

THE  
HERO'S TALE



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ANNOTATED  
BY  
THE AUTHOR

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*Dozenal* numeration is a system of thinking of numbers in twelves, rather than tens. Twelve is much more versatile, having four even divisors—2, 3, 4, and 6—as opposed to only two for ten. This means that such hatefulness as “0.333 . . .” for  $\frac{1}{3}$  and “0.1666 . . .” for  $\frac{1}{6}