindly misdemean,

“But these woes were assigned, and sent by God so that

“The works of God the Father and protector might shine forth.

4       “Our highest obligation is to do His work,

20)    “The living God's commands, so long as day remains.

“For soon enough the murky night will come; and then,  
“At night, no honest man can hope to do God’s work.  
5 “While day increases I will act. For, in a world  
“Of darkness, lo, I am the sun, while I am here.”  
6 Thus said the Lord. From sacred mouth to thirsty earth  
He spat saliva through his teeth as medicine,  
And in the muddy hole he kneaded up the froth;  
Then stirring spit, he made a cure for blindness there.  
And with the mud he daubed the blind face of the man:  
30) He traced around one eye which was not made to see;  
He traced the other eye, and on the eyeless face  
Within the muddy rings, he pressed a central spot,  
With ordinary clay thus sketching out new eyes,  
Out of a heap of dust that might have made a man! 7  
Inspired, he said: “Now go from me and rinse your face  
“Where nearby flows the public fount of Siloam,  
“So named, long past, to prophecy your errand there.”  
Christ spoke, the blind man hurried, and beside the spring  
He drew up phosphorescent water in his hands,  
40) And with the fresh spring water rinsed his gleaming eyes.  
Then wiping clean around the orbit of his face  
He suddenly had sight, not given him at birth,  
And saw a great and unfamiliar light: The sun!  
He rinsed, returned, and stood and gaped at everything.



8 Now, certain foreign travelers were watching him  
As he flashed glances from his new empupilled face,  
And, to some other local men who knew him, said:  
“Is this not him, the vagrant blind man of the town,  
“Who used ere now to beg, in customary way  
50) “Extending his right hand to all the passers by?”  
9 But others argued back, responding in these words:  
“It surely is not him, but only looks like him!”  
The man cried out: “I am!” 10 And then, on hearing this,  
And curious, the crowd of Jews cried out aloud:  
“Now tell us then, how were your bulbous eyes unclosed?”  
11 So to the Hebrews said the man beloved by God:  
“That man, he who is known to be the Christ, the One  
“The crowd calls Jesus, he, he opened up my eyes;  
“And on the ground an efficacious foam he spat.  
60) “The pliant moisture kneading with his fingertips,  
“He worked the spit into the clay and daubed my eyes,  
“And he told me to go up to Siloam pool;  
“So to that spring I went, and in the holy fount  
“I washed the mud encircling my shaded eyes,  
“And suddenly saw light, who did not erst have sight!”  
12 The shameless Hebrews foolishly began to ask:  
“Where is he? Where is he?” Calmly, the man replied:  
“I know not where he is.” 13 And so the crowd set off

To lead him, as if blind, unto the evil priests.

70) 14 (The seventh, idle, sacred day it was that day,  
(On which Christ molded sight onto his eyes with mud,  
Thus lifting from his eyes the former blinding fog.)

15 And now the crowd of faithless Pharisees asked him:

“How did the light descend upon your eyes?” He cried:

“He painted on my eyes with clay miraculous;

“He caricatured eyes. Then in the spring nearby

“I washed away the mud, and now I sit and watch.”

16 But, jealous, the relentless Pharisees replied:

“He does not come from God: he spurns the holy law,

80) “And does not keep the seventh day an idle time.”

Then others argued back, in voice unanimous:

“But all these many wonders, how can he do them,

“A mortal man, and sinful?” From the fighting mob,

Divided bitterly, arose contesting shouts,

And there was confrontation on both sides. 17 All asked

The blind man: “You! What sort of knowledge about him

“Do you have in your mind? What facts can you tell us?”

And suddenly the man, convinced and resolute,

Asserted boldly that: “He is a holy prophet!”

90) 18 The crowds were not persuaded by the man’s true words,

That he was blind and then was given eyes to see,

Until the high priests, unconvinced at first, called forth

The certain parents of the man who now could see.

19 They carefully interrogated both of them:

“This Son of yours, who, all the citizens affirm,

“Burst out, a sightless monster, from his mother’s womb,

“How did so recently he get the light of sight?”

20 His parents, being shrewd and sensible of fear,

They who delivered him, spoke in evasive words:

I00) “We know that this young man who has obtained his sight

“Is veritably our young man; indeed, we know

“He, creeping newborn from his mother into light,

“Unnursed, still gasping from delivery, was blind.

21 “How, though, his eyes were both laid open, double pierced,

“And who dispersed the fog from his unseeing eyes,

“We honestly have not yet learned; but close at hand

“Stands him who knows, ask him what neither of us knows;

“For he is not an infant, rather he is grown:

“He does not need another one to speak. For he,

I10) “In bloom of youth, will tell the truth about himself,

“Since having reached the full estate of young manhood.”

22 The subtle parents answered in this wise from fear

And terror of the Jews. For they, in fury and

From jealousy of Christ due to his miracles,

Announced instructions to the whole obedient crowd:

Whoever should accept him, or should call him Christ,

Might not set foot within God's chosen sacred house.

23 And that was why the parents, to the Hebrews, said:

"Go ask the youth who knows, it is not our affair.

120) "For he must give reply to you inquisitors,

"As he is fully grown, a very tall young man."

The father of the blind man spoke respectfully,

But cautiously, lest they, the hostile mob, might hear,

And see their son with new eyes in his bug-eyed face.

24 Then, summoning the man who once had wandered blind,

In jealous mania the chief priests pointed out:

"Give thanks, O child, to God on high, Who, saving you,

"Bestowed light on your eyes! The man you glorify,

"The man who treated you, is steeped in wickedness."

25 And to the Hebrews said the brave man: "Knowing not

"If this man truly is a sinner, in my heart

"I know at least one truth: that from my natal morn

"I burst forth blind, and now I sit and I can see."

26 The Hebrew chorus poured their curious voices out:

135) "Say, what did he do to you with his poultice of mud?

"How did he dissipate the gloomy mist from you?"

27 And unperturbed, the man cried freely out to them:

"I told this tale before; did you not hear my voice?

"Why do you want to hear it now, another time?

"Perhaps God moves your minds, so that you have become

“The surreptitious students of the sacred Christ?”

28 They straightway quarreled with him, and retorted back:

“No, you, yourself, are one of that scofflaw’s disciples!

“But we are followers of ancient, reverent

145) “Lawgiver Moses, and we minister his laws.

*--Lacuna according to Koechly--*

29 “But him, we do not know.” 30 The man replied aloud:

“Well, this is very strange, that although unto you

“He is unknown, yet, still, he opened up my eyes.

31 “We know that God the Father, He who holds the reins,

150) “Does not at all attend the prayers of sinful men.

“But if a man fears God, and if he might take care,

“And might, with a pure heart, obey God’s own behest,

“Then swiftly working God will hear that prayerful man.

32 “Since ever Father Time has variously waxed,

“So great a tale has ne’er been heard, that one assigned

“Eyes shut up closely in a face devoid of light,

“To such a man comes light, to one who from his birth

“Was blind, e’en from the day of his delivery.

33 “Unless from heaven’s king this man has truly come,

160) “Such wonders he could not himself achieve alone.”

34 The envious mysterians cried rudely back:

“You are a man delivered live, inborn with sins,

“And you, O hasty speaker, preach to the wise priests?”

And thus upbraiding him, they drove him from the Temple.

35 When Jesus heard first-hand reports of the blind man,  
How they, the haughty high priests, had expelled him thence,

He found him and he said: "Are you persuaded to  
"Revere the king of heaven's Son?" 36 The man replied:

"Lord, who is he of whom you speak, that I may praise?"

170) 37 And Jesus said: "You saw him with your very eyes,  
"And he himself is speaking to you now." 38 He said:

"Lord, I believe!" And lowering his head to earth,

And prostrate, and submitting to his deathless feet,

Embraced the gleaming soles of his embellished shoon.

39 And hearing this soul-saving phrase, Jesus replied:

"Unto this judgment came I to the errant world,

"Unto a different, double judgment came: that all

"Who formerly saw not the unseen light of dawn,

"Those blind, might see again, observing with their eyes,

180) "But those with sharp eyes might become bereft of light."

40 The group of Pharisees who followed said to Christ:

"We certainly have not gone blind with failing eyes!"

41 And Jesus then rebuked the disbelieving crowd:

"If darkness had, indeed, obscured your lighted eyes

"Then I would say you might be ignorant of sin;

"But now you see the light and still you go astray;

"Though full of eyes, your minds are blind; for, of those men

"In whom sin sits, they vainly use their eyes to see."

## Chapter 10

In which Christ describes himself as a faithful shepherd, and the people as sheep. In which the people accuse him of being insane.

“Amen, amen, this word is irrefutable:

“Whoever darts into the fenced and gated sheep yard

“From outside creeping in among the hidden sheep

“Unseen, intent to mount an underhand assault,

“This man is but a robber, with rapacious hands.

2 “But he who walks straight through, not slinking in the pen,

“He is the very shepherd of the flock. 3 To him

“The gateman opens wide the public stable gate;

“Then, recognizing him, to pasture skip the sheep

10) “Who hear his voice; his flock wait for him at the gate,

“He beckons them to graze with his familiar call,

“And herds all the delighted sheep out of the fold.

4 “Then gathering them up and leading out the flock,

“He travels, herding all the rams out to the pasture;

“And following, the formless flowing flock afoot

“Accompanies them to the dewy fields to feed.

5 “They will not recognize nor will they hearken to

“The strange sound of an unfamiliar shepherd’s call,

“But darting past, will flee from the deceitful drover.”

20) 6 So this ambiguous account he gave. The crowd

Could nothing make of it, and hearing, did not grasp,  
Christ spoke in such confusingly inspired tones.

7 So Jesus, in plain words, explained to all of them:

“I am the open gate to the capacious fold.

8 “All those who came before with underhanded plans

“Are sneaky thieves; whence, hearing their rapacious cries,

“The sheep in droves do not obey their summonses.

9 “I am a welcoming, secure sheepgate; through me

“Whoever, going through my door, slips in the yard

30) “Can enter in, and then again turn back and leave

“And find his pasture, and will be forever safe.

10 “A sneak thief never comes to enter in the fold

“Unless to steal, unwitnessed, or perhaps to slay

“And butcher all the pent up sheep with savage blade.

“But I come from the Father, and to save my sheep

“I have arrived, so they with never ending glory

“Might have the life to come which time cannot destroy,

“And even more as well. 11 I am the faithful shepherd.

“A trusty husbandman while watching o’er his sheep

40) “Spares not his own life, but he places it in trust

“To save his rams. 12 The hireling is not a shepherd;

“He spies an enemy, a wolf, a sheep thief, near,

“And swiftly slinks off, secretly abandoning

“The grazing sheep unguarded while they widely wander.



“And having fled, he skulks about; nor cares he for  
 “Another’s sheep, for he is but a mercenary.  
 “And then the wily wolf with greedy gullet strikes,  
 “And scatters all the sheep, the drover being gone.  
 “A faithful shepherd am I, and I tend good sheep;  
 50) “I know my flock, and likewise, by the same account  
 “They recognize in me their old familiar shepherd.  
 15 “Just so I know the Father and the Father, me.  
 “Just so I will commit my soul to save my sheep.  
 16 “There are, however, other widely straying sheep  
 “And these ones do not dwell in my divine sheepfold,  
 “Sheep of another breed; my duty is to them;  
 “And so I call them, docile, by my voice; and there  
 “Will be one shepherd and, from all around, one flock.  
 17 “And this is why my Father loves me: for I lay  
 60) “My life down for my sheep; and I will find  
 “What I give up returned to me. 18 I lose it not  
 “Through any law of birth, nor through cruel time,  
 “That juggernaut, nor pitiless necessity,  
 “But on my own I yield it readily, so that  
 “I soon might have it back. I have in me the power  
 “And this behest I take from my high ruling Father,  
 “To lay my life down, then to take it back again.”  
 19 On hearing this the Hebrew crowd again divided.

20 And many wrangled argumentatively, as:  
70) “Leave this one jabbering to swiftly gusting winds;  
“A demon drives him on, he raves.” “He is insane,  
“Leave him.” “Haste ye to listen to a madman’s speech?”  
21 But others in a throaty chorus answered back:  
“These things are not a madman’s streaming gush of words;  
“These are not mindless things. Sure never imp of darkness  
“Is able by himself to open blind men’s eyes?”  
22 Again it was the public holiday on which  
The people held an annual memorial  
Outside the columned Temple built by Solomon,  
80) And there renewed the ancient sacred festival.  
And all this happened in the frosty winter time.  
23 Within the priestly Temple, Jesus walked across  
The pavement of its rich and wondrous corridors  
Named after father Solomon. 24 With evil minds  
The gang of Hebrews circled Jesus in a crowd,  
Surrounded Christ and said to him in frantic words:  
“How long will you conceal your sense in parables?  
“If you are truly Christ, then openly to us  
“Proclaim it publicly. Why do you hide your name?”  
90) 25 And Jesus yelled at them: “To you so many times,  
“So many times I spoke, you did not trust my words.  
“The deeds I do by calling on my Father’s aid

“Are witnesses and speak with silent eloquence  
 “As voluble displays to men. 26 How can you all  
 “Behold what you have seen, but disbelieve your eyes?  
 “You are not of the breed of my compliant sheep,  
 27 “For with enchanted ears the flock of my own sheep  
 “Is always guided by its leader, by my voice.  
 28 “I know my flock, and I bestow to one and all  
 100) “Eternal life to come, forever. Never will,  
 “Nay never will this flock die utterly, while Time  
 “Continues spinning in celestial revolutions,  
 “Nor anyone will seize my comprehending flock  
 “Out of my hands, 29 because my Father who gave me  
 “My sheep to pasture, He is greater than them all.  
 30 “I and my regal Father have a single nature,  
 “A nature whence all worldly things come, root and branch.”  
 3) The Lord spoke. Then the crowd, together, from the ground  
 Pried up the paving stones, so that in stony rage  
 110) They might bombard Christ with a hail of rocky darts.  
 32 And Jesus answered in a highly chiding voice:  
 “So many good things have I shown you which I learned  
 “While there beside my highest Father. And for this,  
 “These sacred things, in bloody payback you now arm  
 “Yourselves with stony missiles targeted at me.”  
 33 The crowd cried back: “Not on account of your good deeds

“Assemble we, the angry villagers, intent  
 “To bury you beneath a rocky overcoat,  
 “But solely on account of your outrageous mouth:  
 I20) “Because, although you come from purely earth born stock,  
 “And being mortal, yet you claim to be a god.” 34  
 To his opponents Christ spoke uncontested words:  
 “Does not your holy writ say just this very thing:  
 “I say: Lo, you are gods? 35 How, if an earthly man  
 “To whom the word of God came merely as a dream,  
 “The psalmist, in your books of laws called humans gods  
 “(And of that written book, its voice can’t be gainsaid--  
 “That writ itself 36 sent to the world by God on high,  
 “Which, by His holy hest, he wrote with his own hand),  
 I30) “Can you complain my words to be an insane boast  
 “That, of the living God, I might yet be the Son. 37  
 “If I do not do my life giving Father’s work,  
 “Do not believe me. 38 But, if through life saving words  
 “From my eternal Father I perform my deeds,  
 “Such deeds as you beheld yourselves as witnesses:  
 “Then learn indeed from these, my God inspired lessons,  
 “That as my Father acts through me, so I with Him  
 “Am joined together, undivided, with my Father.”  
 39 And then they tried to seize untouchable Jesus,  
 I40) A group of foolish men; he fled on faster feet

Their sacrilegious hands, 40 and cross the Jordan river  
Retreated there on foot. 41 And with him as he went  
A vast crowd walked together, countless marching men  
Who said to one another, explaining their decision:  
“Although such wonders for the watching crowd to see  
“True John did not perform, yet still, this man at work  
“I carefully observed, and all the things are true,  
“Whate’er John said of him.” 42 And many, on the spot,  
Believed him on account of his unequalled deeds.

## Chapter II

In which our Lord raises dead Lazarus, thus amazing everybody. In which the High Priests and Pharisees begin their active operations against Jesus.

There was a man called Lazarus, with fever wracked,  
Who lived within the famous town of Bethany  
With Martha and with Mary. 2 Fair-haired Mary  
Was famous as a hostess and she washed Christ's feet,  
And each of them she laved with fragrant drops of myrrh,  
And with her locks wiped clean both his immortal soles,  
Her tresses moistened as with early morning dew,  
The hostess with the lovely hair. The fevered man  
With heavy knees and vapors scourged, her brother was.  
10) 3 The sisters of the invalid, because they saw  
He pined away nigh death with crippling atrophy,  
Dispatched a message forth to the redeemer king.  
"He shivers, whom thou lovest, Lazarus, with flame!  
"He whom thou lovest seeks thee." 4 Hearing this, he cried,  
Did Christ the Lord: "Not on to endless doom is this  
"Sick man escorted by these fiery-eyed hours,  
"But rather to God's greater glory, so through him  
"The most high King's beloved Son might thereby gain  
"Immortal honor." 5 Now, the hospitable dames  
20) Were loved by Jesus with affectionate regard,

E'en Martha, Mary, likewise Lazarus. 6 Still, there,  
 On hearing news that Lazarus to Hades slipped,  
 Confined by withered limbs like fetters to his bed,  
 He dallied ere the passage of two deadly dawns.

7 Then two days later he announced to his disciples:  
 "Let us away again unto the Jewish land."

8 But his disciples, to dissuade him, answered back:  
 "O Rabbi, even now the wroth Judean mob  
 "Bethought to shoot at you with stony missiles tossed.

30) "Do you desire to go where hostile natives are?"

9 Then Jesus answered, preaching in these words unto  
 The fervid souls of his attendants and comrades:  
 "Are there not twelve recurring hours in a day?  
 "In daylight a wayfarer never trips his feet,  
 "His stepping soles on sliding sandals stumbling.  
 "But he who travels later on into the dark  
 "On persevering feet, precarious his road."

10 So spake he. 11 After this he hurried on to say:  
 "A needful but a harmless sleep, sleeps Lazarus,

40) "Our most beloved host; but I will go to him  
 "And I will rouse him up, back from his sleepy daze."

12 So the disciples, comprehending naught, replied:  
 "If Lazarus is sleeping, he will wake." 13 Christ meant  
 The newly dead man, laid within the howling tomb

A silent carcass, slept, and slept not to return.  
 They fondly thought the favored corpse within his house  
 Would pass the night in bed, recovered, in sweet sleep.  
 14 The Lord, compassionate, corrected their mistake:  
 “The common end lulled Lazarus, and led him to  
 50) “The cruel sleep of death. 15 But I rejoice for you  
 “That I was absent when he came to meet his death,  
 “So you might then believe a lifeless mummy walks  
 “When seeing it alive, again to set the table,  
 “Again the host of Christ. But let us go to him!”  
 16 Then, groaning, Thomas, double-named, cried out aloud,  
 The one they called the Twin, to the apostles there,  
 And being in the throes of tears he sobbed with woe:  
 “Let us, then, follow this dear man, so that with him  
 “In love we all might die in one collective doom.”  
 60) 17 The Lord at length approached and came near to the town  
 Where Lazarus he found defunct and strewn with dust;  
 Four days he’d lain within the lamentable tomb.  
 18 Now Bethany from great Jerusalem was but  
 Three furlongs and a dozen. 19 A huge creeping crowd  
 Of Jews descended on the nearby town where sat  
 The hospitable house of Martha and of Mary,  
 To minister the obsequies of Lazarus,  
 And publicly consoling, using all the forms



Of soothing speech, t'appease the prick of anxious care,  
 70) And free them from their sleepless grief. 20 But, learning from  
 The widespread gossip that the Lord had just arrived,  
 Now Martha ran to overtake him, while at home  
 Within, in silent mourning, Mary lashed herself.  
 21 Approaching Christ and groaning loudly, Martha spoke:  
 "O Holy One, if you had been here when he burned,  
 "My brother, Lazarus, would not have died. 22 I know  
 "That even now the Father will put in your hands  
 "Whatever you might ask Him for." 23 The Lord replied:  
 "Your brother will indeed awake again." Upon  
 80) This sweet response, then, Martha spoke a second time:  
 "I know, for I did not forget the resurrection:  
 "That he will later rise, when comes the latter day."  
 25 And to her Christ the savior spoke this oracle:  
 "I am the resurrection and the life; what man  
 "Believes in me, e'en though he be a lifeless corpse,  
 "Will come to life again. 26 And whoso grows in faith,  
 "That man will never die, unto eternity:  
 "Do you believe this word is true?" 27 And she replied:  
 "O Lord, I know and I believe that to the world  
 90) "You came as Christ, the Word, Son of our saving God!"  
 28 Then, having said this, she on swift feet ran ahead  
 And called her sister, Mary; and into her ears

She whispered secretly: "Our teacher and our Lord  
"Has come and calls to you." 29 No sooner said than done,  
On hearing Mary rushed to where the Lord delayed,  
At once dissolved in grief and joy. 30 Distraught, she ran;  
She traveled like the wind to Christ, just down the road.  
31 The waiting multitude, left keening in the house  
And offering condoling words to ease her grief  
100) And soothe the wakeful wretch, on seeing suddenly  
How Mary in a quiet frenzy quickly rose,  
They all pursued her closely, following behind,  
Expecting that the tearful Mary, having leapt  
So suddenly, was going to the family tomb  
That she might weep again over the much wept corpse.  
But even then the Lord had not arrived in town,  
But still remained immobile at the holy spot  
Where earlier he stood when he met Martha there.  
32 As Mary, loudly weeping, came near to the place  
110) Where Jesus still remained on feet immovable,  
He noticed her at once, her with a tortured mind,  
Now prone, now thrashing, having fallen on the ground  
Close to his deathless feet; she prayed to him. She wept;  
With mourning tears she moistened both his sacred feet,  
And forcing out the words, past moans, to leave her throat,  
But barely having curbed her tears, she said to him:

"O holy one, if you had been here Lazarus  
 "Might not have died!" 33 And seeing doleful Mary groan,  
 And all her train of Jews, all mourning, all whose cheeks  
 I20) Were sprinkled with wet showers of lamenting tears,  
 34 Excited by the Father's Spirit he cried out:  
 "Show me where you have put him!" 35 And they said to him:  
 "Come ye and see!" And Jesus then, himself, bewailed,  
 And in his tearless eyes welled unaccustomed tears.  
 36 And presently some there among the crowd cried out:  
 "See how he loves the dear departed Lazarus!"  
 37 But others answered back: "With salutary clay  
 "He could unstop the eyes of people lacking sight:  
 "Could he not do an equal work so that this poor  
 I30) "Dead corpse might not have entered bloody death at last?"  
 They all were saying this. 38 But, now, on hurried feet,  
 And loudly groaning from the grief that wracked his heart,  
 Up to the deadhouse Jesus brought himself at last.  
 A hole it was, cut in the cliff, a hollow room;  
 A stone was carved to fit, the same shape as the door,  
 The same size, set against the tomb's mouth, sealed up.  
 39 Lord Jesus then called out to the believing throng:  
 "Pray, move ye now the stone that covers o'er the chamber."  
 But Martha, sister to the one who died, cried out:  
 I40) "Permit the stone to lie against the door! From out

“The open hole will come an ill wind and a stench;  
“Four long days past the corpse has lain within the tomb!”  
40 Then Jesus said to mourning Martha in reply:  
“Did I not clearly tell this to you: if ye guard  
“My wisdom with your lips in silence ever sealed,  
“Possessing steady faith and being not in doubt,  
“Ye surely shall God’s heavenly redemption see?”  
41 And so they lifted up the stone. And then the Lord  
Raised up his eyes and to his Father cried aloud:  
150) “I thank You, Father, You who hear me! 42 In my heart  
“I know You always hear Your importuning child;  
“But I speak for these people standing all around  
“To hear, so that they might with better faith believe  
“That You sent me, when seeing with their own two eyes  
“The corpse come drifting back across the utter gulf,  
“Wrapped up in bandages and stumbling in the dust.”  
43 He spoke thus, then he shrieked aloud in piercing tones:  
“O Lazarus, come out!” And in the deathly still  
The sound reanimated flesh inanimate.  
160) 44 He called the lifeless man; the corpse at once sat up,  
Ran staggering along the ground on tangled feet;  
He called the lifeless man among the withered dead,  
Who, hearing, ran from Hades, fleeing, seeing here  
A stunning new nativity after the end of life.

In the neighborhood of Lethe, vainly Hades,  
All-Subduer, sought to catch the wand'ring carcass;  
But limping on restored feet, dragging stiffened knees,  
He stumbled, coming forward straight out from the dark.  
The gibbering defunct was e'en from head to foot  
170) With windings wrapped. The grave clothes draped his frame entire,  
And he was stifled over all with coverings.  
A shroud of finest linen stilled concealed his face,  
Sudarion 'tis called by tongues in Syria.  
The crowd, astonished, heard the King of Clouds command:  
"Release him, and allow the corpse to walk at ease."  
And at these words the gathered crowd went instantly;  
Together they ripped off the headband of the shroud,  
And helping him, they stripped the heavy coverings,  
And off the corpse went, back into his house again  
180) Seeing the light of the fifth day. 45 And many Jews  
Inside the mournful house of Martha and of Mary  
Believed the Son of God, of course, for having seen  
This unbelievable exploit the Lord had done  
In plucking Lazarus back from the gloomy depths,  
Recovered safely from the dead. 46 But some of them,  
Their feet took them to town, to the ungodly priests  
And to the throng of the most faithless Pharisees,  
And they described the deeds of Christ. 47 The heartless priests

Collected in a noisy conclave; the old men  
 190) Sat filling the first row of the assembled court.  
 They said: "What shall we do? Our adversary, lo,  
 "He manifests the most remarkable portents!  
 48 "If we leave him alone to work more prodigies,  
 "The people certainly will follow us no more,  
 "But him alone will they pursue when they believe.  
 "Yea, all will follow. And the men from Italy  
 "Will surely come and ravage our entire race,  
 "Aye, both our race and our estates." 49 A certain man,  
 Nefarious and cunning Caiaphas, who was that year  
 200) Their high priest and director of the Festival,  
 Conniving, cried to all the Jewish councilors:  
 "All you wise men know nothing! In your eager plans,  
 "You do not use your brains to see the only choice:  
 50 "That it is better one should die than everyone,  
 "Lest, thanks to him, our people suddenly be ruined;  
 "The state will be at peace as soon as this man dies!"  
 51 Not of himself did this man say this prophecy,  
 But, having tended to the sacrifice (for he  
 Was that year's celebrant), he spoke the very truth,  
 210) That Christ would, willing, go to his redeeming fate  
 And die for all the Jews. 52 And not for them alone,  
 But that God's children scattered all around the world

Might gather all in him. 53 From that first evil hour  
The ruthless high priests in their secret plans contrived,  
Together with the wily band of Pharisees,  
How they might all, with one stroke, murder Jesus Christ.  
54 Not any longer public in his passages  
Was Christ among the Hebrews. So, on noiseless feet,  
He steered clear of the cultivated holy land.  
220) From there he traveled to the mountains near the desert,  
Unto the town where he and his disciples stayed:  
They call it Ephraim. 55 And it was nearly Pasch,  
The famous feast; from the far reaches of the earth  
The desert Jews, all bound for the same destination,  
Went up into Jerusalem to celebrate,  
And to perform the early cleansing rituals  
Before the noisy day of Festival arrived.  
56 And many in the incensed Temple sought him out,  
The missing preacher Jesus; those who stood around  
230) Discussed among themselves above the roaring crowd:  
“What now do you suppose will happen? Can the man  
“Refrain and stay away from dancing at the feast?”  
57 The faithless high priests issued orders to the crowd,  
And all the wily throng of haughty Pharisees,  
If anyone there saw or even heard of him  
In town, he should report it to the Pharisees  
So that the hateful gang might seize and murder him.

## Chapter 12

In which Jesus leads a parade into Jerusalem amidst cheering throngs. In which he nonetheless predicts his imminent demise.

Now, having left the desert for the fruited plains

Unapprehended, Jesus came back to the town:

He entered Bethany, where buried Lazarus

He'd summoned from the dead with his soul raising howl.

He entered Bethany when it was near the Feast.

Six only days were wanting till those mystic hours.

2 And they were pleased to set a supper up for him,

And Martha laid a table full and liberal.

One of the guests was Lazarus, still in a daze,

10) But there for all to see. 3 Then, Mary, taking myrrh,

Three measures of the fragrant liquid known as nard,

Its dewy drops all brimming o'er the crystal jar,

The thick haired Mary at this banquet for the Lord

Massaged his wondrous feet with myrrh spread over all,

And sopped up the rich moisture with her wanton hair;

The place was swimming, drunk with the divine bouquet.

4 And speaking very clearly, wily Judas said:

5 "And why was this not sold for three hundred or more

20) "Denarii, this myrrh, somewhere, that we might give

"To needy beggars and not waste it in the dirt?"



6 This tricky one, he said this not because for those  
Poor folks he cared, the villain, but simply because  
He was a thief and gulled the rich; he kept the chest  
Which held their money; from the strong box what he wished  
He could take for himself, a naughty guard. 7 But him  
Jesus repudiated and he said aloud:

“Have done! This innocent and feminine largesse  
“Will guard the treasure of my body when might come  
30) “The bloody hour of my funeral.

8 “The poor are near and numberless and always there  
“For you who look for them. But you who look for me,  
“You will not have me here nearby forever.” 9

The faithful crowd of Jews outside the city heard  
The rumor with delighted ears, that Jesus came  
And stayed his sacred feet within that very town  
Where Martha dwelt. A throng, unutterably great,  
Then scurried in a mob together to her house  
Not only to see Jesus, but even more to gape

40) At Lazarus, whom, freshly risen from the dead  
Alive and breathing, he’d revived with but a call.

10 The envious high priests desired earnestly,  
Indeed the whole enraged concert of Pharisees,  
That back into the pit they might send Lazarus,  
Retrieved from death, returned to death (those murderers,

And him still gasping from his former death) to prove:

“Tho’ Lazarus ‘scapes death, he cannot ‘scape the priests!”

I1 So they were bent on seizing him. On his account

The crowd of Jews remained there in the open village,

50) Believing in the savior Lord, the Son of God.

I2 But then, just when the dawn had cleaved the shadowed night,

The horde, while waiting in the village for the feast,

Got word of a report that from that holy site

He’d gone into the precinct of Jerusalem.

They went to greet him, I3 and from leafy orchards they

Stripped palm trees bare of leaves, stripped bare the crowns,

And waving their green branches in the air the crowd

Sang pleasant songs, and cried from mouths euphonious:

*(Insertion by Bordatus:)*

59) *And thus they eulogized: “Now let the King*

*“Of Israel be worthy of all praise:*

60) *“The one who cometh in the very name,*

*“The name of him, the deathless cosmic Lord!”*

I4 And many waved their branches here and there aloft,

And formed a forward escort and attending train;

And Jesus was surrounded in the midst of men,

Upon an ass, unbridled, placid traveler,

Upon the back of an unbroken beast of burden,

As Zacharias wrote and which was now fulfilled:

15 “Fear not, O Zion, daughter of a lofty mother,  
“Behold, with lavish gifts thy king comes unto thee,  
“Upon a young foal, and escorted by its dam.”

70) 16 Now none of this did the disciples notice then,  
But later when the guardian of all emerged  
As Christ the King, they finally at last recalled  
That all this had been written in the holy book  
Just as it happened. 17 Slowly, then, the story spread  
Throughout the crowd, how Lazarus from out his tomb  
Was called by Jesus after four days being dead,  
Retrieved from death by soul directing invocation.

18 And thus the vast and teeming crowd processed at length,  
Cried “Hail, Son of David!” to invigorating Christ.

80) 19 Meanwhile the Pharisees conspired with each other:  
“How can this work to our advantage? For the whole  
“Vast world, and various, dogs after this one man,  
“Our murderous contrivances to no avail!”

20 Now, there were many men there from among the Greeks  
Who came together, tourists, for the holy days.

21 And hearing all the chanting about Jesus in the town  
They came to look for Philip and they said to him:  
“Here we have come and we desire to see the Christ.” 22  
To Andrew eager Philip spoke. Then eloquent

90) Andrew together with impetuous Philip

Relayed their message on to Christ. 23 The Lord replied:

“Now the hour of pain has come, the time is nigh

92) “When the holy Son of Man shall be raised up.

24 “A grain of wheat that falls upon the thirsty earth

“Unless it dies lies fruitless there upon the spot,

“Unsown, unused, unploughed, unharvested;

“But if it dies, it grows, and gives a lavish yield.

25 “Who ever loves his soul will in this life be lost

100) “Pursuing vanities throughout the tempting world;

“Whoever hates his soul will never die, and will

“Preserve it, lasting, unto life forever more.

26 “Whoever might obey and minister to me,

“My Father up on high knows how to recompense;

“Whoever would serve me and follow my precepts

“Will come to me and he may join my company,

“So he can stay my servant with me where I dwell.

27 “And now I am distressed, but what is there to say?

“My soul distracts me? Father, from this dizzying hour,

110) “Inevitable, save me? Nay, for unto this

“Appalling moment, uncompelled I freely came.

“Exalt your Son.” 28 And then from heaven came a voice:

“I glorified him once, and will reward him yet!”

29 And many there were loitering about who heard

With trembling ears the airy rush of sound;

The multitude cried out, as from some sacred place  
A thunderous loud clap resounded in the air.  
While others shrieked that nigh to him an angel came,  
The roaring sounds its wise and heavenly converse.  
120) 30 But Jesus then addressed the terror stricken crowd:  
“This bombast cometh not from me, but cometh down  
“This answering reply from heaven, out of thunder!  
31 “Now comes the holy judgment of the world! Forthwith  
“The ruler of the evil world is banished hence.”  
129) 32 The crowd cried out as if they spoke with but one tongue:  
130) 34 “We many places have, in our inscriptions, found  
“That Christ will stay forever, guarding everything.  
“So how can you tell us in your mysterious words:  
“On being raised from under ground up to the Pole,  
“I then will draw you all up from the earth to me  
“As soon as the great Son of Man might be raised up?  
“Say, then, who is he, whom with unfamiliar terms  
“You call the Son of Man and preach to us about?”  
35 At once cried Jesus back to them: “Yet briefly here  
“The heavenly light of day will be with you, this time.  
140) “Be steady in the light, stay on the righteous path,  
“March on, courageous ones, so long as dusk is far,  
“Lest in its gloomy eddies darkness catches you.  
“Whoever marches through the night on stumbling feet

“Roams, ignorant of where the winding road might go.  
36 “As long as you can see the Light, trust his wise words  
146) “And then you will become the shining sons of splendor.”  
149) 37 Despite the things he did, and all his many cures,  
150) Despite beholding them, and not just hearing news,  
No one believed him, 38 so that it might be fulfilled  
As spoke Isaiah, pouring out his prophecy:  
“O Lord, who, after all of this, believed your words?  
“To whom did God display His naked arm?”  
39 For they could not develop godly faith themselves,  
As once again Isaiah told in sacred words:  
40 “The eyes that witnessed all my deeds, he blinded them,  
“And set straight minds to wandering by clouding them,  
“Lest in their hearts they see and with their eyes they look  
160) “And so turn back to me. But I will save their minds,  
“Those evil minded men, with magic healing words,  
“A doctor without scalpel, strewing remedies.”  
41 Isaiah wrote all this in his inspired book  
Because he saw back then the glory of Christ God,  
Beholding with his mind’s all seeing eye, and so  
Possessed, he prophesied the One who was to come.  
42 Yet still, in prudent silence some eccentric men,  
Lights of the stately council, rulers of the Jews,  
Believed in God’s Son, thanks to all his miracles;

170) But to avoid the vengeance of the Pharisees  
 None showed his mind in public, as they were ashamed;  
 Their faith, kept secret in the minds of each of them,  
 Unseen, not noised abroad, they hid in lurking silence.

43 For every one prefers to look to ant-like men  
 For honor and renown, rather than to great God.

44 Then Jesus cried aloud from in the fragrant Temple:  
 "Whoever takes my words to be sacred commands,  
 "And trusts, is not by me persuaded, but by him,  
 "The sending Father. 45 And, though using human eyes,  
 180) "Whoever watches me beholds as well my Father.

46 "From heaven downward came the Light to the blind world;  
 "From heaven downward came the Light, so mortal men  
 "Who honor me with faith should not remain in dark.

47 "He who receives my stream of orders sent by God  
 "And does not keep them closely guarded in his mind,  
 "I do not judge this man at once; I did not come  
 "To judge this errant world, but came to rescue it.

48 "The rash man who demurs to me and mine and who  
 "Rejects the living streams of my redeeming voice

190) "Already has a judge to judge him. For my words,  
 "The things that I have said, accuse this faithless one  
 "And they will judge him when the final race day dawns,  
 "When judgment comes to all the pent. 49 And as for me,

“I do not teach this on my own or give commands  
“Unless I have the clearest mandate from the Father  
“What I shall say to men and what to cry aloud.  
50 “And I know the commission of the sov’ reign Lord:  
“Life without death to be man’s fate throughout the ages  
“In endless vortices of time; and what I teach,  
200) “Just as my Father speaks it to me, so I preach.”



## Chapter 13

In which Jesus washes Peter's feet over his protests. In which he hints at his betrayal, and dispatches Judas to do the dirty work. In which he predicts Peter's minor treachery.

Now, shortly loomed the local Pasch when altars blazed,  
And Jesus, knowing that the time had come at last  
For him to leave the world to pass back to the sky,  
And, thus returned, to shine with his high ruling parent,  
Now, having loved his comrades ever at his side  
From the beginning, loved he them until the end.

2     So, at the friendly table during evening meal,  
He undertook to do a service for his friends,  
Just when the demon rival with a prick of greed  
10)    Was goading Judas to a maddened lust for money  
Until he dared to go turn over to the Jews  
His foster, Christ, once he was paid the full death price.

3     And knowing in his heart that even unto him  
High ruling God put all things in his hands to guide,  
And that as down from heaven, likewise to the sky,  
As formerly from God he came, back up to God would go.

4     And so then, for his guests performing valet's work,  
Jesus stood swiftly up, retiring from the meal,  
And from his shining body he removed his robe  
20)    And wrapped around his flanks a kind of linen apron,

The rough cloth tightly bound, which in the Latin tongue  
Is called a towel, sometimes used to dry wet feet.

5 Next, pouring water from a basin in his lap,  
Christ now set out to wash the dear feet of his friends,  
From first to last, and passing from one to the next,  
With Simon starting, ending with his own assassin.

6 First, elder Simon he approached and both his feet  
He grasped; and Simon just as rapidly pulled back;  
He checked dear Jesus, sacred awe showed in his eyes.

30) Restraining him, he loudly tried to placate him:

“O Lord, who rulest all, of your devoted slave

“Stoop ye to wash my feet with your own hands?” 7 And then

To seated Simon Jesus said in dulcet words:

“What I am doing now, performing this mean chore,

“You cannot understand but later on you will.”

8 But to him Peter answered, making empty boasts:

“Nay, never shall you wash my feet, as long as creeps

“Spinning eternity!” The Lord gave this reply:

“Then never will be portion saved for you with me,

40) “Unless I wash you, pouring water by my hand.”

9 And to him Simon, now persuaded, spoke this word:

“Nay, Lord, I beg, not just my feet alone and both

“Of them wash, but my hands, and my round forehead, too,

“Yea, if you wish, my frame entire!” 10 Jesus said:

“He does not need more water, one who has been bathed,  
 “Unless, perhaps a foot bath after traveling  
 “Along the road; his body, though is clean. And you  
 “Clean ones, are clean in mind and free from human sin. . .  
 “But certainly not all!” 11 For he knew in his heart  
 50) Which man was soon to turn him over to the Jews  
 To traffic in his death, and sell him to his foes.  
 And that is why the Lord had told his intimates:  
 “You have clean minds and do not have a share of sin,  
 “But not quite all of you!” 12 So, as a waiter does  
 When circulating through twelve guests seated around,  
 Now sacred Jesus washed his comrades’ profane feet;  
 And then his garments, set aside, he quickly put back on.  
 And there he sat, reclining with his elbow bent,  
 Up at the head of the fraternal dinner table.  
 60) He said to his companions: “Do you understand  
 “What I did here, performing this small task for you?  
 13 “You cleverly have called me by a double name:  
 “As both your Lord and Teacher, and you are quite right,  
 “Brave men, you say this well for I am truly both,  
 “Just as you call me both. 14 Now, if, for simple love,  
 “I with a cleansing rinse have washed and dried your feet,  
 “And I your Lord and Master, then these very things  
 “From my example you must learn to imitate,

“And you must wash the precious feet of one another.  
70) 15 “This demonstration was a lesson, so that you  
“Can do yourselves the thoughtful deed which I just did  
“To one another and in reciprocity:  
“So similarly you shall follow my first lead.  
16 “The hired man does not surpass the King, nor does  
“A dispatched deputy surpass his commandant.  
17 “So if you understand these words and if your souls  
“Strive to perform then you will grow in happiness. 18  
“I did not mean that all of you need cleansing baths,  
“My meaning was concerning one. I know, indeed,  
80) “What men I have collected, innocent and true;  
“But as the sacred psalm sung to the lyre says:  
“The greedy, heartless man, the man who ate my food,  
“Against me raised his heel, and full of avarice,  
“Although my guest, insulted me at my own table.  
19 “I now foretell the future with my prescient tongue,  
“So that, when spinning time shall do it, creeping near,  
“You might recall the word though spoken long before,  
“That my prophetic oracle once told to you.  
20 “Amen, amen, this witness is reliable:  
90) “He who receives the minister whom I shall send,  
“And looks upon him kindly, receives me. The man  
“Embracing me, accepting me, one sent from God,

“Accepts the Sender, e’en my self-created Father.”

21 Thus said the Lord. And opening his sacred mouth,  
Compelled by mental impulse from the Holy Spirit,  
Christ roiled with words that burned themselves into his mind,  
And prophesied aloud in his own witness voice:  
“One man of you beloved friends will give me up;  
“One false friend in my home will overpower me.”

100) 22 So Jesus said. And then his students, all together,  
All looked at one another with grim visages,  
For they were stung to silence, and, as one, perplexed  
About whom he might mean. 23 A certain man there was,  
Who leaned against the bosom of his tender Lord;

24 And Peter nodded to him, asking by that sign:  
Who is it that he means? 25 Emboldened by this hint,  
The favorite now fell upon the holy breast  
And whispered softly to the royal banquet host:  
“Who is it?” 26 Christ replied: “To whom by my own hand  
110) “I send a sop of bread dipped in a splash of wine,  
“He will betray me.” Then, into a cup of wine  
Now dipping the last crust, he gave to ruthless Judas  
The bread, to indicate his greedy murderer.

27 And when he took the bread, a wicked evil spirit  
Possessed the man, infecting him with avarice.  
Then Christ gave him an order, which he recognized:

“Go do your job at once.” 28 No one at table knew  
 The portent of the innocent remark that they had heard;  
 29 For some of them thought this innocuous command,  
 120) Since Judas wore attached the wooden money box,  
 Meant that the Lord had told him in straightforward speech  
 To ready any holiday requirements,  
 Or that he should send something to the homeless poor.  
 30 So after supper, being drunk, the greedy man,  
 Still carrying the sacred bread, departed in the night.  
 31 Now that the twelfth man, Judas, had at last retired,  
 God driven Jesus said to the eleven left:  
 “The Son of Man is now rewarded publicly,  
 “And through him is the self made God made glorious!  
 130) 32 “If God the Father is exalted thanks to him,  
 “Then God the Father will exalt His praising Son.  
 33 “O children, but a short time I remain with you,  
 “And what I told the Hebrews, that word once again  
 134) “I now repeat to you in my familiar voice.  
 136) “It is not possible to follow where I go,  
 “Or know the inaccessible route of my path.  
 34 “A new, more suitable, command I give to you:  
 “As I have loved you all, just so, in innocence,  
 140) “In ties of sacred love, be bound to one another,  
 “United, as a league of friends unbreakable.

35 “So everyone on seeing you will recognize  
“You love each other, and that in this sacred heart  
“Of blazing Christ you are god fearing proselytes.”

36 Then, as he heard Christ speak, who soon would travel on,  
Attentive Simon, in a honeyed converse, said:  
“Where speed ye, Lord, tell me? Tell me what land ye seek?”  
And to inquiring Peter, Jesus made reply:  
“Where I must shortly tread you cannot outstrip me,  
150) “Or as companion follow on my road behind,  
“But when the proper season in its cycle comes,  
“Then you will walk in company with me.” 37 And Simon said:  
“Can I not, following on foot with nimble knees,  
“Cut short the path which you have yet to walk along?  
“Why, even my own soul I would lay down for you!”

38 But Jesus said an unexpected thing to him:  
“Will you, right now, for my sake render up your soul?  
“Thrice in one single night, compelled by circumstance  
“You shall deny your Christ, before, arching his throat,  
160) “The raucous rooster, rousing by his cries, will crow!”

# Chapter I4

Didactic Chapter. Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The coming Paraclete.

“Let not your minds be agitated or unsure,

“But trust in God and in me, trust ye! Unto both

“The Son and Father join ye all in common praise.

2 “Within my Father’s heavenly domain there are

“Arrayed and clustered very many palaces;

“If there were not a vast and colonnaded court

“I would not now be telling you that I will go

“In order to construct in that enormous open space

“Your final dwelling places to be suitable for you.

10) 3 “And from that sacred place that I have promised you

“I will haste back to lead you to immortal homes

“Where you will dwell together, where I also live,

“Forever neighbors! 4 And you then shall know my path.”

So spake he. 5 With a groan cried Thomas (with two names:

His parents called him Didymos, or Twin, since his

Eighth day when he was brought to have his circumcision):

“O Lord, we have not yet learned where you haste your steps.

“How could we know directions on an unmapped road?”

6 Then Jesus taught and spoke to the attentive man:

20) “The life, the truth and the straight way am I; I am

“The way of life for man, the path that does not turn.



“An earthborn man may not come unto God the Father  
 “Unless he closely follows my divine footsteps  
 “Along the straight road to the Father from the Son.  
 7 “As you have heard my sacred oracles from me,  
 26) “Through them you will then know my Father up on high.”  
 28) Then Philip with these soothing words implored Jesus:  
 “O godly King, thy Father shew to thy disciples;  
 30) “Thy Father demonstrate and make Him plain to us.”  
 9 And Jesus said: “Conjoined with my invisible  
 “Begetter, and possessed of Him by very nature,  
 “But in a human seeming shape, Philip, I am!  
 “A long time now I have remained here with you all  
 “As your companion; do you still not know my face?  
 “All mortal men who see me, see the deathless Father.  
 38) “So whence for such division of this state pray you,  
 39) “To say: Show me the Father? You see Him in me!  
 36) IO “Do you not yet have faith that I am joined with Him,  
 37) “And that the Father cherishes me in this shape?  
 40) “Whene’er I utter from my heart a prayer,  
 “My Father dwelling in me, by my speaking, does the deed.  
 II “Not yet by words are you persuaded to believe  
 “That in me dwells my Father, and that I myself  
 “Am joined with Him: I speak and he accomplishes.  
 “If you are not persuaded by my words, then trust

“Our deeds together so that you shall recognize  
 “How, undivided, tied together with one cord,  
 48) “The Son lives in the Father, the Father in the Son.  
 50) 12 “For any man who holds his faith unshakable  
 “And does what I have done, I will ensure his work,  
 “And many greater prodigies than mine he’ll do,  
 “As soon as I attain the unapproachable.  
 13 “Whatever you may ask the Father up on high  
 “By asking in my name, that same thing I will do,  
 56) “So that the Father through the Son might be renowned.  
 59) 15 “If you will join in bonds of love and faith in me  
 60) “Then guard ye well within your hearts all my commands,  
 16 “And I will pray to God my Father, ‘til He sends  
 “An intercessor down from heaven unto you,  
 “Another, born with Christ, immutable, eternal,  
 “A conduit for truth; 17 the many-splendoured world  
 “Cannot conceive of him, since mortal man has not  
 “With human eyes the Primal Spirit yet beheld:  
 “It is the soul of God the Father. Only you  
 “Can see a sacred likeness of the unseen face,  
 “Because he lives among you and will be with you  
 70) “A comrade dwelling in your souls. 18 I will not let  
 “You be like orphans, far away from heaven’s care;  
 “For I will come back swiftly unto you again.

19 “Already time is short when in the faithless world  
 “My sacred shape will not be seen, but you alone  
 “Will see me, since upon this earth forever will  
 76) “I dwell, and so through me you all will live as well.  
 79) 21 “Who has me in his heart and follows my commands,  
 80) “Faithful to all the rites, this man loves me, and he  
 “Will be a man loved by my Father, God. And I  
 “Will surely bind him in strong chains of love and friendship  
 “And forthwith I will shew to him my sacred body.”  
 22 Then unto Jesus spoke that other Judas, not  
 The vile Iscariot, but rather Jacob’s son:  
 “O Master, how is it that you reveal your shape  
 “To your companions only, but not to the world?”  
 23 Then Jesus spoke and preached unto the clever man:  
 “The man who welcomes me and honors me with cries  
 90) “Will guard inviolate my precepts in his heart.  
 “And such a man of wisdom will my Father love.  
 “Then entering that man, I and my Father both,  
 “We will establish there a throne for each of us,  
 “Both dwelling in the temple of his human voice.  
 24 “But he who loves me not, who foolishly neglects  
 “My words, is tossed in tempests of oblivion.  
 “Now, these are not my words which I just spoke, but His  
 “Who sent me down from heav’n as savior of the world.

25 “As long as I remain with you down here on earth,  
100) “I say these things; 26 but when the Advocate arrives  
“In plain speech he will give the whole account to you;  
“And he will then remind you what I said before:  
27 “Peace salutary I bequeath to you; again,  
“Peace undisturbed I give to you as your companion.  
“Not as the vagrant world is wont to offer you  
“I put into your hands a common gift to hold:  
“Let not your hearts by dread or tumult be dismayed.  
28 “You have already heard the thunder of my voice  
“When calling from the whirlwind to my mighty sire.  
110) “I will surmount the heights to take my seat among the stars.  
“If you were joined to me by binding laws of love,  
“Then you would celebrate with bounding leaps of joy,  
“And share in the delight when I depart this earth  
114) “At last returning to my Father, who sent me.  
116) 29 “I spoke to you before just now this oracle,  
“So twisted time might creep in time to its achievement.  
“Then you might be reminded of the words I said  
“So long ago, the sacred things I warned you of.  
120) 30 “No more than this will I reveal, for unforeseen  
“The ruler of the world must come in mighty splendor.  
31 “He is arrived, not being any part of me,  
“But only as a witness so the world can see

“How much I love the Father and how well I do  
“What He with governing command ordains be done.  
“Arise ye all and let us venture hence from here!”

## Chapter 15

Didactic Chapter. The Vine of Life. Dire prophecies. Love one another.

“Unto the constantly regenerating world I am

“The vine of life, my Father is the gardener.

2 “A lovely leafy branch which does not bear sweet grapes

“He prunes; but one which fruits, one flush with purple clusters,

“My Father, husbandman of life, knows how to trim

“So that it might bear better fruit on newer tendrils.

3 “You are now purified through what I taught to you.

4 “Remain yet clustered on my generative branch,

“Remain yet clustered with me, cosmic sprouts.

10) “Just as a cultivated branch cannot produce

“Unless someone should graft it to a rooted stock,

“Just so, just like the many branches of a cluster,

“If you do not remain engrafted onto me

“You are not able to put out the sacred fruit.

5 “I am the teaching vine and all together you

“The branches, heavy laden with the fruit of wisdom;

“All who are firm in faith are grafted on to me

“And they, obedient to God, produce more yield,

“Forever flowering and not a puny crop.

20) 6 “If any man does not stay grafted on my stock

“As on a grape vine, he is tossed into the dirt  
“Just like the graft. And there spread out and piled high,  
“Like parched and dried up branches raked into a heap,  
“The harvesters will cast him on the bonfire then,  
“My angel harvesters; and he in fiery smoke  
“Ignites, and only my good saplings will remain.  
7 “If you abide in me and if my flowing words  
“Can irrigate you and take root within your hearts,  
“Whatever you might wish for, ask it of my Father,  
30) “And all at once it will occur for you. 8 From this  
“My Father will receive the highest dignities,  
“When you can, through God’s words of life, bear fruit of faith,  
“Inspired fruit; then you will be my true disciples  
“With characters unchangeable. 9 As God loves me,  
“My Father in the clouds, according to that law  
“I love you just so much; remain under my spell.  
10 “If ever my words slip into your wakeful ears  
“And you preserve them carefully within your hearts,  
“The bonds of my love ever in your minds will grow,  
40) “As even I who keep my Father’s perfect laws  
“Remain in the enjoyment of my Father’s love.  
11 “My purpose in relating all these precious things to you  
“Is that you may rejoice; and in each one of you  
“My joy may be affirmed and finally achieved.

12 “This is the greatest law and my command to you:  
46) “That all of you should always love each one the other  
48) “As I have loved you all; 13 For greater than this love  
“I cannot think of any love so great, that one,  
50) “As ransom and redemption for his closest friends,  
“Should through his care for them yield up his valiant life.  
14 “You, one and all, are all my friends if my commands  
“You will obey, which give you all you need to live.  
15 “No longer will I call you my apprentices.  
“A lackey does not know what job his master plans,  
“A lackey does not know. I call you intimates:  
“Whatever from the voice of heaven that I heard,  
“Whatever as from my Father’s loving voice I learned,  
“So much I told to you. 16 And not through mortal choice  
60) “Did you choose me; but carefully selecting you,  
“You students all, from many with intelligence  
“I chose you as more faithful, and I send you out  
“That soon you might bear fruit and that your seed might be  
“Forever fruitful. If in reverential words  
“You ever make requests unto the King on high  
“Invoking in my name, I will grant everything.  
17 “I prophesy, I say these things from inspiration  
“So you will keep my law, and love each one the other.  
18 “And if the willful world with baffled mind loathes you,



70) “The earthbound world whose deeds you know, you understand  
 “That long before they railed at you, accusing you,  
 “They first loathed me. 19 But if a worldly type of life  
 “You had adopted, living in the vicious world,  
 “Th’ inconstant world would have embraced you as its friends.  
 “But since you are not like the sinful human race,  
 “You are not like the crooked stewards of the world,  
 “I took you for myself back from the foolish world  
 “As foster sons, abandoned by the human race  
 “And hated by the world. 20 With fervent eagerness

80) “Remember now and evermore these simple words:

82) “A servant is not ever greater than his lord,  
 “And no apostle greater than his own director.  
 “If the aggressive race of mankind hunts me down  
 “It certainly will flush you all out in the end.  
 “If it would closely keep and understand my words,  
 “Then it would keep your own words safe within its heart.

21 “But sinful men, relying on my name, will do  
 “These things to you enthusiastically, because

90) “They neither know me nor the Father who sent me.

22 “If I had not come on a saving mission from  
 “The Father, teaching all the way of piety,  
 “They would not now be blamed; but now that they have learned

94) “They have no more excuse for choosing sinful lives.

98) 24 “Had I not done my deeds which no one else can do,  
“Had they not seen themselves and been eyewitnesses,  
100) “Their recklessness would not have been accountable.  
“But now that they have gazed upon the two of us,  
“They still despise both me and my high ruling Father.  
25 “But in the holy writ, so sang the sacred voice  
“Of him who stroked the harp that this would come to pass:  
“They freely hated me. 26 But when, into the world  
“The Spirit of God’s mind comes rushing from the Father,  
“The very spirit I will send to you from Him,  
“He will announce great things about me to all men. 27  
“And you will preach about me from your own accounts,  
110) “For you were my companions, single-minded friends;  
“From the beginning you have witnessed all my deeds.”

## Chapter 16

Didactic Chapter. More gloomy prophecies. The coming Paraclete. Christ's ultimate victory.

"I tell you all these certain things, I prophesy

"Forfending faithless frenzy entering your souls:

2 "Lo, they will drive you from God's chosen sanctuary;

"The time is soon when ev'ry man will be intent

"On killing all of you with sharp edged steel. By this

"He hopes his slavish deed might please almighty God,

"Through human sacrifice instead of with a bull,

"Equating murder to the sacrifice of cattle.

3 "And the profane provokers in their mindless madness

10) "Will do such things to you, for these men do not know

"My Father, King of Heaven, nor the Father's Son.

4 "I make these prophecies for you so that in time

"(And very soon, in fact, that moment will arrive)

"You will recall the forecast prophecies I make.

"I kept these things concealed in my preaching heart

"And purposefully did not tell you at the start

"While I was just a comrade with you on the earth. 5

"Now I will soon leave earth to travel to the sky,

"And none of you who share my bed have asked me yet:

20) "Lord, whither goest thou? Tell me where you will go.  
6 "But ever since I told you how these things will be  
"Your minds have been completely filled with grief and pain.  
7 "However, I have told the simple truth, that unto far  
"Off heaven it is better for you that I go.  
"In truth, unless I go, returning to the sky,  
"The spirit of the living God will never come.  
"But if I do go, he will then come down to earth.  
8 "Once having come from there he will indict the world  
"For its impiety and sins, according to  
30) "His justice and his judgment: 9 for its sinfulness,  
"Since all are disobedient. 10 In holiness  
"And sacred justice I go back home now to God,  
"Nor will you ever see me dwell again with men.  
11 "And on account of judgment, since here in the world  
"The tempter of the world already has been judged.  
12 "But many things I have avoided telling you,  
"For most of them you cannot stand to hear just yet. 13  
"The coming Paraclete will point the way to truth,  
"He will direct you on the straight and narrow path;  
40) "He will not chastise on his own account for naught,  
"But when he hears of sin he will speak out. He will  
"Forecast the imminent events to one and all.  
14 "And, coming from my Father, he will honor me,

“And everything that he was given from the Father  
 “He will foretell to all of you in prophecies  
 “About what is to come. 15 My birthright is to have  
 “My legacy. My Father gives it all to me;  
 “And coming, as he does, straight from my sacred Father  
 “He will foretell the end of all that is.  
 50) 16 “Brief is the time remaining when here in the world  
 “You will no longer see me as your comrade. Soon,  
 “And short the time remaining, when you lonely souls  
 “Will look around for me, but up into the lap  
 “Of God the Father I will go.” 17 The students spoke  
 In whispers but the thought lay heavy in their minds,  
 And shattering the silence, someone softly said:  
 “What does this message which he told us mean: that short  
 “And brief remains the time when here upon the earth  
 “You will no longer see me living with you; soon,  
 60) “And very soon, indeed, you poor abandoned ones  
 “Will look around but I will have returned to God?”  
 19 But Jesus knew the breezy habits of his friends,  
 How they all gossiped and they wanted to know more,  
 So he, preempting their demand for explanation,  
 Said: “Why do you keep going on about these things?  
 “So what if I said I will soon depart from you  
 “And soon you will be vainly looking out for me?

20 “Amen, amen, I swear in no uncertain terms:  
 “You all will weep, and dirges you will sing. The world,  
 70) “Gone mad, will take its joy in things unholy, but  
 “Your wretched grief and pain will shortly be transformed:  
 21 “Just as a pregnant woman aches within her heart,  
 “Anticipating the sharp pangs of childbirth,  
 “And dreads the painful moment of delivery,  
 “But then her piercing load of pain is shaken off  
 “And she forgets her past discomfort for at last  
 “Another man has blossomed in the fertile world;  
 22 “Much like that, just as if you were delivering,  
 “At first you all will rend your souls with watchful grief,  
 80) “But somewhere I shall see you all again and your  
 “Redeemed hearts then will be delighted, and at last  
 “No person will be able to deprive you of  
 “Your endless happiness. 23 And on that joyful day  
 “You will no longer need, as once, to question me,  
 “But you will ask of God directly for yourselves  
 “And from the gracious Father all those things will be.  
 24 “So far no life-sustaining work have you besought  
 “From God the Father as your own reward; now is the time  
 “For you to ask for it, whatever pleases you,  
 90) “And that you will receive from my high ruling Father.  
 92) 25 “Though now I speak obliquely and by indirection,

“Quite soon the moment will arrive, the sacred hour  
 “When, after having heard directly from the Father,  
 “I will return transfigured with a brilliant voice,  
 “No more equivocating, but with forthright speech.  
 26 “On that day you may pray and pray again to God  
 “In votive ceremonies; then I will not say  
 “As I was wont to say: Unto my living Father  
 100) “I will pray for you. 27 For, gazing from on high  
 “And with a holy love which corresponds to mine,  
 “My Father loves you all the same as He loves me,  
 “For, single-minded and aware, you, to the Word,  
 “God’s Son, plighted your troth, to my amazing love  
 “Forever faithful; and your hearts all recognize  
 “That I come from the Father, God, the source of Life.  
 28 “I came down from the Father, I dwelt in the world,  
 “And from the world, pregnant with sin, I now will leave  
 “And swiftly go back home to my dispatching Father.”  
 110) 29 And forthwith all of his apprentices spoke up:  
 “You now speak plainly and not in some secret code,  
 “Oblique, misleading us, requiring other words.  
 30 “Indeed, we now see that no human education  
 “Do you require, lest you be questioned unprepared.  
 “And that is why we are convinced that to the world  
 “You came as Christ, the Son of God from heav’n above.”

31 Then Jesus prophesied about the end of things:

“You fickle ones, right now you trust the words I say:

32 “But hard by is that time, when, fleeing, you will scatter,

120) “Each chased behind his own closed door, one and the next,

“To leave me all alone; but when the hostile crowd

“Approaches I am not alone, though you will flee;

“For never does my Father stop sustaining me.

33 “But all these things I told you so that ever more

“You might preserve the gentle peace I leave with you

“Unto eternity. In this distracting world

“Afflictors will mistreat you, but despite affliction

“You still will be courageous; and I will accomplish

“Still greater things for men. I have o’erwhelmed the world!”



# Chapter 17

Christ's particular prayer for his Apostles.

Immediately after roaring out this cry,  
Unto the Pole he raised his eyes and to his Father  
Cried out: "Just once more, O my Father, one more time  
"Give glory to Your Son <sup>2</sup> to whom You have assigned  
"A human body in which he can navigate;  
"I wish for one and all whom I have gathered here  
"To give eternal sacred life as their attendant,  
3 "So they might know You are one God, the world's desire,  
"And know Christ Jesus whom You sent down to the earth.  
10) 4 "And I have honored You and done Your work on earth;  
"Whatever You commanded me to do, I did.  
5 "Now, Father, honor me with my appointed glory  
"Which I enjoyed beside You, when by grave command  
"You had not yet laid the foundations for the world.  
6 "For I have preached Your name to men down here on earth,  
"Men You assigned to me, the Light in a dark world.  
"For they were Yours and You gave them to me to rule,  
"And they had faith in Your immutable commands  
"And they obeyed Your laws. <sup>7</sup> They now know in their hearts  
20) "That everything I have You gave to me. <sup>8</sup> To them  
"I preached Your sermons of salvation; happily

“They took Your guiding word, imbued it in their hearts,  
 “And even understood that I came down from You;  
 “They eagerly accepted as the very truth  
 “That You sent me to earth. 9 Now, for my faithful ones,  
 “Not for the benefit of sinners here on earth,  
 “I beg You, Father, and I pray to You for them,  
 “The ones You gave to me, for they are Yours; 10 But, then  
 “All that You have is mine, and any I redeem  
 30) “Are Yours completely; and from these few friends  
 “My glory will accumulate o’er all the globe.  
 11 “They still are in the world, I soon will leave the earth  
 “to come back home to You. O Father, my disciples  
 “Are all united, pray protect them from abuse  
 “And from temptations of the adversary demon.  
 “O holy Father, guard these champions, Your cultists,  
 “So they may be like us, all one and unified.  
 12 “When I lived in the world and walked among Your own,  
 39) “I could protect the group unharmed and none of them  
 41) “Has perished in a frenzy of impiety,  
 “Except that Son of devilish and deadly doom,  
 “So that it might be done as it was once set down.  
 13 “Now, Father, I will come back home to You from earth,  
 “For I have told all things to them, so ever more  
 “They can rejoice in all the things that I have done.

14 “And I left them Your sacred words. Alas, the world,  
“Resenting them, hates them because they truly are  
“From heaven and but seeming citizens of earth,  
50) “Just as I am a stranger in the world. I do not come  
“From any human marriage or an earthly race. 15  
“I pray, O Father, that not yet my milling crew,  
“My friends, You transport hence out of the boundless world,  
“But that with sleepless eyes You guard them and protect  
“Them from enslavement by the ancient evil demon.

17 “By Your divine enactments, make my students holy  
“And cleanse them all with beams of intellectual truth  
“Because Your word is truth. 19 For these assembled here,  
“For my associates, I sanctify myself

60) “So in Your life-sustaining words they can find joy  
“And, being purified, be sanctified in truth,  
“Their bodies washed all over with a holy flame. 20  
“But not for them alone do I receive Your grace,  
“But for whoever cast away their disbelief  
“And gather proper faith from my disciples’ words;

21 “I pray they may be one together just as we  
74) “United are, each one alone, each in the other,  
67) “As Your will I perform and from You I arise,  
“My Father, linked, united to each other. May  
“They, too, all be united, growing out of us,

70) "So that the whole created world can recognize  
 "That You dispatched me here to rule the race of men.  
 22 "And glory I bestow on those You gave to me  
 "So they may be initiated into us  
 "And then may be delivered at full term from us.  
 23 "Then You will be complete in me, O Father, just  
 "As I am carried in the union of my friends.  
 "The dull and stupid world must know deep in its heart  
 "That You sent me, a succor to the watching world,  
 80) "Humanity's redeemer, and I pray that You  
 "Will sanctify my comrades as You love Your Son.  
 24 "I hope, my Father, that the ones You gave to me  
 "Will recollect, despite where I may be, that they  
 84) "Will see my lofty throne with their own human eyes.  
 87) 25 "O righteous Father of all men, savior of life,  
 "The world does not yet know You; I, by nature, do.  
 "And the enlightened chorus of my friends has learnt  
 90) "Through pious habits 26 as Your rituals to them  
 "I have disclosed; and I yet once again shall shew  
 "So they can know You fully, and so that in them  
 "I and my law of love can ever be enthroned."

## Chapter 18

In which our Lord is betrayed by Judas, arrested by the guards of the High Priest, examined by Pilate, and found Not Guilty. In which Peter denies Christ three times. In which the cock crows. In which the Jews prefer Barabbas over Jesus.

And after saying all these things he boldly strode  
On foot to where the Kedron, with fair headlands, rolled  
In raging billows, lo, the stormy wanderer,  
The river's torrent gouging out the mountain cleft.  
Close by, a verdant garden sat just off the road  
Down which the Lord was coming, leading back into  
A green and fragrant orchard in the pleasure garden.  
2     Rash Judas knew this grove and nursery of vines,  
The shaded spot where Christ would often go alone,  
10)   How oftentimes he went within, though with him now  
Together bivouacked his crowd of close disciples.  
3     So, with a strong armed troop dispatched by the high priests,  
And villains from the ancient evil Pharisees,  
A swarm of roving bullies armed and running with him,  
Came traitor Judas into the familiar garden  
With lamps and weapons; those in company with him  
Each followed closely on the next with hands raised high  
And carrying a lamp protected from the wind  
Within a shade. These were constructed out of reeds  
20)   And well made, being split and woven by a master,

And very much the likeness of the starry sphere;  
Inside, the lamp was seated in an inner pocket  
And shot its keen light out right through the cover's holes  
Which split the light in leaping, ramifying rays.

4 Then Jesus, knowing that it must needs be,  
Went, fearless, of his own accord, straight to the garden  
And asked the warlike company in bitter words:

“What person do you trackers come to find and seize?”

5 Then from the gang of armed men, one responded thus:

30) “We all are seeking Jesus, him from Nazareth.”

Rash Judas stood as escort to the enemies,  
Who, for the feeble sake of momentary wealth,  
The Son of God betrayed, the world's hope without end,  
The Son of God betrayed. 6 The soft clad, unarmed Lord  
Then murmured a reply before the multitude

But with a voice that broke the solid ranks of soldiers:

44) “From Nazareth in Galilee, I, Jesus, come!”

36) And then the armored warriors with all the rest  
Were tossed about and flung face down onto the ground,  
Made mad to hear that hurricane of feeble sound.

7 A second time again, then, Jesus calmly asked:

40) “What man do you, assembled, seek to apprehend?”

Again the enemies responded with these words:

“We seek Christ Jesus, he who comes from Nazareth.”

8 And Jesus answered them in this undaunted turn:

“Lo, I am Galilean Jesus. If alone

“You seek me only, let these go and send them home

“Untouched; release ye, now, this crowd of my retainers.”

9 So that the prophecy might be at once fulfilled,

The very same one Christ said to his living Father:

50) “Of all the men You gave to me, not one is dead.”

10 Then suddenly bold Simon drew his sword; a man,

A minister to the implacable high priest,

His right ear he sliced off, flashing his steely knife,

And Malchus was the name of the assaulted fellow.

11 But Jesus checked beloved Peter with a call:

“Leave off thy choler, in its scabbard put thy blade!

“Shall I not gladly drink the cup from my own Father,

“The one he sent to me?” 12 The high priest’s Temple guard,

Commander of a thousand men, together with

60) The fearsome Champion of the troop of men-at-arms,

At once bound blameless Christ in heavy shackles and

They took him on a silent journey in the dark,

Escorting Christ up to the house of high priest Annas.

For he was father to the wife of Caiaphas,

That year’s high priest, 14 who once before the Hebrew throng,

From jealousy of Christ and controversy, cried:

“Behooves it that one man should die for all our folk,

“Lest creeping devastation wreck the Hebrew race!”

The armored men brought Jesus to the high priest’s house.

70) 15 But Simon, following behind them at a distance

Together with another young disciple, was

Well known around the high priest’s court as fisherman;

He hurried to the yard where Christ was being held

16 And once there quickly hid himself beside the door.

The other follower of Christ there with him leaped

And ran up to the house, and to the gatekeeper

He spoke, and then led Peter in the great courtyard,

17 When, eyes askance, a gossiping domestic slave,

A concierge, on seeing nearby Peter, cried

80) These words: “Now, are you not a follower of Christ?”

And Simon answered in a voice betraying fear:

“O woman, I am not Christ’s fellow traveler!”

18 They stood there, all together, priestly ministers,

Their servants and maidservants, and they warmed themselves

Around a heap of coals. Beneath a spray of sparks

The meager flame extinguished in the smokeless blaze.

It was a dark and stormy night. The evening winds

Perflating o’er the earth now gusted overhead,

And so the slave girls stoked the fire. And nearby

90) Stood Peter, silent, still unrecognized by them.

19 And now the priest asked Jesus through sharp questioning



(Broad bearded Annas, as his habit was to rake  
 His fingers through his beard, lush and luxurious)  
 About his clever comrades whom he had as students  
 And of his teachings on religion. 20 In strong words  
 And firmly, Jesus said: "I to the curious world  
 "Conversed in public in the undefiled Temple,  
 "To those within the precinct of the holy shrine  
 "Where many folks of many nations lay encamped,  
 100) "And never spoke in occult or in furtive words;  
 "Why question me about that now? 21 See, all around  
 "These people are the witnesses to what I preached;  
 "They learned the many purposes of my commands  
 "Which I declared to God's obedient Hebrew tribe."  
 22 But when he said these things, the savage minister  
 106) Laid violent hands upon the cheek ineffable.  
 108) 23 Then Jesus answered the hirsute conspirator:  
 "If evilly I spoke, presumptuous, and with  
 110) "A silly spirit, there will testimony be  
 "Of evil in thine articles indicting me  
 "If well accounted. Why, by blows, will you reduce me?"  
 24 But, having bound in flaxen ropes of bloody thrall  
 His hands behind him, fettered in inglorious bonds,  
 Annas sent Jesus to his raving son-in-law,  
 Dispatched, constrained, from this high priest to that high priest.

25 Now Simon, sitting by the hearth and being pained  
By cold, warmed up his body at the fireside.  
And as he warmed himself the high priest's servants asked,  
Since he was just arrived and still unrecognized:  
I20) "You both are surely friends of Christ?" And in response  
Unto the asking maidservants, Peter denied:  
"I am not Christ's!" He spoke to them in lying words.

26 Another servant of the high priest then asked Peter,  
A relative of him whom Peter earlier  
That night had with his sword hacked off his flapping ear:  
"But are not you a minister of Christ? With him  
"Did I not see you walking in the woodsy copse?"

27 And now the third time Peter gave the same reply:  
He disowned Jesus. Forthwith crew the cock.

I30) 28 Then the accusers, leaving Caiaphas' house,  
Burst in like rioters upon the hegemon  
I32) And dragged the willing Jesus to his saving doom.  
But they did not go in the loud and busy hall  
On foot, so that their bodies might not be polluted;  
They still desired to eat the Pasch with bodies pure.  
Those fools, not thinking that by murderous incitement  
They nullified the prophylaxis of the Law!

I40) 29 So Pilate set out quickly for his court of law.  
In following the law, he asked the Temple keepers,

Demanding testimony to sustain a verdict:

“What do you say in accusation of this man?”

“What cause for death? How has this man so greatly sinned?”

“And what indictments do you bring for this man’s death?”

30 The high priests cried aloud in murderous reply:

“If he had not done evil indescribable

“We would not have, by force, dragged him, uncharged, to you,

“Or carried him, o’erpowered by our hands, to turn

“Him over to you!” 31 But their bitter jealousy

150) Of Christ he knew, and he declined to question him.

“You took him. You adjudge him by your sacred book

“According to your fathers’ laws and bloody norms.”

Said the bold multitude: “To put this man to death

“Is not in our prerogative.” 32 So that Christ’s word

Might be fulfilled, foretelling by what evil fate

He was to die. 33 So Pilate left the wily gang

Outside the door, and storming back into the court

He summoned Jesus and demanded testimony:

“Are you King of the Jews?” 34 To his examiner,

160) Spoke Jesus, filled with God, like one did not know,

And said, though he did know: “This thing that you just said,

“Do you, yourself, acknowledge me as Jewish King?

“Or has another told you to?” 35 The ruler cried:

“Nay, surely I am not a Jew? Your very own

“Unspeakable high priests and people, so that I  
 “May judge you, turned you over to me. Tell me now:  
 “What did you do?” 36 And then the King shot back these words:  
 “My kingly sovereignty does not spring from this earth,  
 “Nor came it from the short lived universe. Were mine  
 170) “An earthly lordship, or if it sprang from this world,  
 “My servants would have struggled in an armed affray  
 “Lest I should be betrayed into the Hebrews’ hands.  
 “But as it is, from hence is not my kingly power.”  
 37 And once again demanded Pilate in these words:  
 “Are you indeed a king?” And Jesus answered back:  
 “Unto this was I born, and for this I arrived:  
 “To be a witness to eternal verity;  
 “Whoever can endure the weight of honesty  
 “Will hear my tongue speak out unperjured words.  
 180) 38 And Pilate was exasperated and shot back:  
 “What are the simple facts?” And springing from his throne  
 He left the court and went straight to the maddened mob,  
 Reproaching them, and said: “I many different ways  
 “Examined this defendant; naught in him I found,  
 “Nor one sufficient cause. 39 Long is the custom, though,  
 “Here in your country, annually, that to you,  
 “From prison calling, I release one captive man.  
 “Advise me truly now, shall I bestow on you

“Among the prisoners, this bound king of the Jews?”

190) 40 The Jews with one accord screamed out an endless roar:

“Not that one, not the one you said, give us Barabbas!”

Barabbas was a robber and condemned to death.

## Chapter I9

In which our Lord is mocked and tortured. In which Pilate undoes justice in a fit of pique. In which the Jews acclaim Cæsar as their only King. In which Jesus dies. In which he is buried.

And so the frenzied clamor from their reckless mouths  
The governor now hearing, he bestowed on them  
The plunderer hauled up, the prisoner released  
Not even beat with clubs; but with repeated stripes  
He reddened Jesus' shudd'ring body with the whip.

2     The soldiers, in a mood of mockery, took him;  
A cluster of keen thorns, then, someone weaving, they  
Crowned with a mummerly of kingship his poor head,  
And cast upon his flesh a curtain for a robe,

10)   Dyed brilliant purple from the catch of Sidon's sea,  
The very sign of kingship in the midst of pain.

3     Then, genuflecting, with their heads bowed to the floor,  
They hailed him king in travesty of courtly forms  
Of royal supplication; and they darted in,  
First one and then another, and they slapped his face.

4     Then enterprising Pilate scurried from his court  
On quick returning feet and cried to the mad throng:  
"Right here, right now, I bring this man before you all  
"So you can see him. But, no erring thoughts in him

20) “Found I, adjudging him not guilty in his heart.”

5 Then Jesus, innocent, was hauled out from the court;

And he had on the thorny crown of plaited spines

And wore the bloody drape of Tyre purple dye.

Then Pilate spoke again unto the seething mob:

“Behold, the man stands, whipped, although he guiltless stands.”

6 And even while the lawless high priests gazed on him,

The vulgar plebs roared an extraordinary shout:

“Let him be lifted upright, hung upon a cross,

“And let his feet and hands be nailed with iron spikes!”

30) So Pilate loosed his voice over the frenzied mob:

“Then you yourselves nail his four limbs to death!

“For I can not find one excuse for him to die!”

7 The high priests raged at Pilate, trying to explain:

“Our fathers’ law is carried to the Jews within

“The book which our lawgivers wrote, wherein is said:

“That man must die a death of bloody punishment

“Because of blasphemy, who calls himself divine

“And Son of ever-loving God the Father.”

8 But when he heard all this the learned judge took fright,

40) 9 And hurriedly he went back to the public court,

And once again asked Jesus what he asked before:

“Who are you? And whence come you?” With his eyes downcast,

The Lord refused to look; not opening his mouth,

He did not give an audible response to Pilate.

10 Then Pilate, deeply angered, cried out in a shriek:

“You do not speak to me? Do you not realize

“That I bear double power over you? At will

“I can subject you to the cross, or set you free!”

11 Reproaching, then, this worldly boasting, Christ replied:

50) “Yourself, you would not have one power over me

“If from above it were not granted; hence, the man

“Who gave me up is eaten by a greater sin!”

12 And angry Pilate, thereupon deciding, let

The unconvicted Jesus be turned over to his doom.

The mob roared in a tumult, full of cries and shrieks

From countless mouths: “If you unpunished leave this one

“You are not Cæsar’s friend, who is our only king!

“For who in lying words anoints himself a king,

“This false named one vies with Cæsar Tiberius!”

60) 13 And Pilate hearing this and trembling at the sound,

Took Jesus Christ outside the great high vaulted hall;

Close by the hall he sat out on the Lithostrote

(This being in the Grecian tongue what it is called,

(That court of paving stones, though by the spluttering

(Natives of Syria is called by them Gabbada).

14 The sixth day, as they call the day of Sabbath eve,

Had run its course and now the fatal third hour loomed,



As on his marble throne sat Pilate, bold of deed,  
 And shouted to the Jews: "Behold, here stands the man!  
 70) "The lord of your domain, and draped in purple rags!"  
 15 The multitude roared out with voices from their throats:  
 "He should be crucified! By that disgraceful fate  
 "He ought to be destroyed! Upright, with steel bolts  
 "Stretched out upon the tree of death, hung on four spikes!"  
 And Pilate asked once more of the reviewing horde:  
 "Shall I let him be fastened on a plank with nails?  
 "Shall I condemn your king to punitive destruction?"  
 The high priests bellowed back in treacherous rejoinder:  
 "We do not know and cannot have another king,  
 80) "A self appointed leader, whom Rome did not crown,  
 "Cæsar alone, eternal shepherd of the people!"  
 16 And Pilate, hearing the unquenchable uproar,  
 Delivered, will he, nill he, Christ to unjust death.  
 Delighted, even unto death the shameless priests  
 Took Jesus happily; and thereby mortal men  
 Became at last the murderers of deathless Christ.  
 17 And Jesus, by himself, and bearing his own cross,  
 Took calmly his first willing step to destiny.  
 At last he reached the spot known as Place of the Skull,  
 90) Named from the noble brow of first created Adam,  
 In Syrian called Golgotha. 18 The murderers,

Upon a cross erected high above the ground  
 Then stretched him out upright, and binding tight by force  
 His hands, spread them on either side with steel spikes  
 In them; next, with a single nail piercing them,  
 Two bloody wounds run through in puncturing assault,  
 A fearsome bolt they hammered into both his feet.  
 On their own crosses, hung by spikes identical,  
 Two men, both highway robbers, shared a common fate  
 100) And hung there near each other; Jesus hung between.  
 19 There on a tablet Pilate wrote the wondrous sign,  
 The superscription, which is called a Titulus.  
 It was by skillful pen incised: "Here Jesus is.  
 "This is the Jewish King, Jesus of Galilee."  
 20 And many of the throng of Hebrew tourists read  
 That sign because the hill was nearby to the town,  
 And it was posted by a nail to the cross.  
 For it was written by a learned hand, the lines  
 In tongues of Italy, of Greece and Syria.  
 110) 21 The high priests reassembled to beseech Pilate:  
 "Write not, nay, write not that he is the Jewish King,  
 "But rather this: He said in meretricious words:  
 "I am the Hebrew Lord, the scepter bearing Jesus."  
 22 And Pilate then replied, to shame the cruel men:  
 "I wrote precisely what I meant to write." 23 Above,

The underservants of inexorable fate,  
Once having lifted Jesus on the cross outspread,  
The sacred raiment of the God-engendered king  
Divided, standing there, including his fine robe  
120) Entirely unseamed from top down to its bottom,  
But woven in one piece from ankle up to throat.  
24 And they said to each other in complete accord:  
“Come, let us not divide this novel wine dark robe,  
“This wrap-around of foreign style. Let us instead  
“Cast knucklebones by hand, and shoot for victory  
“To see which one shall win this undivided prize.”  
So that the prophecy might now at last come true  
Which he declaimed who plucked the lyre to sing of God:  
“My frightful murderers, themselves antagonists  
130) “In common rivalry, apportioned my array,  
“And for a lucky strike cast lots to win my cloak,  
“So that they now become the wearers of my clothes.”  
25 The gang of outlaw men did just that very thing.  
Close by the cross stood some who came there in a group.  
First, there was Mary, mother of Christ God. With her  
Was yet another Mary, of her family,  
And also weeping Mary Magdalene. 26 Christ saw  
Her, who had borne God’s child, with his disciple dear.  
He said: “O Mother, woman ever virginal,

140) "Behold your virgin son!" 27 And to his student said:

"O lover of virginity, your mother see,  
"Who bore you not." And from this moment on  
The student took the fruitful virgin as his guest,  
And without impregnation he became the son  
Of her who never suffered his delivery.

28 Then Jesus, knowing that things hurried on apace,  
And soon all would be done, desired the rapid end  
Of what was going to be. He cried out to the crowd:  
"I thirst." 29 And right at hand there was nearby the spot

150) A full jar of turned wine. One knowing of this wine  
Then took a sponge, the sprout from Ocean's darkest depths;  
He filled it with sharp drink and parching salt water,  
And, planting it upon the point of a long reed,  
He lifted it, dilute, the vinegar of doom,  
A payback to the king for his refreshing bread,  
His gift divine, extending through the air aloft  
The salty sponge upon the point of the raised stalk.

30 But when he took the brackish draught of acid wine  
His death was nigh. He spoke his last words: "It is done!"

160) And dropped his head and gladly yielded to death.

31 The raging priests, as it was near the evening hour  
That tolled the day of festival for eating sheep,  
Poured back into the dwelling of the governor.

And in committee they besought of Pilate that  
Of Christ ineffable and of the two doomed men,  
Their legs might all be shattered with a steel blade,  
Lest on their crosses they should still remain attached  
When daylight broke upon the seventh day. It was  
To all the Jews a law unspeakable, that dawn  
170) Of Sabbath marks the day they had to celebrate.  
32 And so the bloody band came near the crucified;  
And at the first one, with a rod of iron they broke  
The robber's crossed legs. Next, upon the other cross  
The second robber's legs, a bludgeon did the job;  
It cast the villain headlong down to bitter fate.  
33 But when they looked upon dead Jesus, being dead,  
His nailed feet they did not cudgel with the club,  
34 But one, relentless, thrusting with a futile lance,  
His precious side he punctured with that cruel point:  
180) And from his perforated side, in double streams  
First blood gushed out and soon thereafter holy water.  
35 The man who saw all this is faithful in his words  
Of honest testimony; and from his fine heart  
We know his word is truthful and is sacred, too.  
36 And all this happened so the word might be fulfilled  
Which, to the sacred lyre in sweetly breathing song  
The Psalmist, of his blameless body, sang: "Not one

“Of his bones shall be broken or his limbs be bruised.”

37 And still another prophecy told by the saint:

190) “Upon him shall they gaze, him whom they wounded sore,  
“Who, for a goading lance, shall later wreak revenge.”

38 Thereafter, Joseph crept to Pilate to beseech,

But cautiously, in terror of the Jews, for he  
Was Christ’s secret disciple, fond of listening,  
And sipped the milk of faith straight from his sacred lips.

He entered in the house on genuflecting knees  
And begged the ruler for the corpse possessed of God,  
Who gladly gave the ever-living corpse to him.

On silent feet came Joseph, ferrying the dead;

200) Now at the cross, hefting the one who had been nailed,  
He loosened with keen bronze the couple sharpened spikes,  
And in the dusk the man brought down the upright corpse,  
A lightweight cargo, laid upon his pious shoulder.

39 And Nicodemus came, the one who went into

The house of Christ by night. He crept up stealthily  
With fragrant myrrh, and, from the Gulf of Erythraios,  
Aloe, a succulent from lands of India,

By weight one hundred of those units called a “Pound”.

This is the sacred measure of the spice. By hand

210) They wrapped the corpse in delicate white linen sheets  
And tightly wound and twisted it in fragrant bands,

The way the Hebrew nation guards its obsequies.  
41 There was a garden near the place up on the hill  
Where on the cross they fastened Jesus with a spike,  
That pitiless and hateful mob; and in that grove  
A tomb, not built, but deeply dug into the rock  
Carved whole, new made. And in this tomb of living rock  
Not yet had any corpse been laid upon the ground  
But through the open tomb the vineyard garden breeze  
220) Blew softly o'er the place, 42 where Joseph, diligent,  
Had carried Jesus thither, hoisted on his back.  
He laid the dead corpse on the stony bed of earth  
(The ever-living corpse would not remain three days  
Within the tomb) accomplishing the deed unseen,  
Because the circuit of protecting hours had run.  
The night of Sabbath eve was hast'ning to the dawn,  
And to his house again came Joseph, swiftly fleeing.

## Chapter 20

In which Jesus arises from the dead, and appears to his friends. In which he convinces Thomas. The End.

Now on the very next day, after Sabbath passed,  
The melancholy Mary Magdalene approached  
The tomb quite early, while above the twilit earth  
The morning star still glowed, though dimly, in the sky.  
And, lo, the great stone door was leaning to the side.  
It had been rolled away, a dead weight on the ground.  
She saw the empty cave where heavy laden Joseph  
Had laid dead Jesus on the dusty little shelf.  
And there the woman, up all night, rested her feet.  
10) Her bag held mourning myrrh, and on the empty slab  
She sought the missing corpse, to wash it and anoint it,  
But she could not locate it. 2 So on speedy feet  
She hastened to the house, to Peter in the back,  
And to the other student there inside with him,  
The one the Lord had loved, and gave them her report  
About the empty tomb. 3 And Peter, hearing this,  
Gasped, and distraught, sprang frantic to his feet to search.  
He raced out of the house; the other one soon followed  
Together to the tomb. They ran along the path,



20) But, speedy as the wind, the younger student ran  
More swiftly than old Peter who had set off first. 5  
Arriving quickly, he peeked just inside the tomb  
And noticed in plain view right there in front of him  
A pile of snow white linen lying on the ground.  
But he did not go in although he got there first.

6 Then bringing up the rear, old Simon bustled up  
And quickly went inside. There crumpled on the floor,  
They both together recognized the linen cloth

7 And tangled ribbons that had once bound up his hair  
30) (Which in the tongue of Syria is called Sudarion),  
Not laid beside the winding sheets, but tossed aside  
And wadded up into a bundle by itself.

8 The student who was first to reach the sepulchre  
Now slowly made his way inside the carven tomb.  
The stone beside the maw tossed carelessly aside,  
A perfect fit into the cut door of the tomb;  
The hair strap and the grave clothes lying on the ground;  
He saw these and believed that cross the chthonian gulf  
The corpse, borne by the wind, on heav'nly feet had flown.

40) 9 Christ's two disciples had not yet discovered that  
Soon after leaving earth through unrelenting death,  
He woke as if from sleep after a mere three dawns;  
He came back from the dead, was raised up to Polaris

And trampled on the shattered shackles of grim death.

10 The mightily astonished couple of disciples  
Somehow retraced their steps back home to spend the night,  
Abandoning the silent empty tomb.

11 The Magdalene remained alone beside the grave,  
And gushing out hot torrents from her mournful eyes  
50) Lamented for one living. Through the shining door,  
While yet she wept for one who stood not far away,  
She noticed an angelic couple. 12 One of them  
Was sitting on her right, up where Christ's head had lain,  
And radiating sparks from his divine eyed face;  
The other sat down where the corpse's feet had been,  
And blazed with snowy sparkles flashing from his robe.

13 Together from inside the tomb they asked the woman:  
"Why weep ye, woman?" Mary answered them and said:  
"Because some secret robbers have purloined my Lord,  
60) "Despoiled his tomb by night, and I do not know where  
"They may have taken him." 14 And turning round to flee  
She noticed Jesus who was standing by. She saw,  
But did not recognize Christ there outside the tomb.

15 The unfamiliar man was strolling in the park.  
"Why, woman, weepst thou?" She answered with a moan.  
"Nay, tell me whom ye seek?" So, Mary spoke aloud,  
Believing that she saw a nurseryman there:

“If you have taken from its tomb the horrid corpse,  
“Pray, tell me where you put it? I will fetch him thither.”  
70) 16 And Jesus answered in a clear and flowing voice,  
And called out: “Mary!” Spinning back around she cried:  
“Yes, Master?” 17 But God quickly stopped the woman short  
As she reached out her hand to his immortal garment  
And said to her: “Forbear, lest thou shouldst touch my robe:  
“For I have not yet gone to my Father after death.  
“But go, announce it to my brotherly disciples  
“That I am going to my Father and your Father,  
“And to your God and my God, very soon I go.”  
18 So Mary fled and testified to the eleven,  
80) To the disciples cowering beneath the roof,  
She saw his naked limbs beneath his spectral robe,  
She saw Christ shining through his supernatural cloak,  
And he, in flowing splendor, face to face conversed.  
19 But when the shadows covered the whole dusky earth,  
And while the door was locked up tight with sturdy bolts,  
In where the terrified disciples were holed up,  
He stood there, floating on the air like winged thought,  
Companions all around him, and he said: “May Peace  
“Be with you.” 20 Then, against all expectation, he  
90) Showed both his hands and feet to his disciples there,  
Transfixed by nails, and his freshly wounded side;

And at this apparition all the men rejoiced.

21 And quickly then the Lord addressed them once again:

“Again, peace be to you; as to the world’s far ends

“My Father sent me out, just so I send you forth.”

22 He spoke and he breathed out from his immortal mouth

Through his redeeming lips, and said to his disciples:

“Receive my holy breath and ever more on earth,

“Whatever men you please to free from sin, their debt

100) “Will be forgotten, heaven will redeem their sins;

“But those whom you would load with ruin and with guilt

“Will stay encumbered by their deeds and sinful lives.”

24 Now Thomas of them all was not there with his friends

When Jesus suddenly appeared out of thin air,

Borne by the wind, unwitnessed, coming back to earth.

25 When the disciples who had seen it said to him

That they had seen the Lord, he opened up his mouth

And spoke a doubtful word, and with obdurate heart,

Unyielding, he asked for more convincing proof.

110) “Unless I see his hand, by iron deeply pierced,

“Unless I plant my finger in the nail holes,

“And stroke his smooth breast by myself with my own hand,

“I never will believe it.” 26 Later at their prayers,

One early morning after eight full days had passed,

They all were lined up in their hiding place at home

And all aquiver from the barbed threats of the Jews;  
And this time Thomas sat together with the group,  
The one nick-named the Twin; when unexpectedly  
Came Christ on airy sandals springing in the house,  
120) Appearing wingless in the midst of his disciples,  
And cried aloud a third time what he said before:  
“Again, peace be to you!” 27 And pulling him aside,  
Invited Thomas to investigate up close:  
“Give me your finger, gentle friend, let it approach  
“The evidence of nails, incontrovertible.  
“See both sides of my hands; and here, on my right flank  
“Reach out your hand and touch my self-evident scars.  
“Reject your native skepticism. After this  
“You will be twice as faithful, having seen and touched.”  
130) 28 Thomas, by then hysterical, cried out aloud:  
“My Lord, and yes, my God!” 29 Then Jesus said to him,  
To doubting Thomas, in words of admonishment:  
“With me displayed before your eyes you can believe;  
“Far happier and blest are those who have not seen:  
“For they have better faith, who do not need to see.”  
30 And many other miracles for his initiates  
He there performed, and showed them various wonders,  
True stories which remain unwritten in this book.  
He who inscribed these things on purpose left them out.

I40) 31 But all the things he did put down within this book  
He wrote so you might have redeeming grace from God,  
To know that Jesus Christ comes from the God of Life:  
To all you who believe, graced by the King of Heaven,  
The sacred life is your perpetual reward.

## Chapter 21

The End, Part Two. In which Jesus prepares a seaside brunch for his disciples. In which he invests Peter with the care of his sheep. Really the End.

And still a third time to his students Christ appeared  
Across the murmuring Lake of Tiberias.  
And thus his form he showed. 2 Within a secret room  
Were Peter, once the roarer erstwhile known as Simon,  
And clever Andrew, from the self same womb as Peter,  
The two swift sons of Zebedee who ploughed the waves,  
And Thomas with the nickname. Also there himself,  
Nathaniel and two other God-obeying men.

3 And to them in a group net weaver Simon said:

10) “Down to the lake, as usual, I go to fish.”

And all the fishermen together said to him:

“With you unto the flowing sea for fishy work

“We’ll go and stay together.” So from out of doors

Into the open to the nearby lake they sped

And then, embarking, sailed their boat. But all night long

They were not able with their sea worn hands to catch

A shoal of fish, and Simon was annoyed, again

And yet again hauling the empty net by hand.

4 And when the dawn with rosy beams sliced through the dark

20) Christ stood along the pebbly beach beside the lake

As if a morning walk had brought him to the shore,  
As if he hungered for some sea spun provender.  
The students did not recognize that here was Jesus.  
5 And so he asked the old familiar fishermen:  
“Have you caught any sea food from the fruitful lake,  
“O you hardworking children of the brine?” They said  
That they had nothing. 6 Then the Lord instructed them:  
“Let down your nets and cast them out into the lake  
“Right here, just off the starboard of your yarely ship.”  
30) So having made a pocket of their cast out net,  
They pulled back from the lake a whole migrating school,  
Fish dancing bright-eyed up out of the lake’s great depths;  
They did not have the strength to pull the net back in  
With such a mess of fish held in its gaping sack.  
36) 7 The student and companion whom the Lord loved spoke  
35) To nimble Simon, plumber of the salty deeps,  
“There is the Lord, himself!” And quickly running up,  
With dripping garments Simon girded up his loins  
And covered up his body with a ragged cloak,  
40) And round his haunches wrapped a loincloth of the type  
Which, being doubled up, was stuffed between his thighs,  
As modest seamen wear over their private parts.  
For he worked naked when he dragged the net ashore.  
He swiftly leaped into the current; cross the lake



He paddled with his hands and held his head up high;  
Behind, with alternating feet he kicked the water  
And came at last to reach the god-visited shore  
Where Jesus stood and waited. 8 All the other men  
Came back together in the common fishing boat,  
50) And with them through the water dragged the netted catch,  
For it was not a long haul from the sea to land,  
A mere two hundred cubits journey through the waves  
Where balmy breezes blew the spindrift back to shore  
And misted all the nearby beach with salty spume.  
9 And as they made land on a dry part of the beach  
They saw a smoldering and smoky fire pit,  
And there were fish set down upon the burning coals,  
Some fish and fresh bread. 10 Then the Lord called his disciples:  
“Haul in your draught of odd shaped creatures of the deep,  
60) “Which you culled from the pastures of the ocean depths.”  
11 And Simon went on down, and leapt with splashing feet,  
And with his own two hands he dragged the net to land,  
Stuffed full of leaping, quivering and twitching fish,  
Big fish. And Simon hurried, straining with his back  
To drag one hundred of the wet herd from the lake;  
And still fish threw themselves into his woven net,  
Full fifty three of them. The net within the lake  
Despite so many fish in bulk, still did not burst.

69) 12 And not a man of them within the group had nerve,  
 70) Watching a God appearing there before their eyes,  
 71) To ask, Who are you? Even Simon did not ask,  
 72) When, up close, he could recognize the Lord Jesus.  
 73) The Lord set out a very large fish for them all,  
 74) Fish and fresh bread. And then he called to his disciples:  
 75) "Come once again and sit and dine around my table  
 76) "On this surprising meal of baked goods and sea food."  
 77) 14 This was the third time Jesus showed to his disciples  
 After his resurrection from the sleep of death,  
 Back from the dead and the chthonian abyss,  
 80) Back to Tiberias and the old fishing grounds,  
 To give a breakfast there 15 for all of them.  
 After the fishy meal served at a meatless table,  
 He called to nearby Simon in his sacred voice:  
 "O Simon, as you are an honest Son of John,  
 "Do you, more than all of your other friends, love me?"  
 And Peter said: "Now, Lord, indeed, within your heart  
 "You know how much I love you, and you need no words."  
 And with his sacred mouth the Lord instructed Peter:  
 "My nervous bleating sheep, attend them with your staff."  
 90) 16 And once again did Jesus ask Peter the same:  
 "O Simon, Son of John, who sired brilliant sons,  
 "Do you love me alone, more than all of your friends?"

His jaw dropped as he once again answered the Lord;

Simon, Fisher of Men, expostulated thus:

“Now Lord, you are the witness of my heart, you know

“How much, how sweet, and how unspeakable my love.”

And once again the Lord said to attentive Peter:

“Then be a shepherd to my flock of mindful sheep.”

17 Then Jesus quickly spoke the now familiar words:

I00) “O Simon, scion of your pious father, John,

“Say, do you love me more than all the others do?”

And Peter greatly grieved that three times Jesus asked

Do you love me more than my brotherhood of friends.

So Peter answered Jesus in dejected tones:

“You know all things, Lord of the World, and all I think.

“You surely know how solid are my bonds of love,

“And how much I love you.” And God replied to him:

“Then tend my sheep and lambs with your celestial crook.

18 “While yet a youth, O Peter, you could dress yourself;

I10) “Wherever you would go you walked on your own path.

“But in your older days your arms will be stretched out,

“And other harsh, rude men will bind you up with cords

“And bear you to a place you do not want to go.”

19 He spoke, divinely prophesying of the end

I15) Which would earn Peter’s prize, by dying for his king.

I18) And Christ said to him: “Follow.” 20 And as he was walking,

He looked around behind him with his big round eyes,  
 120) And following behind them brilliant schemer Simon  
 Saw there the student whom the Lord had loved, approaching,  
 The one who while at dinner with the God-born King  
 Reclined against his breast, and in an off-hand way  
 Asked knowledgeable Jesus who might be the man  
 Who would deliver him to sacrilegious Jews.  
 21 So, Peter, having seen him, asked: "What will become  
 "Of him, my fellow toiler?" 22 Jesus scolded him:  
 "If I desire that he stay here till I come,  
 "What difference to you? You follow me!" 23 This tale  
 130) Was spread by secret rumors by some ones who heard:  
 The boast that their companion would not be defeated  
 And would not see the common fate of death. But he  
 Did not say: he will not retire from life, but just:  
 If I choose him to stay until I choose to come,  
 What difference to you? Why do you ask? 24 That man  
 Who, trav'ling with them, saw, and did not merely hear,  
 The sacred deeds, is this eyewitness, this disciple.  
 And seeing all these things he wrote them in this book.  
 25 But wisely, he kept many other wonders sealed  
 140) Which Jesus did himself, and he was there to see,  
 Which if a man could write them down and lay them out,  
 So many newly written books never, I ween,  
 The gorgeous boundless universe could e'er contain.

# APPENDIX I

## Translator's Notes



# APPENDIX I

## Translator's Notes by Tony Prost

### HISTORY OF THE TEXT

Two great epic poems have come down to us across the centuries from the dusk of the Græco-Roman Empire, claiming the authorship of Nonnos of Panopolis. One is a colossal tour-de-force about the life and apotheosis of Bacchus, called, from the Greek, the *Dionysiaka*. The *Dionysiaka* is one-third again the length of the *Iliad* and almost twice the length of the *Odyssey*, and consists of a non-stop orgy of baroque Greek poetry detailing, at length, the exploits of Bacchus and his campaign against the Indians. Through the course of its 21,287 lines of dactylic hexameter, Nonnos includes virtually every myth about Bacchus, collected from the farthest reaches of the Roman Empire, including some deriving from Bacchus-like gods of the barbarians. It is a bravura extravaganza of the highest literary caliber. It might be what the young Mahler would have written, if he had been an ancient Greek poet.

The other poem said to be by Nonnos is the *Metabolê*, the Paraphrase of the Gospel of John. The Paraphrase is a short (3750 lines), restrained, elegant, sophisticated telling of the Fourth Gospel, also in the classical Homeric meter, using

the strictest rules of prosody, and following line by line the account from the canonic Gospel.

The separate survival of these two poems is the turn of luck. They were written almost sixteen hundred years ago, but the oldest surviving manuscript of the Paraphrase was only copied as late as the Eleventh Century and today contains less than half of the poem. Only a small handful of manuscripts exist, most of which derive from that same Eleventh Century copy. Considering the fate of most of the books ever written in the world, it is one of those coincidences that we are pleased to call a miracle that the text of this ancient document survives at all. Most of Nonnos' colleagues are known only by fragments, quotations, or obscure references in obscure ancient bibliographies.

Over the millennia, the Paraphrase has gone through periods of obscurity and periods of fame and appreciation. It was initially successful enough to have had copies survive the vicissitudes of barbarism and Islam until the Age of Print. Then, during the explosion of publishing in the century following Gutenberg, no fewer than eleven separate editions of the Paraphrase were published in Europe between 1501 and 1596. Some thirteen or fourteen subsequent editions have been published in the intervening centuries.

The first translation of the Paraphrase, into Latin, was by Aldo Manutius in Venice, in 1501. In 1838, Winkler translated it into German. In 1861 the erudite Comte de Marcellus offered a new edition, and a literary prose translation into French. (He also edited and translated the *Dionysiaka*.) Enrico Livrea of Florence is presently engaged in a new Greek edition, and a translation into Italian. In 1991,



Lee Francis Sherry submitted a literal English rendering, attached to his doctoral thesis that the attribution of the Paraphrase to Nonnos is mistaken. This present work is the first literary translation of the Paraphrase into English and the first generally published.

### **NONNOS' BIBLE**

Nonnos creates a fairly faithful paraphrase of the whole Gospel, with rare omissions (v. 1, 29; iv. 27, 41, 42; vi. 41-53; viii. 16, 18.) There are also occasional lacuna in the Greek text of the Paraphrase. These are indicated, with the editor who noted them.

More jarringly absent to the modern reader is the Pericope of the Adulteress, found in vii. 53—viii. 11. This omission tells us something about the version of the Bible available to Nonnos at the time. This story does not appear in the oldest texts we have. The episode is missing in the four earliest manuscripts of the Bible: the Codex Alexandrinus (referred to by scholars as "A"), in the Codex Sinaiticus (aleph), the Codex Vaticanus (B), the emended Codex Ephraemi (C); and in many other early copies it is indicated as being of doubtful authenticity. It does not appear in the Gothic translation, the Syrian translation of Cureton, the Coptic and Armenian translations, in most codices of the Peshito, or finally in the oldest manuscripts of the Itala. Vaticanus and Sinaiticus were once, although no longer, thought to be survivors of Constantine's great commission of fifty standardized Bibles. They are, however, a pretty likely picture of the text Nonnos was using, as a

priest in Alexandria. Importantly, Cyril of Alexandria did not treat of this story in his homiletics, nor did any of the Greek Fathers in their Commentaries.

On the other hand, St. Jerome, an early contemporary of Nonnos, claimed that the story was contained in many Greek and Latin codices. He included the episode in his new authoritative translation of the Bible, the Latin Vulgate, which was used by Western Christendom until the great Protestant vernacular Bibles began to appear. Among the Latin Fathers, Ambrose and Augustine included the pericope in their texts, although Hillary and Tertullian did not.

In short, the story was accepted early into the Western Tradition, but does not appear in the Eastern Tradition. The question is, did the Western Fathers introduce this peculiar story into the Gospel, or did the Eastern Fathers excise it? The explanation given by Augustine, and the simplest one, is that the Eastern Fathers omitted the story because of its lesson. They evidently did not want to dissuade their congregants from throwing stones at adulteresses.

Besides the missing pericope, Nonnos appears to adhere to the Alexandrine orthodoxy as preached by Cyril, following interpretations which seem to conform to Cyril's Commentaries. Some of these can be seen at i. 1, 16, 24, 42 (Peter's name); vi. 71 (the motive of Judas); vii. 19 (the reference to the sixth commandment); viii. 40 (the hospitality of Abraham); xii, 6, 10; xvii. 15; xix. 7.

Most significant in the context of the theological controversies of the Fifth Century is Nonnos' explicit use of the term Theotokos to describe Mary, in Chapter 2, lines 9 and 66, and Chapter 19, line 135. This is a plain

endorsement of the orthodoxy preached by Cyril of Alexandria, and an explicit rejection of the Nestorian heresy.

Nonnos' treatment of the Jews is also in conformity to Cyrillian orthodoxy.

### **NONNOS' TECHNIQUE**

With only a few exceptions, Nonnos follows the text of the Gospel verse for verse. In this translation, the text is divided into the familiar chapters, and the verses are indicated, as well as line numbers.

Generally his paraphrase technique is simply to cast the gospel into poetic language. He adds visual description, setting the scene for each episode. The story of the wedding feast at Cana is a perfect example of how he colorizes the bare narrative in John's second chapter. Chapters 18 and 19, which cover the passion and crucifixion, are remarkable for their drama and their character description. In this version, the scenes shift like in a movie, intercutting episodes for dramatic impact.

In the second appendix, "The Traditional Poetic Context of Nonnos", Professor Edwin Floyd, of the University of Pittsburgh, discusses Nonnos' use of language, and includes a number of examples of the sort of examination being done by scholars of this ancient text, and the disputes which still exist between editions, and among Nonnians.

I want to point out some particularly elegant Greek writing, appearing in Chapter 18, lines 175—181.

In the Douay-Rheims, John has Jesus saying, at verse 37, "For this was I born, and for this came I into the world; that I should give testimony to the truth. Everyone that is of

the truth heareth my voice. 38 Pilate saith unto him: What is truth?"

In the Gospel, each iteration of the word truth uses the Greek word "*aletheia*."

In paraphrasing this section, Nonnos uses four different words for "truth":

*etêtimiês* true, genuine, real

*alêtheiês* true, sincere, frank, obvious, honest

*apseudea* true, without falsehood

*atrekiês* true, exact, strict, real, evidence

175) . . . And Jesus answered back:

"Unto this was I born, and for this I arrived:

"To be a witness to eternal verity (*etêtimiês*);

"Whoever can endure the weight of honesty (*alêtheiês*)

"Will hear my tongue speak out unperjured (*apseudea*) words.

180) 38 And Pilate was exasperated and shot back:

"What are the simple facts (*atrekiês*)?"

Similarly, in Chapter 21, when Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him, Nonnos makes each repetition ask a slightly different question.

"O Simon, as you are an honest Son of John,  
"Do you, more than all of your other friends, love me?"

"O Simon, Son of John, who sired brilliant sons,  
"Do you love me alone, more than all of your friends?"

"O Simon, scion of your pious father, John,  
"Say, do you love me more than all the others do?"

Nonnos uses a number of Homerisms in his paraphrase, idioms used characteristically by Homer, and used by Nonnos as one might toss off an allusion to Shakespeare. In the Chapter 19, where the Jews reject Jesus as their King, and assert that they have no King but Cæsar, Nonnos adds the epithet "Shepherd of the People," a recurring title for Agamemnon in the Iliad. When heroes die and fall, Homer frequently describes their dead bodies with the phrase "a dead weight on the ground", a phrase which is quoted by Nonnos to describe the stone which once covered Jesus' tomb. And, when the second thief's legs are broken, Nonnos says it "cast the villain headlong down to bitter fate," another Homeric phrase used when a man is killed in battle. An unfamiliar adjective used several times by Nonnos to describe Jesus and his attributes is "ambrosial." This is a Homeric term used solely to describe the Olympian gods. It means "immortal", and is constructed in the same way as the English word: a(m)-brosial, im-mortal. The "brosial" derives from the word "*brotos*", which means mortal, doomed to die. The Olympians were said to dine on Ambrosia.

One additional note about the text. In chapter 18, line 87, appears the brief sentence: "It was a dark and stormy night." This is a literal translation of Nonnos' Greek, and predates Bulwer-Lytton's uses of the phrase by 1400 years.

## THE TRANSLATION

The poem consists of some 3,750 lines of dactylic hexameter, about twenty per cent longer than Beowulf.

Nonnos adds no new episodes and does not change the order of any of the stories. He does inflate, but conservatively, the Gospel text, and where he does, by this little bit he brightens the otherwise bald narrative of John, just enough to add color to the scene, just enough to add humanity to the characters.

Nonnos' foot is the dactyl, his line the hexameter. This appears to be the natural rhythm of the Greek language, in the same way the natural rhythm of the English language is iambic, used by Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton and Pope in their extended narrative poems.

Some poets have attempted to use the Homeric meter in English poetry, but it is generally not successful. The most famous example is Longfellow's *Evangeline*. Here are the first few lines of the Iliad rendered into dactylic hexameter by the present translator:

Mania, fury and rage of Achilles, O goddess, I charge you  
Sing, of the Son of Peléus, sing, of the raft of destruction  
Wrought by his rage, hurling multitudes of the Achaeans to  
Hades,  
Souls of the strong, of the heroes, but leaving their corpses to  
camp dogs;  
Carrion birds served the will of Zeus Pater, who brought to  
conclusion  
What first commenced when Achilles stood up against King  
Agamemnon,  
Leader of men and the Son of Atréus against prince Achilles.

This is a rather athletic line, perfectly suited for the material of barbaric warfare and violent passion. In

performance, the meter is vigorous and flexible enough to provide variety. Ancient singers accompanied themselves with a lyre, riffing *ad libitum*, much as a jazz poet might have a guitar behind him. By all accounts, the earliest Homeric performances can be compared to modern slam poetry in its vigor, or even more, rap, with its complex and extended rhythms. One must not imagine Homer sitting around in white robes like in a Maxfield Parrish painting. He was entertaining drunken young warriors gathered around a campfire. In classical times, Homeric bards performed in theatres before audiences as large as a Superbowl crowd. The Iliad and the Odyssey were performed at the Olympics.

Compare the dactylic hexameter with Pope's heroic couplets, of the same opening lines:

Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring  
Of woes unnumber'd, heavenly goddess, sing!  
That wrath which hurl'd to Pluto's gloomy reign  
The souls of mighty chiefs, untimely slain;  
Whose limbs, unburied on the naked shore,  
Devouring dogs and hungry vultures tore:  
Since great Achilles and Atrides strove,  
Such was the doom, and such the will of Jove!

I chose the iamb as the foot most natural to the English language.

The hexameter line, as opposed to the usual pentameter, was a decision made for several reasons.

Primarily, my desire was, as far as possible, to render a line for line translation, and I was able to achieve that for

more than ninety-nine per cent of the work. Occasionally, because of the constraints of even the flexible English language, I was obliged to place a word in a different line than the Greek has it, and very rarely did I have to use more than one line of English to render one line of Greek. Because I wanted a line by line translation, I quickly discovered that a pentameter line was too short. I simply needed an extra foot.

What I found after working with the hexameter line for some time, was that its additional length, actually twenty per cent longer than a pentameter, turned out to be ideal for the weight and dignity of the text being translated. Iambic pentameter, particularly as heroic couplets, makes for aphoristic units of two or four lines, at which Mr. Pope excelled. Iambic hexameter, on the other hand allows for a complete thought to be expressed in one single line, instead of having to fill a jaunty couplet, and weightier thoughts have plenty of room to be expressed in two or three lines, and do not need to be expanded into four lines to complete a rhyme. When I translated the *Batrachomyomachia* into heroic couplets, the line count went from about 370 in the Greek to 440 in the English. The translation of the Paraphrase, on the other hand, has the same number of lines as the Greek.

Moreover, I found that the hexameter line, when appropriate, can work like extended prose writing. Twenty lines of Pope or Dryden bounce along sprightly, and you cannot forget you are reading poetry even with Miltonian blank verse. It is Shakespeare in his dramas who best turns written iambic pentameter into spoken prose. For some reason, perhaps because of the ubiquity of the sonnet form, the mind reading iambic pentameter comes to a full stop at the end of each line. (i.e., Shall I compare thee to a summer's



day?) The sixth foot of the hexameter line fills that beat and allows a seamless move to the next line. One can think of it as an extended legato line, instead of a series of phrases.

Finally, I wanted to create the same effect in the modern reader as Nonnos' poem would have had on his own readers. That is, I wanted to use a formal poetic style, with a classical feeling and vocabulary, but with a modern sensibility. Consequently, as much as possible I translated Nonnos' own idioms directly. This poem is a sentence by sentence translation of the Greek. Nonnos was fond of extended sentences with layers of participial phrases, and this is reflected in the sentence structure as it appears in the translation. Oftentimes, in fact most of the time, Nonnos did not use simple adverbs. Instead of saying "He went quickly to the Temple" or "The Hebrews asked in reply", Nonnos characteristically phrases it as "He went to the Temple on swift feet." "The Hebrews asked of him in these responsive words." "You have not strength to follow on pursuing feet."

This formulation will become familiar as the reader proceeds through the poem.

One of the issues involved in producing this translation is that the words used by Nonnos do not have the sixteen hundred years of accretions of Christian exegesis which our Bible has today. This dilemma appears regularly, of course, in a text based on a scripture. An example may illustrate. The word used by Nonnos to describe Jesus' companions is *mathêtês*. This has come, over the centuries, to be translated in Bibles as "Disciples" or "Apostles." However, in 450 A.D., the word was an ordinary word meaning "student." A student of Hypatia in Alexandria was her *mathêtês*. I have chosen most of the time to use the word Student, although

sometimes for variety or metrical considerations, I have used Disciple or Apostle. An equivalent of the word might be the Arab word *talib*, the *taliban* being students of religious masters. I often used an English word which was intended specifically to jar the reader away from the resonance of the traditional translations of the New Testament

My working text was the Scheindler edition, published by Teubner in 1886. From the internet, I found Marcellus' 1861 edition, with his French prose translation, and my prize, the 1589 edition by Nanzius, with his Latin translation. This edition also contains almost 400 additional lines written and inserted by Nanzius, to fill in the verses omitted by Nonnos. The book I obtained was full of marginal notes scribbled by some owner prior to me, who had studied the same volume, probably when it was new, four hundred years ago, and drawn who knows what conclusions from it. He was an intermediary, transmitting information in a centuries long intellectual chain beginning with Nonnos at the beginning of the Fifth Century and reaching me at the beginning of the Twenty First Century. In fact, that chain begins with Homer, 1200 years before Christ, and includes the Evangelist as well. And now I pass the next link on to you, dear reader.

Besides the texts, I used Liddell and Scott's Abridged Lexicon of 1881, and the huge Donnegan's Greek and English Lexicon of 1832, in which I found every rare word which Liddell and Scott did not contain. I could not have done this work without the resources offered by the Perseus Project, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>.

The final draft of the poem was completed at Burning Man 2003, in Black Rock City, Nevada.

# APPENDIX II

Edwin D. Floyd



## APPENDIX II

### The Traditional Poetic Context of Nonnos

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Not as often read these days as many other ancient Greek poets, Nonnos is nevertheless arguably one of the most skilled craftsmen in the entire ancient Greek poetic tradition. Some might even say his work exhibits too much skill, as he imposes several layers of metrical and poetical subtlety upon his Classical models.

Metrically, any line of the *Dionysiaca* or the *Paraphrase of John* could pass as fundamentally Homeric. If one takes 10 to 15 lines running in either poem, though, there may begin to be a sense of something alien to the Homeric dactylic hexameter. For one thing, Nonnos does not make much use of the repeated formulaic phrases which are so familiar a feature of Homeric composition. Beyond this, there is an additional dissonance with Homer in the fact that, although any line of Nonnos could pass Homeric metrical muster, the reverse is not true. For many important metrical phenomena, Nonnos has his own special rules, more or less alien to anything in Homer. These affect matters such as the occurrence of spondees and the use of elision. For example, Nonnos allows a maximum of one spondee in the first half of the line and one in the second, with none at all in the fifth foot, whereas Homer allows pretty much any pattern of spondees. As for elision, Nonnos allows this only with

prepositions and conjunctions—but not with nouns, pronouns, adjective, and verbs, all of which Homer allows to be pretty freely elided. There are also other Nonnian rules, including a pervasive, if subtle connection with the written pitch accent, at both the middle and end of the line; in contrast, almost the first thing that students are told about scanning Homer or any other author in the regular Classical canon is that they should ignore the written accent. (For details concerning Nonnos' metrics, see the introduction, in French, to the *Dionysiaca* in Francis Vian's Budé text, *Les Dionysiaques*, Paris: les Belles Lettres, vol. 1, pp. 1-lv.) Overall, only about 30% of lines in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* would emerge from a cursory glance as fulfilling Nonnos' rules. Some of these Homeric lines, moreover, would fail a closer examination in terms of the position of the cæsure, additional accent rules, etc.

To be sure, Nonnos did not invent his rules out of nothing. There is even a fairly strong tendency in Homer—violated only about 5% of the time—to avoid a fifth foot spondee. In the Hellenistic period, about midway chronologically between Homer and Nonnos, one can begin to observe distinctly more regularity in the placement of spondees and in matters of cæsure, elision, etc. Nonnos' full metrical package, though, is a fifth century A.D. invention, elaborating and, so to speak, perfecting various previous tendencies.

When one thinks about it, this fact about Nonnos exacerbates an already enigmatic situation. If one merely speaks of "Nonnos" and "the *Dionysiaca*" and "the *Paraphrase of John*", one can sort of finesse the differences between the two poems. The thoroughgoing consistency in metrical

technique between them, though, emphasizes the fact that they are by the same author, writing in exactly the same style. But how can this be?

The *Dionysiaca* is pagan, solidly based in Greek mythology and Classical culture. Moreover, even as it shows a metrical technique which, in its specific refinements, is quite different from Homer's, the fact that the *Dionysiaca* contains exactly 48 Books is almost surely significant. Nonnos' total of 48 Books suggests that he was somehow trying to combine the effect of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (each comprising 24 Books) into one grand composition. (For an overall treatment of Nonnos' utilization of Homeric patterns in the *Dionysiaca*, see Robert Shorrock, *The Challenge of Epic: Allusive Engagement in the Dionysiaca of Nonnos*, Leiden: Brill, 2001.) Running to somewhat over 20,000 lines, the *Dionysiaca* is an expansive treatment of mythological themes. Starting with a great deal of Olympian and Theban background in books 1-2 and 3-8 respectively, it finally deals with the birth of Dionysus from Zeus' thigh in Book 9. After discussion of Dionysus' youthful exploits, the middle portion, from Book 14 through Book 40, deals, off and on, with Dionysus' conquests in far-off India. After various other matters, we finally conclude with Dionysus' apotheosis and reception into Olympus in Book 48.

The *Paraphrase of John* is comparably expansive, but it would seem that that is about as much as one can say in likening it to the *Dionysiaca*. In its own way, the *Paraphrase* is just that—a straightforward paraphrase of the *Gospel according to John*. There are many added flourishes, but no substantive modification of the gospel message. One of many "flourishes", for example, is the phrase "Light come

from light" in Chapter 1, line 3. At this point, we are still in Nonnos' rendition of *John* 1.1, and his gospel source does not use the word *phôs* "light" until *John* 1.4, "That life was the light of men". Nonnos' phrasing at Chapter 1, line 3, though, is thoroughly orthodox; in fact, it is almost straight out of the Nicene Creed. Likewise, the virgin mother of *Paraphrase*, Chapter 2, lines 9 and 66 is not, actually, in *John*—but it is perfectly straightforward in a Christian poem. For that matter, the name Mary, used by Nonnos at Chapter 2, line 23 and elsewhere, is not used at all by John to refer to Jesus' mother. The name, though, is clearly acceptable in a Christian context.

An obvious explanation of the apparent contrast between the *Dionysiaca* and the *Paraphrase* might seem to be Nonnos' conversion from paganism to Christianity in the pivotal fifth century A.D., with the *Dionysiaca* coming first and the *Paraphrase* later. A conceivable alternative to this scenario is apostasy, with Nonnos first writing the *Paraphrase* and then backsliding to compose the exuberantly pagan *Dionysiaca*. Also, still another possibility is that the metrical and stylistic similarities between the two poems do not, after all, demonstrate an identity of authorship. It might be that the real Nonnos wrote one poem—presumably the longer, more traditional *Dionysiaca*—, and another, an imitator, used exactly the same metrical technique in the *Paraphrase of John*. Or, if one follows this line of reasoning, it might be better to say that the "real Nonnos" was the author of the *Paraphrase*, inasmuch as the name Nonnos was a more or less specifically Christian one in fifth century Egypt, being derived from a Coptic word meaning "pure" or "holy".



Rather than any of the foregoing alternatives, a good deal of current scholarship indicates something which may initially seem counter-intuitive. The work of scholars such as Enrico Livrea and Francis Vian suggests that Nonnos' pagan poem draws, in poetically fundamental ways, upon stylistic features which were first developed for the Christian one. If this is so, one really cannot separate the two world views which they seem to represent. Livrea, "Il poeta ed il vescovo", in *Prometheus* 13, 1987, 97-123, for example, develops the idea that an orthodox Christian (in fact, a bishop of Edessa) composed both poems as an elaboration of the Classical cultural patrimony of the fifth century A.D. Likewise, Vian, "'Mártus' chez Nonnos de Panopolis: étude de sémantique et de chronologie," in *Revue des Etudes Grecques* 110, 1997, 143-160, discusses the word *martus* "witness." Vian's argument is that the use of this typically Johannine word in the *Dionysiaca* is crucially dependent on the contexts in which the word appears in the *Paraphrase*.

From the perspective of many centuries of Christian hegemony and/or exclusiveness, this sort of relationship between the *Paraphrase* and the *Dionysiaca* may seem outré. It would not be so strange, though, in the transitional period represented by the mid-fifth century, before Justinian's closing of the schools of Athens in 529. In the century before Nonnos, for example, the uncompromisingly orthodox Gregory of Nazianzus had made an extensive use of traditional poetic formulas and patterns in his poetic oeuvre, and he also included occasional allusions to myth. (Gregory is perhaps best known for his prose sermons and other theological works, but he also wrote a good deal of verse, in

dactylic hexameter, elegiac couplets, iambic trimeter, and other Classical meters.)

In the particular case of Nonnos, an attractive paradigm for his procedure, in his poetic production as a whole, is Parmenides, a fifth century B.C. pre-Socratic philosopher-poet. Parmenides' poem *On Nature* consists of two apparently incompatible sections—*Aletheia* "Truth" and *Doxa* "Opinion". In the first section of Parmenides' poem, Being is all there is. It is absolutely unchanging, neither growing nor diminishing, and since there is nothing except Being, there is no possibility of motion at all. (Besides Parmenides' own composition *On Nature*, another important source of information for his argumentation concerning Being is provided by the paradoxes propounded by his student Zeno, e.g., concerning the arrow which cannot move or the runner who can never get to the end of a race course—because they first have to cover half the distance, and then half that distance, etc.) In contrast to "Truth", though, the second section of Parmenides' poem, viz., "Opinion", refers to two elements, Night and Light (or Fire). Moreover, this section, in which Being is divided into two elements, assumes the reality of a good deal of motion in the phenomena which it attempts to explain. Not only does this flatly contradict the premises and conclusions alike of "Truth", but Parmenides also introduces "Opinion" at fr. 8.50-52 as being specifically false—a "deceitful arrangement of words":

*en tõi soi pauô piston logon êde noêma*  
*amphis alêtheiês; doxas d' apo toude broteias*  
*manthane, kosmon emôn epeôn apatêlon akouôn.*

With this I cease my trustworthy account and thought  
concerning Truth; from here on, learn mortal Opinions,  
hearkening to the deceitful arrangement of my words.

Just as there is a clearly stated contradiction between Parmenides' "Truth" and "Opinion", the Christian reader of the *Paraphrase* and *Dionysiaca* could correspondingly view the one poem as true, while the other presented the commonly held opinions of ancient mythology. Moreover, beyond the fifth century A.D. Christian reader of Nonnos' oeuvre, we can imagine Nonnos himself as working on the two poems simultaneously, with the idea that they would produce a comprehensive, if paradoxical poetic effect, like that achieved by his distant predecessor Parmenides.

Although Parmenides' *On Nature* has come down to us in a fragmentary condition, we are fortunate in having the precise point of transition between "Truth" and "Opinion" at fr. 8.52. Parmenides' phrasing, quoted above, may seem extremely curt and paradoxical, but it is actually poetically resonant, with quite a few parallels in his poetic predecessors in the eighth through sixth centuries B.C.

At Homer, *Odyssey* 8.179, for example, we find the same combination of *kosmos* "order, arrangement" with the root \*ep-. (The root \*ep- has a basic connection with speaking, and it underlies both the verb *eipein* "to speak, to say" and the noun *epos* "word"). In the *Odyssey* passage, the disguised Odysseus has been reluctant to compete in the Phæacians' games. At *Odyssey* 8.159-164, though, Euryalos taunts him, saying he is more like a merchant than an athlete. As Odysseus puts it at 8.179, Euryalos has "spoken not in accordance with order", *eipôn ou kata kosmon*; nevertheless,

there is a positive dimension to Euryalos' apparent gaucherie, inasmuch as his form of speech breaks through Odysseus' self-imposed diffidence, provoking him to compete—very successfully—in the discus throw.

A century or so after Homer, Solon, fr. 1.2, drew on the same combination of *kosmos* with the root \**ep-*. The Athenians had often been defeated by the Megarians when fighting over the island of Salamis. As a result, the Athenians passed a law forbidding any public discussion of the matter. Solon, however, circumvented this legislation by composing a poem about Salamis. Pretending to be out of his mind, he recited his poem in the agora. Actually, of course, Solon was not crazy at all, and his poem was an effective call to arms against Megara; in fact, it so impressed his fellow-citizens that they once again went to war with Megara and were finally successful, capturing (or regaining) Salamis. Poetically speaking, though, how could Solon get his composition off the ground? He does so through the use of a traditional formula *kosmon epeôn* 'arrangement of words' in the second line of the introductory elegiac couplet of his poem:

*autos kêrux êlthon aph' himertês Salaminos*  
*kosmon epeôn ôidên ant' agorês themenos*

"I myself as herald have come from lovely Salamis,  
Putting together an arrangement of words—song  
instead of prose".

Drawing on the same traditional pattern, Parmenides likewise uses the phrase *kosmon emôn epeôn* "arrangement of my words" at fr. 8.52. The preceding, apparently closely

argued presentation seems to show that Being is unchanging. If he is to discuss changeable natural phenomena (as any self-respecting pre-Socratic philosopher would be expected to), Parmenides is therefore at a sort of impasse. He must somehow shift gears from unchanging Being to mutable natural phenomena, and he does so through the poetically resonant combination of *kosmon* with *\*ep-* that Homer had used to get Odysseus into competition in *Odyssey*, Book 8 and that Solon used to circumvent an apparently cut-and-dried legal prohibition in fr. 1.2.

The same pattern is also plainly utilized by Nonnos—if one runs directly from the *Paraphrase* to the *Dionysiaca*. The *Paraphrase* concludes (Chapter 21, lines 142-143) as follows, as it sums up the manifold accomplishments of Jesus:

*oude kai auton  
elpomai aglaomorphon atermona kosmon aeirai.*

"never, I ween,  
The gorgeous boundless universe could e'er contain."

The *Dionysiaca* opens as follows:

*eipe, thea, Kronidao diaktoron aithopos augês*

"Speak, goddess, of Cronus' son's messenger with blazing light."

If one runs directly from the *Paraphrase* to the *Dionysiaca* (and so, in a sense, treats them as two parts of a single poetic endeavor), one has *kosmon* ... / *eipe* ("universe ... / speak").

With one intervening word, we have exactly the etymological pattern of Parmenides' *kosmon ... epeôn* "arrangement ... of words". Moreover, while parallels exist in Homer and Solon as well as Parmenides, Nonnos' pattern more specifically resembles Parmenides, fr. 8.52, inasmuch as Parmenides and Nonnos alike have one intervening word in the *kosmon ... \*ep-* combination, whereas Homer has two intervening words, and Solon simply juxtaposes the two etymological items.

There is also another specific point of comparison with Parmenides at *Paraphrase*, Chapter 21, line 143. Seemingly, the word *kosmon* is used quite differently by Parmenides and by Nonnos in the two passages under discussion. Parmenides uses it in the traditional Homeric sense of "order, arrangement", while Nonnos reflects the Johannine sense of "world". Even this, though, is a subtle Parmenidean resonance, inasmuch as Parmenides elsewhere (fr. 4.3) uses *kosmos* in the new sense "world", which was wide-spread by John's (and Nonnos') time; in fact, according to Theophrastus, Parmenides was the first Greek author to use *kosmos* in this sense.

There are also quite a few other arguably Parmenidean resonances in Nonnos' *Paraphrase of John*. Some of these are listed by Domenico Accorinti, *Nonno di Panopoli, Parafrasi del vangelo di S. Giovanni, Canto XX. Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento*, Pisa: Scuola Normale superiore, 1996. (Accorinti's work on Chapter 20 is part of an ongoing Italian series, inspired by Livrea, which has thus far produced editions of Chapters 1, 2, 18, and 20.)

The beginning of the *Paraphrase* runs as follows (Prost's translation, with a slight modification in the third line):

Ere time, ere space, ere speech dwelt the archaic Word,  
God's like in age and nature, motherless, this Son,  
The Word, with self-born God, as Light come from light,  
Inseparate, interminable and enthroned  
With God, conseated on God's sempiternal chair:

As is often the case with ancient texts, there is a problem about establishing the correct text of the above passage. The translation as given above follows an emendation which I suggested in a paper read at the 20th International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Paris in August, 2001, "What light do Nonnos, *Paraphrase of John 1.3* and the Nicene Creed shed on one another?"

For line 3, the manuscript text is as follows:

*kai Logos autophutoio Theou, phôs, ek phaeos phôs*

(Literally, this is something like "And the Word of the self-born God, Light, from Light, Light".)

Partly, perhaps, because of the apparent redundancy in words for "light", but mainly for metrical reasons, Scheindler's 1881 text, which modern scholars tend to rely on, adopts Koechly's emendation, replacing the first *phôs* with *gonos* "offspring":

*kai Logos autophutoio Theou gonos, ek phaeos phôs*

The metrical problem is that a long monosyllable at position 8 (represented by the first *phôs*) in the dactylic

hexameter is, more or less, forbidden by Nonnos' package of metrical rules. A connective such as *hôs* ("like, as"), though, would be possible. (*Dionysiaca* 18.205 offers a close parallel for the resulting sentence structure.) Accordingly, it is attractive to conclude that the correct text is as follows:

*Achronos ên, akichêtos, en arrêtoi Logos archêi  
isophuês Genetêros homêlikos, huios amêtôr,  
kai Logos Autophutoio; Theou, d' hôs ek phaeos phôs,  
Patros eên ameristos, atermoni sunthronos hedrêi;  
kai Theos hupsigenethlos eên Logos. Houtos ap' archês ...*

It involves a certain amount of repunctuation, but the reading with *d' hôs* is otherwise much closer to the manuscript *phôs* than Koechly's *gonos*. It also fits the context well. With *d' hôs*, the adjective *Autophutoio* "Self-born" (capitalized in our modern typography) will be another reference to God, paralleling *Genetêros* "Father" in the preceding line. Then, in line 3, *Theou* "God" will introduce a new phrase, to be completed with *Patros* "Father" at the beginning of line 4. Such run-on of thought from one line to the next is fairly frequent in Nonnos, and in this instance it would be particularly effective as a way of stating the fundamental identity of Father and Son, like light which emanates from some source and yet is identical with that source.

Overall, the first five lines of Nonnos' Paraphrase could be characterized as just an elaboration on *John* 1.1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." Added on to the gospel text, though, Nonnos piles up a number of negatives, so as to express the idea that the Logos "Word" somehow stands outside the ordinary world of



experience. The poem begins with the word *achronos* "timeless", and there are five more negative compounds with alpha-privative (*akichêtos*, *arrêtôi*, *amêtôr*, *ameristos*, and *atermoni*) in the next few lines. These six negatives are translated by Tony Prost as "Ere time", "ere space", "ere speech", "motherless" "inseparate", and "interminable". The specific terms are different, but the pattern, with a number of attributes, all expressed with alpha-privative, closely parallels Parmenides' description of Being in 8.3-4, where there are four negatives in close succession, viz., *agenêton*, *anôlethron*, *atremes*, and *ateleston* "ungenerated, imperishable, unmoving, unending". (Also, it may be noted, the adjective *atermona* "boundless" in the last line of the *Paraphrase* at Chapter 21, line 143 is a comparable negative compound; thus, it reinforces a Parmenidean resonance for *kosmon* in this line.)

Of course, Parmenides is not the only source that Nonnos draws on to produce a Christian poem with rich Classical reminiscences. Besides Hellenistic and later authors, such as Theocritus, Callimachus, and Babrius, whose metrical practice Nonnos refined in formulating his own strict metrical rules, the *Paraphrase* also draws on other earlier poets such as Hesiod and the authors of the *Homeric Hymns*, along with Homer himself; also, in a way, Nonnos draws, more or less globally, on the overall Greek poetic tradition represented by these various authors.

An interesting example of Nonnos' overall use of his poetic tradition is found at *Paraphrase*, Chapter 6, line 88. Starting at line 70, there is a description of a storm on Lake Tiberias, with reference to Jesus' walking on water at lines 75-79. Outside this specific point in the story, but still part of the overall narrative, is the word *himassomenês* "battered",

used to refer to the shore at 6.88: "Close by the damp and battered Shore". In this instance, the poetic traditions on which Nonnos is drawing are ancient indeed. As Calvert Watkins, *How to Kill A Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 448-459 points out, the Greek words *himas* "thong" and *himassein* "to lash, to beat, to batter", both cognate with Hittite *ishimas* "rope, cord", fit into a broad Indo-European pattern of vocabulary associated with the narration of a god's dealing with a monstrous opponent. In archaic Greek poetry, for example, Zeus's conflict with Typhoeus (or Typhon) is highlighted with this vocabulary at Homer, *Iliad* 2.782; Hesiod, *Theogony*, 857; and *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, 340. The pattern is also used with Typhoeus in Books 1-2 of Nonnos' *Dionysiaca*, as Watkins points out. Additionally, we find the same vocabulary, in a passage not discussed by Watkins (who does not consider the *Paraphrase* at all in *How to Kill a Dragon*) at *Paraphrase*, Chapter 6, line 88. Just as with Typhoeus and Zeus in the *Dionysiaca*, we have here an overall context of some meteorological phenomenon (the storm on Lake Tiberias) being controlled by a more powerful divine force (Jesus).

Another passage, Chapter 18, lines 126-129 (based on *John* 18.26), is worth quoting at length, inasmuch as it illustrates several examples of Nonnos' sophisticated metrical and poetic technique:

*ou su peleis Christoio diaktoros? ou se met' autou  
 eidon egô druoentos homestion endothi kêpou?  
 kai tritatêi palinorsos ethêmoni Petros iôêi  
 Iêsoun apeeipe, kai ekragen euthus alektôr.*

"But are not you a minister of Christ? With Him  
"Did I not see you walking in the woodsy copse?"  
And now the third time Peter gave the same response:  
He disowned Jesus. Forthwith crew the cock.

The first of the quoted lines illustrates a seeming inconcinnity, frequent in Nonnos' *Paraphrase*, in the use of the word "Christ". The term of course means "Anointed One, Messiah", and it is used in the *Gospel according to John* only in this sense. Accordingly, at *John* 18.26, where Peter's interlocutor Malchus does not regard Jesus as the Messiah, John has simply, "Did I not see you?" Nonnos' usage, though, draws on the pattern of Homeric divine names such as "Phoebus Apollo" or "Pallas Athena". In particular, Homer refers to Apollo, pretty much without variation in meaning, as "Phoebus Apollo" or "Phoebus" or "Apollo". Likewise, Nonnos uses "Jesus" or "Christ" or "Christ Jesus", even in contexts in which the latter two might not seem appropriate to the context. (For metrical reasons, though, the seemingly most straightforward of all, viz., "Jesus Christ", does not appear in the *Paraphrase*.)

Still another metrical resonance of Nonnos' usage with that found with Homeric "Apollo" is, in part, illustrated in these four lines. In the case of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the three-syllable name *Apollôn* "Apollo" can have, depending on meter, a long or short initial alpha, and Nonnos exhibits exactly the same sort of thing with the name *Iêsous* "Jesus". In this name (three syllables in Greek), the initial vowel (iota) can be metrically long or short, just as is the case with Homeric *Apollôn*. As usual, though, Nonnos imposes his

own rules, much stricter than anything one finds in Homer. The name *Iêsous* can appear in only two metrical positions—either at the beginning of the line, in which case the iota is long (as in Chapter 18, line 129, quoted above), or at the end of the line, in which case it is short.

There is also an effective reuse of an archaic pattern concerning truth and falsehood in *Paraphrase*, Chapter 18, lines 126-129. At Hesiod, *Theogony*, 35, we find the phrase *peri drun ê peri petrên* "concerning oak or rock". The two nouns have sharply contrasting etymological associations with truth and falsehood. *Drus* "oak" has a reasonably straightforward association with the idea of steadfastness and sturdiness, illustrated in the English cognates "tree" and "true". *Petrê* "rock" might also seem to fit into the same semantic area of resonance—especially if one thinks of Peter as the firm and true "rock" on which the church is founded, as stated at *Matthew* 16.18. Actually, though, the archaic Greek association of *petrê* is just the opposite. The connection is with falsehood, probably through a circuitous etymology with *piptô* "fall" (appropriate to "rock" as something which can make one stumble). At *Theogony* 35, Hesiod is pretty clearly playing on these contrasting etymological associations of "oak" and "rock", inasmuch as, just a few lines previously, at lines 27-28, there is a statement by the Muses that they can speak both truth and falsehood. Writing more than a thousand years after Hesiod, Nonnos too develops the same etymological pattern. The context is Peter's three times denying Christ, and Nonnos combines *druentos* "woodsy" with the proper name *Petros* "Peter, Rock". Here, then, just as in Hesiod, *Theogony* 35, some authority (Hesiod's Muses and Nonnos' Peter, respectively) is

connected with the possibility of being false, and just like Hesiod, Nonnos incorporates both of the inherited elements *dru-* and *petr-*, first in the adjective *druoentos* and then in the proper name *Petros*.

One more, among many instances of Nonnos' poetic skill in the use of traditional phrasing and an accompanying counterpoint with Classical sources is to be found in his references to Dawn. There is a well-known Homeric formula, occurring twice in the *Iliad* and 20 times in the *Odyssey*, "When early born rosy-fingered Dawn appeared". As is the case with most full-fledged Homeric formulas, this particular combination never appears in the *Paraphrase*. Through eleven different phrases which are used for the coming of dawn, though, there is a notable metrical consistency, with *êôs* "Dawn" appearing only at the end of the line, just as in the Homeric formula. In the *Paraphrase*, the word preceding *êôs* varies from one passage to another, with eight different patterns in the eleven lines in which *êôs* appears. None of the first ten of these is particularly reminiscent of the Homeric pattern. In the very last occurrence, though, at Chapter 21, line 19 (based on *John* 21.4), the Homeric word *rhododaktulos* "rosy-fingered" is picked up in the phrase "when the dawn with rosy beams (*rhodeais aktisin*) sliced through the dark". The setting in Chapter 21 is that the resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples, but they do not initially recognize him. The Classically tuned Christian reader of the *Paraphrase*, though, would recognize more, for as Nonnos here echoes Homeric *rhododaktulos* "rosy-fingered" with *rhodeais aktisin* "with rosy beams", he thereby imparts to the scene a special quality, which is at once resonant and mysterious.



# APPENDIX III

Ron Newbold





## APPENDIX III

### Nonnus, Dionysus and Christianity

Ron Newbold,

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Nonnus of Panopolis in Egypt comes at the end of the great line of Greek and Roman writers of epic in antiquity. But the last, Fifth Century efflorescence was also the greatest if we judge solely by length. Nonnus' 48 book *Dionysiaca*, a 21,288 line doorstopper, easily exceeded Homer's 15,000+ line *Iliad* and 12,000+ line *Odyssey*. This alone merits attention but Nonnus is also a formidably gifted poet who was not entirely devoid of his senses in challenging Homer (his 48 book epic is statement clear enough, given that Homer's works together filled 24 books) for the title of premier Greek epicist. He may not exhibit the memorable characterisation and satisfying plot structure of his illustrious predecessor and exemplar but he reshapes the epic tradition, in part by drawing on a diversity of genres, such as pastoral, panegyric, novel, epyllion and didactic.

Almost anything, so long as it was in Greek was drawn upon, for it is not at all certain that Nonnus knew Latin or read Roman works. Common criticisms of his treatment of the career of Dionysus include rhetorical excess and monotonous antithesis, extravagant imagery, poor taste, disjointed structure and "a rambling, wild mélange of myths and phantasy" (Lind 1938: 58). Recent judgments, even without resorting to chaos theory (Newbold 1999), on the

structure of the poem have been much kinder and demonstrate that there is a clear overall structure, even if it is not particularly tight, surrendering as it often does to ecphrases and diversions. Basically, the structure is: Books 1-6, the pre-Dionysian world, Books 7-12 the birth and growth to manhood of Dionysus, Books 13–40 the Indian war, Books 41-48 Dionysus' return to and progress through Greece.

Beginning at the top with Dionysus, the characters do not engage the reader. Some are pleasant and sympathetic but mostly, whether they are gods, demi-gods or humans, they are weakly characterised and are unpleasantly childish, hysterical, frenzied, narcissistic, cruel and puppet-like. One looks in vain in Dionysus (being immortal poses many problems for an author emulating others who based their works on heroes and heroic exploits) and in Deriades, the king of the Indians and his chief mortal antagonist, for the passion and poignancy which Homer brings not only to his portrayal of Achilles and Hector but also to his other characters. Dionysus is frequently, and unexpectedly, mired in passivity.

What one does find, however, is a free flow of fantasy that informs characterisation, speeches, action scenes and descriptions; and scenes and objects that reveal a largely infantile stream of consciousness, to a degree that probably exceeds any other extant antique author. A number of psychopathologies are on display, including sado-masochism, voyeurism, fetishism and breast fixation. One might say that Nonnus attunes to and illustrates Dionysian consciousness, thereby seeing Dionysus from the inside. He does so in such a wholehearted and elaborate way that it is

hard to believe it is only an assumed persona. The significance of so much archaic, primitive behaviour for the issue of the *Dionysiaca* vis-à-vis Christianity will become apparent in the final paragraph.

Nietzsche popularised the idea of parallels between Dionysus and Christ, the suffering, persecuted saviours who came to earth to aid humanity. (Dionysus was persecuted, opposed and periodically thwarted by his “stepmother” Hera). Nonnus describes the birth and murder of Zagreus, Son of Zeus and Persephone, whose heart survived to be implanted in Semele when she conceived Dionysus after being impregnated by Zeus. In that sense, Dionysus is a twice-born god, commissioned by his father to reduce the pain and suffering of humanity by introducing viticulture and freer, more revelrous dance. To a degree, therefore, he is a redeemer and liberator god, Lysios the Loosener, who eventually fulfils his destiny and proves himself worthy to take his place as one of the 12 Olympians.

The gifts of Dionysus were the latest in a series of divine boons, such as agriculture and writing, that advanced humanity and civilisation. Dionysus challenged and subverted old ways. Alcohol, particularly when introduced to virgin communities, can have devastating effects. The red wine that humans may use to lubricate and extend conviviality is easily associated with blood, which in turn is a powerful and obvious symbol of life. It also brings about an alteration of consciousness that can easily be experienced as divine afflatus and possession.

Dionysus is a fertility deity, a symbol of and vehicle for the power that makes things grow. His cult, to an uncertain but attested extent, involved the ingestion of raw flesh and

thereby an intake of the indwelling Dionysian life, power, fertility. The sacramental Christian ingestion of the body and blood of Christ via bread and wine is an obvious parallel.

In *John* 15:1-6 Jesus declares that he is a vine and hence a source of life. New life springs from the old plant as deadwood is pruned away. In the *Dionysiaca*, Dionysus several times changes water into wine. Myths and attributes of Dionysus were used in early Christian iconography. However, many of the supposed parallels are general and universal characteristics of cult and belief. The cult of Osiris too has certain Christian parallels but, equally, much that is different.

The dying redeemer/saviour god was not a new or unique concept. It is hard, for example, to see how Dionysus's fiery premature birth and subsequent 3 month gestation to full term on the thigh of Zeus resembles the nativity of Jesus. Furthermore, identifications between Dionysus and Alexander the Great, and Dionysus with the Hindu god Shiva, cosmic dancer destroyer and creator, do not help the Dionysus=Christ thesis. Certain Christian sects, particularly those of a Gnostic bent, accommodated some or many features such as indiscriminate sex, carnality, pleasure; revelry and prolonged dancing; Dionysian intoxication; ecstasy through identification with nature; and loud percussion. But the brand of Christianity that solidified into the ecclesiastical structures of the Church after the Council of Nicæa in 325 was recognisably distinct and antipathetic to the concept of a sexualised cosmos. Nonnus never uses the word "saviour" (Greek *soter*) of Dionysus. His god is not notably compassionate or salvific. He does not

offer eternal life in some kind of paradise or heaven, or any kind of moral instruction.

Nevertheless, there are features, including terminology, and passages in the *Dionysiaca* and the *Paraphrase* to suggest the author of the former was well acquainted with Christian teachings. There is an exchange between Zeus and Time at the beginning of Book 7, where Zeus ponders what he can do to help careworn, unhappy, suffering, joyless humanity after the global catastrophe that followed the death of Zagreus, and where he is threatened with a withdrawal of labour by Time unless he did something. Zeus decides to send a son to bring more merriment and be a protector of the human race (7.7-105). He makes it clear to his son that a place in heaven depends on fulfillment of his father's mission. Some scholars have seen close Biblical parallels between Dionysus and Pentheus as they confront each other on the one hand, compared with Jesus versus Pilate and the Temple priests on the other. The compiler of a cento from Euripides' plays that included *The Bacchæ*, called *Christus Patiens*, which sought to narrate the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus, also saw these links. Justin Martyr in the Second Century saw the cult of Dionysus as a perverse invention of demons to deceive followers of the true religion with a vain promise of salvation (Tissoni 1998).

The St John Gospel opens sonorously: "In the beginning was the Word (Greek Logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1.1). Logos can also mean speech and reason, and in this gospel it can mean the salvific message of the New Testament, the channel of truth. Jesus uttered words of power that have resonated for millennia. Beginning in this fashion, John reaffirms *Genesis* 1:

God spoke and it was done. Logos carries out the work of creation. It is how God realises His will, it is a means of powerful activity. It signifies a Creator and Sustainer through the power of initiating sound. Our cosmos exists because a great being (or beings) has (or have) enunciated.

John's clarion beginning therefore accords not only with other cosmologies, some of which also feature music in creation stories, but also with modern scientific perceptions: that sound is all there is, that matter dissolves sub-atomically into sound-emitting vibrators. Forms are functions of frequencies. All is aquiver and capable of entrainment, that is, being moved onto the frequency of a more powerful transmitter. Whatever theological or doctrinal reasons drove Nonnus to choose this particular gospel to paraphrase, its opening must have resonated with the author of an epic poem which, in effect, asserts the same thing. It throbs with energy, in part, because it is so full of (often extremely loud) sound. Like wine, sound in the *Dionysiaca* can beguile and intoxicate. Dionysus is god of music and dance, activities that for long have been associated with fertilisation and fertility. He is like the great cosmic creator whose sonic booms and patterns, reproduced by his followers and worshippers, sustain all life. The new sounds and dances Dionysus brought to the world were as disruptive and challenging to traditional ways and values as Jesus' radical teachings were in his day, and likewise provoked fierce resistance (Newbold 2003).

Nonnus is capable of such insights. His vision of the cosmos as a great spiraling dance, a great play and revel, a great musical concert, a joyous shout of *Euoi!*, is awesome. What Dionysus brought to the world was an immense

release of energy, new ways of expressing the life force, a chance to escape from apathy, despair and helplessness, to move forward creatively, to expand consciousness and develop cultural activities such as drama that would further energise and stimulate individual and cultural growth. Unfortunately, Nonnus does not illustrate the behaviour that constructively lives out these opportunities. There is much metamorphosis and transformation but the changes tend to “spiral in a void”, to use Jack Lindsay’s felicitous phrase, like a car engine revving in neutral and not moving forward, or like an alcohol-induced change of consciousness that temporarily casts off inhibitions but confers no lasting insights or modifications of behaviour.

Early in the Fifth Century, Christian theologians such as St Augustine were laying the foundations for the Crusades and Inquisition by arguing that force was justified against heretics such as the Donatists. Having become so much a part of the structure of force and authority of the Roman Empire, bishops in particular found it difficult to avoid thinking and behaving like any other office-holder willing to see violence as the quick and easy solution to a problem (Brown 1967, 1992). The ascetic movement that gathered pace in the age of Constantine and his successors was fuelled partly by anguish and disgust that the purity and lofty teachings of Jesus were compromised and corrupted by too close an identification with the things that were Cæsar’s, and by recourse to coercion and oppression to impose unity.

Nor was maintaining the ideals made easier by the inclusion of the Old Testament, which appears to sanction the use of force, punishment and vengeance in many

situations, in its book of scripture. Much of its message does not sit comfortably with the gospels' message of forgiveness and compassion. Nonnus would be very aware that many disreputable and disgraceful things had been and were being done in the name of Christianity.

Power is different from force. Power arises from high principle and appeals to what is noble and uplifting. Force is crass, debasing and always in need of some justification or special pleading. It automatically creates a counter-force and is thus limited in its efficacy. Power is like a standing field, complete in itself. Like gravity, it does not have to move against or insatiably consume anything. It energises, gives forth, supplies and supports life, whereas force shuts down and confines. Force polarizes and requires constant costly vigilance and defence against dissent and opposition. Power provides motivation and meaning, and when it radiates love, forgiveness and compassion rather than imposing punishment and control, it provides joy.

But many movements that begin with true power are taken over by self-seekers who succumb to the temptation to use force for their own or for an organisation's ends. To debase high principles by violating the freedom and dignity of others is to forfeit much power (Hawkins 1995). The St. John Gospel illustrates how powerful forgiveness and compassion can be in the story of the woman accused of adultery and the way her would-be executioners, who appeal to Mosaic law, are shown up for the bullies and hypocrites they are (8.1-12). And the enduring appeal of Jesus' message obviously exerted much more power than those who arrested, beat and crucified him. The *Dionysiaca*



can be seen as an extended examination of the contrast between power and force.

Lindsay sets out the issue well. Dionysus incorporates the demand and hope for a fuller life, a joyful life free from the force-wielders who would control and trammel it. Dionysus worship “represented the desperate clinging to the sources of joy and renewal in experience—sources that could not be wholly closed up under even the most parched and oppressive of existences.” (Lindsay 1965: 369). Throughout Nonnus’ poem there is endless dancing—everything and almost everybody dances, even warriors in battle and Dionysus in the womb—and there is much music-making, singing, chanting, revelry, conception, birth, transformation. It is a world of spontaneity and plenty and the poem is like a huge dance-drama.

Lindsay explains what may have driven Nonnus to the John Gospel. “Dionysos for Nonnus was the symbol and incarnation of the free energies of the universe, but he was also the expression of the imperial conquering state. Christianity had at its core a total opposition to the State and expressed this with poignant drama in the story of Calvary...Though by Nonnus’ day Clement of Alexandria had long made the creed safe for bankers, and the Church had circuitously come round to a point of agreement with the imperial State, the original values were deeply embodied in its writings and rituals: the insistence that the first should be last...Its saviour was a poor man historically murdered by the State-power...It was natural then that Nonnus, seeking a Christian theme, should turn to the gospel in which the plain meanings are most luminously dissolved into symbols” (393-394).

The imposition of new dances, forms of revelry, and viticulture by Dionysus upon the Indians during and after a 7 year war and upon communities in Greece that initially rejected his cult has uncomfortable parallels with a Christianity that used force against pagans and dissenters. That this mission was imposed upon him by Zeus does not excuse the murderous mayhem and the imposition of gifts upon those who did not seek them and who understood the losses and costs entailed in accepting them (Newbold 2001). It takes until Book 40 before the Indians are finally defeated. The remaining books mingle further triumph and success in spreading Dionysus worship throughout Greece with defeat and some gruesome tragedies. Cadmus, Agave and Pentheus are just some of the victims.

At the end of Book 48, Dionysus ascends to Olympus but the bulk of this final book is taken up with the story of Aura, a nymph, a free spirit, a virgin huntress happy in her role and wanting to stay that way. She rejects Dionysus. He imposes his will upon her in a particularly nasty way, raping her as she lies bound and comatose in a drunken stupor. Stripped of her pride and dignity, she commits suicide after delivering twin sons. It is as if Nonnus knew that so much virtue and power had gone out of the Dionysian mission by its resort to force in India that in Greece it became a tawdry fiasco rather than a truly triumphal parade. And whether by accident or design, Nonnus makes it perfectly clear why the noble, admirable principles and truths of the Dionysian message were doomed. They were betrayed because of the characters of the people, human and divine, entrusted with their maintenance.

There is some love, tenderness and compassion in the *Dionysiaca* but there is much crass and debasing struggle for dominance. Mortals and deities kill, wound, rape, beat, lash, whip, flog, bind and fetter those who resist them. They boast, mock, humiliate others in displays of hubris and arrogance that shriek of the insecurities of those who resort to force and who fail to understand how useless and transient such victories are. There is much grief, lamentation, unhappiness. Dionysus releases powerful new energies and aspirations but offers no guidance or indeed example as to how they should be used to serve the wider good.

Nonnus senses the joyous throb and vibrancy of life that empowers, transports and transforms, but is unable to illustrate the behaviour that lives it out day by day and face to face. The corpus of pagan mythology on which Nonnus drew did not provide obvious answers either. Hence Nonnus, says Lindsay, “willy-nilly explains to us why no pagan synthesis could satisfy his world, however brilliant, however intellectually or aesthetically worked out. Such a synthesis could not stand up against Christianity” (393), even against a Christianity that had forfeited much of its original power. The *Dionysiaca*, ostensibly a panegyric on a pagan god, subverts paganism.

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# APPENDIX IV

Richard Garrett



## APPENDIX IV

### The Poet of Panopolis by Richard Garrett

*Richard Garnett (1835--1906) worked all his life as Curator of Printed Books at the British Museum. Garnett published two editions of The Twilight of the Gods in his lifetime. The first, in 1888, contained sixteen stories; to the second, in 1903, he added an additional twelve.*

## I

ALTHOUGH in a manner retired from the world during the fifth and sixth Christian centuries, the banished Gods did not neglect to keep an eye on human affairs, interesting themselves in any movement which might seem to afford them a chance of regaining their lost supremacy, or in any person whose conduct evinced regret at their dethronement. They deeply sympathized with the efforts of their votary Pamprepius to turn the revolt of Ilus to their advantage, and excused the low magical arts to which he stooped as a necessary concession to the spirit of a barbarous age. They ministered invisibly to Damascius and his companions on their flight into Persia, alleviating the hardships under which the frames of the veteran philosophers might otherwise have sunk. It was not, indeed, until the burning of the Alexandrian library that they lost all heart and lapsed into the chrysalis-like condition in which they remained until tempted forth by the young sunshine of the Renaissance.

Such a phenomenon for the fifth century as the Dionysiaca of Nonnus of Panopolis could not fail to excite their most lively interest. Forty-eight books of verse on the exploits of Bacchus in the age of pugnacious prelates and filthy cenobites, of imbecile rulers and rampant robbers, of the threatened dissolution of every tie, legal, social, or

political; an age of earthquake, war, and famine! Bacchus, who is known from Aristophanes not to have excelled in criticism, protested that his laureate was greater than Homer; and, though Homer could not go quite so far as this, he graciously conceded that if he had himself been an Egyptian of the fifth century, with a faint glimmering of the poetical art, and encumbered with more learning than he knew how to use, he might have written almost as badly as his modern representative. More impartial critics judged Nonnus' achievement more favourably, and all agreed that his steadfastness in the faith deserved some special mark of distinction. The Muses under Pallas' direction (being themselves a little awkward in female accomplishments) embroidered him a robe; Hermes made a lyre, and Hephæstus forged a plectrum. Apollo added a chaplet of laurel, and Bacchus one of ivy. Whether from distrust of Hermes' integrity, or wishing to make the personal acquaintance of his follower, Phoebus volunteered to convey the testimonial in person, and accordingly took his departure for the Egyptian Thebaid.

As Apollo fared through the sandy and rugged wilderness under the blazing sun of an African summer afternoon, he observed with surprise a vast crowd of strange figures clustering at the entrance to a hive. On a nearer approach he identified them as a posse of demons besetting a hermit. Words cannot describe the enormous variety of whatever the universe holds of most heterogeneous. Naked women of surpassing loveliness displayed their charms to the anchorite's gaze, sturdy porters bent beneath loads of gold which they heaped at his feet, other shapes not alien from humanity allured his appetite with costly dishes or cooling drinks, or smote at him with swords, or made feints at his eyes with spears, or burned sulphur under his nose, or displayed before him scrolls of poetry or learning, or shrieked blasphemies in his ears, or surveyed him from a little distance with glances of leering affection; while a motley crowd of goblins, wearing the heads of boars or lions, or whisking the tails of dragons, winged, or hoofed, or scaled, or feathered, or all at once, incessantly jostled and wrangled with each other and their betters, mopping and mowing, grunting and grinning, snapping, snarling, constantly running away and returning like gnats dancing over a marsh. The holy man sat doggedly at the entrance of his cavern, with an expression of fathomless stupidity, which seemed to defy all the fiends of



the Thebaid to get an idea into his head, or make him vary his attitude by a single inch.

“These people did not exist in our time,” said Apollo aloud, “or at least they knew their place, and behaved themselves.”

“Sir,” said a comparatively grave and respectable demon, addressing the stranger, “I should wish Your Peregrinity to understand that these imps are mere schoolboys--my pupils, in fact. When their education has made further progress they will be more mannerly, and will comprehend the folly of pestering an unintellectual old gentleman like this worthy Pachymius with beauty for which he has no eyes, and gold for which he has no use, and dainties for which he has no palate, and learning for which he has no head. But I’ll wake him up!” And waving his pupils away, the pedagogic fiend placed himself at the anchorite’s ear, and shouted into it:

“Nonnus is to be Bishop of Panopolis!”

The hermit’s features were instantly animated by an expression of envy and hatred.

“Nonnus!” he exclaimed, “the heathen poet, to have the See of Panopolis, of which I was promised the reversion!”

“My dear sir,” suggested Apollo, “it is all very well to enliven the reverend eremite; but don’t you think it is rather a liberty to make such jokes at the expense of my good friend Nonnus?”

“There is no liberty,” said the demon, “for there is no joke. Recanted on Monday. Baptized yesterday. Ordained today. To be consecrated to-morrow.”

The anchorite poured forth a torrent of the choicest ecclesiastical curses, until he became speechless from exhaustion, and Apollo, profiting by the opportunity, addressed the demon:

“Would it be an unpardonable breach of politeness, respected sir, if I ventured to hint that the illusions your pupils have been trying to impose upon this venerable man have in some small measure impaired the confidence with which I was originally inspired by your advantageous personal appearance?”

“Not in the least,” replied the demon, “especially as I can easily make my words good. If you and Pachymius will mount my back I will transport you to Panopolis, where you can verify my assertion for yourselves.”

The Deity and the anchorite promptly consented, and seated themselves on the demon's shoulders. The shadow of the fiend's expanded wings fell black and vast on the fiery sand, but diminished and became invisible as he soared to a prodigious height, to escape observation from below. By and by the sun's glowing ball touched earth at the extremity of the horizon; it disappeared, the fires of sunset burned low in the west, and the figures of the demon and his freight showed like a black dot against a lake of green sky, growing larger as he cautiously stooped to earth. Grazing temples, skimming pyramids, the party came to ground in the precincts of Panopolis, just in time to avoid the rising moon that would have betrayed them. The demon immediately disappeared. Apollo hastened off to demand an explanation from Nonnus, while Pachymius repaired to a neighbouring convent, peopled, as he knew, by a legion of sturdy monks, ever ready to smite and be smitten in the cause of orthodoxy.

## II

Nonnus sat in his study, wrinkling his brow as he polished his verses by the light of a small lamp. A large scroll lay open on his knees, the contents of which seemed to afford him little satisfaction. Forty-eight more scrolls, resplendent with silver knobs and coquettishly tied with purple cord, reposed in an adjoining bookcase; the forty-eight books, manifestly, of the Panopolitan bard's *Dionysiaca*. Homer, Euripides, and other poets lay on the floor, having apparently been hurriedly dislodged to make room for divers liturgies and lives of the saints. A set of episcopal robes depended from a hook, and on a side-table stood half a dozen mitres, which, to all appearance, the designated prelate had been trying on.

"Nonnus," said Phoebus, passing noiselessly through the unresisting wall, "the tale of thy apostasy is then true?"

It would be difficult to determine whether surprise, delight, or dismay preponderated in Nonnus' expression as he lifted up his eyes and

recognized the God of Poetry. He had just presence of mind to shuffle his scroll under an enormous dictionary ere he fell at Apollo's feet.

"O Phoebus," he exclaimed, "hadst thou come a week ago!"

"It is true then?" said Apollo. "Thou forsakest me and the Muses. Thou sidest with them who have broken our statues, unroofed our temples, desecrated our altars, and banished us from among mankind. Thou rejectest the glory of standing alone in a barbarous age as the last witness to culture and civilization. Thou despisest the gifts of the Gods and the Muses, of which I am even now the bearer. Thou preferrest the mitre to the laurel chaplet, and the hymns of Gregory to the epics of Homer?"

"O Phoebus," replied Nonnus, "were it any God but thee, I should bend before him in silence, having nought to reply. But thou art a poet, and thou understandest the temper of a poet. Thou knows how beyond other men he is devoured by the craving for sympathy. This and not vulgar vanity is his motive of action; his shaft is launched in vain unless he can deem it embedded in the heart of a friend. Thou mayest well judge what scoffing and reviling my Dionysiaca epic has brought upon me in this evil age; yet, had this been all, peradventure I might have borne it. But it was not all. The gentle, the good, the affectionate, they who in happier times would have been my audience, came about me, saying, Nonnus, why sing the strains against which we must shut our ears? Sing what we may listen to, and we will love and honor thee. I could not bear the thought of going to my grave without having awakened an echo of sympathy, and weakly but not basely have I yielded, given them what they craved, and suffered them, since the Muses' garland is not theirs to bestow, to reward me with a mitre."

"And what demanded they?" asked Apollo.

"Oh, a mere romance! Something entirely fabulous."

"I must see it," persisted Apollo; and Nonnus reluctantly disinterred his scroll from under the big dictionary, and handed it up, trembling like a schoolboy who anticipates a castigation for a bad exercise.

"What trash have we here?" cried Phoebus:

Ere time, ere space, ere speech dwelt the archaic Word ,  
God's like in age and nature, motherless, this Son,

The Word, the spawn of self-born God, Light come from light,  
Inseparate, interminable and enthroned  
With God, conseated on God's sempiternal chair:

"If it isn't the beginning of the Gospel of John! Thy impiety is worse than thy poetry!"

Apollo cast the scroll indignantly to the ground. His countenance wore an expression so similar to that with which he is represented in act to smite the Python, that Nonnus judged it prudent to catch up his manuscript and hold it shieldwise before his face.

"Thou doest well," said Apollo, laughing bitterly, "That rampart is indeed impenetrable to my arrows."

Nonnus seemed about to fall prostrate, when a sharp rap came to the door.

"That is the Governor's knock," he exclaimed. "Do not forsake me utterly, O Phoebus!" But as he turned to open the door, Apollo vanished. The Governor entered, a sagacious, good-humored looking man in middle life.

"Who was with thee just now?" he asked. "Methought I heard voices."

"Merely the Muse," explained Nonnus, "With whom I am wont to hold nocturnal communings."

"Indeed!" replied the Governor. "Then the Muse has done well to take herself off, and will do even better not to return. Bishops must have no flirtations with Muses, heavenly or earthly--not that I am now altogether certain that thou wilt be a bishop."

"How so?" asked Nonnus, not without a feeling of relief.

"Imagine, my dear friend," returned the Governor, "who should turn up this evening but that sordid anchorite Pachymius, to whom the See was promised indeed, but who was reported to have been devoured by vermin in the desert. The rumour seemed so highly plausible that it must be feared that sufficient pains were not taken to verify it--cannot have been, in fact; for, as I said, here he comes, having been brought, as he affirms, through the air by an angel. Little would it have signified if he had come by himself, but he is accompanied by three hundred monks carrying cudgels, who threaten an insurrection if he is not consecrated on the spot.

My friend the Archbishop and I are at our wits' end: we have set out hearts on having a gentleman over the diocese, but we cannot afford to have tumults reported at Constantinople. At last, mainly through the mediation of a sable personage whom no one seems to know, but who approves himself most intelligent and obliging, the matter is put off till to-morrow, when thou and Pachymius are to compete for the bishopric in public on conditions not yet settled, but which our swarthy friend undertakes to arrange to every one's satisfaction. So keep up a good heart, and don't run away in any case. I know thou art timid, but remember that there is no safety for thee but in victory. If thou yieldest thou wilt be beheaded by me, and if thou are defeated thou wilt certainly be burned by Pachymius."

With this incentive to intrepidity the Governor withdrew, leaving the poor poet in a pitiable state between remorse and terror. One thing alone somewhat comforted him: the mitres had vanished, and the gifts of the Gods lay on the table in their place, whence he concluded that a friendly power might yet be watching over him.

### III

Next morning all Panopolis was in an uproar. It was generally known that the pretensions of the candidates for the episcopate would be decided by public competition, and it was rumoured that this would partake of the nature of an ordeal by fire and water. Nothing further had transpired except that the arrangements had been settled by the Governor and Archbishop in concert with two strangers, a dingy Libyan and a handsome young Greek, neither of whom were known in the city, but in both of whom the authorities seemed to repose entire confidence. At the appointed time the people flocked into the theatre, and found the stage already occupied by the parties chiefly concerned. The Governor and the Archbishop sat in the centre on their tribunals: the competitors stood on each side, Pachymius backed by the demon, Nonnus by Apollo; both these supporters, of course, appearing to the assembly in the light of

ordinary mortals. Nonnus recognized Apollo perfectly, but Pachymius's limited powers of intelligence seemed entirely engrossed by the discomfort visibly occasioned him by the proximity of an enormous brass vessel of water, close to which burned a bright fire. Nonnus was also ill at ease, and continually directed his attention to a large package, of the contents of which he seemed instinctively cognizant.

All being ready, the Governor rose from his seat, and announced that, with the sanction of his Grace the Archbishop, the invidious task of determining between the claims of two such highly qualified competitors had been delegated to two gentlemen in the enjoyment of his full confidence, who would proceed to apply fitting tests to the respective candidates. Should one fail and the other succeed, the victor would of course be instituted; should both undergo the probation successfully, new criterions of merit would be devised; should both fall short, both would be set aside, and the disputed mitre would be conferred elsewhere. He would first summon Nonnus, long their fellow-citizen, and now their fellow-Christian, to submit himself to the test proposed.

Apollo now rose, and proclaimed in an audible voice, "By virtue of the authority committed to me, I call upon Nonnus of Panopolis, candidate for the bishopric of his native city, to demonstrate his fitness for the same by consigning to the flames with his own hands the forty-eight execrable books of heathen poetry composed by him in the days of his darkness and blindness, but now without doubt as detestable to him as to the universal body of the faithful." So saying, he made a sign to an attendant, the wrapping of the package fell away, and the forty-eight scrolls of the Dionysiaca, silver knobs, purple cords, and all, came to view.

"Burn my poem!" exclaimed Nonnus. "Destroy the labours of twenty-four years! Bereave Egypt of its Homer! Erase the name of Nonnus from the tablet of Time!"

"How so, while thou hast the Paraphrase of St. John?" demanded Apollo maliciously.

"Indeed, good youth," said the Governor, who wished to favour Nonnus, "methinks the condition is somewhat exorbitant. A single book might suffice, surely!"

"I am quite content," replied Apollo. "If he consents to burn any of his books he is no poet, and I wash my hands of him."

“Come, Nonnus,” cried the Governor, “make haste; one book will do as well as another. Hand them up here.”

“It must be with his own hands, please your Excellency,” said Apollo.

“Then,” cried the Governor, pitching to the poet the first scroll brought to him, “the thirteenth book. Who cares about the thirteenth book? Pop it in!”

“The thirteenth book!” exclaimed Nonnus, “containing the contest between wine and honey, without which my epic becomes totally and entirely unintelligible!”

“This, then,” said the Governor, picking out another, which chanced to be the seventeenth.

“In my seventeenth book,” objected Nonnus, “Bacchus plants vines in India, and the superiority of wine to milk is convincingly demonstrated.”

“Well,” rejoined the Governor, “what can you say to the twenty-second?”

“With my Hamadryad! I can never give up my Hamadryad!”

“Then,” said the Governor, contemptuously hurling the whole set in the direction of Nonnus, “burn which you will, only burn!”

The wretched poet sat among his scrolls looking for a victim. All his forty-eight children were equally dear to his parental heart. The cries of applause and derision from the spectators, and the formidable bellowings of the exasperated monks who surrounded Pachymius, did not tend to steady his nerves, or render the task of critical discrimination the easier.

“I won’t! I won’t!” he exclaimed at last, starting up defiantly. “Let the bishopric go to the devil! Any one of my similes is worth all the bishoprics in Egypt!”

“Out on the vanity of these poets!” exclaimed the disappointed Governor.

“It is not vanity,” said Apollo, “it is parental affection; and being myself a sufferer from the same infirmity, I rejoice to find him my true son after all.”

“Well,” said the Governor, turning to the demon: “it is thy man’s turn now. Trot him out!”

“Brethren,” said the demon to the assembly, “it is meet that he who aspires to the office of bishop should be prepared to give evidence of extraordinary self-denial. Ye have seen even our weak brother Nonnus adoring what he hath burned, albeit as yet unwilling to burn what he hath adored. How much more may be reasonably expected of our brother Pachymius, so eminent for sanctity! I therefore call upon him to demonstrate his humility and self-renunciation, and effectually mortify the natural man, by washing himself in this ample vessel provided for the purpose.”

“Wash myself!” exclaimed Pachymius, with a vivacity of which he had previously shown no token. “Destroy at one splash the sanctity of fifty-seven years! Avaunt! Thou subtle enemy of my salvation! I know thee who thou art, the demon who brought me hither on his back yesterday.”

“I thought it had been an angel,” said the Governor.

“A demon in the disguise of an angel of light,” said Pachymius.

A tumultuous discussion arose among Pachymius’s supporters, some extolling his fortitude, others blaming his wrong-headedness.

“What!” said he to the latter, “would ye rob me of my reputation? Shall it be written of me, The holy Pachymius abode in the precepts of the eremites so long as he dwelt in the desert where no water was, but as soon as he came within sight of a bath, he stumbled and fell?”

“O father,” urged they, “savourest not this of vaingloriousness? The demon in the guise of an angel of light, as thou so well saidest even now. Be strong. Quit thyself valiantly. Think of the sufferings of the primitive confessors.”

“St. John was cast into a caldron of boiling oil,” said one.

“St. Apocryphus was actually drowned,” said another.

“I have reason to believe,” said a third, “that the loathsomeness of ablution hath been greatly exaggerated by the heretics.”

“I know it has,” said another. “I have washed myself once, though ye might not think it, and can assert that it is by no means as disagreeable as one supposes.”

“That is just what I dread,” said Pachymius. “Little by little, one might positively come to like it! We should resist the beginnings of evil.”

All this time the crowd of his supporters had been pressing upon the anchorite, and had imperceptibly forced him nearer the edge of the vessel,



purposing at a convenient season to throw him in. He was now near enough to catch a glimpse of the limpid element. Recoiling in horror, he collected all his energies, and with head depressed towards his chest, and hands thrust forth as if to ward off pollution--butting, kicking, biting the air--he rushed forwards, and with a preternatural force deserving to be enumerated among his miracles, fairly overthrew the enormous vase, the contents streaming on the crowd in front of the stage.

"Take me to my hermitage!" he screamed. "I renounce the bishopric. Take me to my hermitage!"

"Amen," responded the demon, and, assuming his proper shape, he took Pachymius upon his back and flew away with him amid the cheers of the multitude.

Pachymius was speedily deposited at the mouth of his cavern, where he received the visits of the neighbouring anchorites, who came to congratulate him on the constancy with which he had maintained his fiery, or rather watery trial. He spent most of his remaining days in the society of the devil, on which account he was canonized at his death.

"O Phoebus," said Nonnus, when they were alone, "impose upon me any penance thou wilt, so I may but regain thy favour and that of the Muses! But before all things let me destroy my paraphrase."

"Thou shalt not destroy it," said Phoebus. "Thou shalt publish it. That shall be thy penance."

And so it is that the epic on the exploits of Bacchus and the paraphrase of St. John's Gospel have alike come down to us as the work of Nonnus, whose authorship of both learned men have never been able to deny, having regard to the similarity of style, but never could explain until the facts above narrated came to light in one of the Fayoum papyri recently acquired by the Archduke Rainier.

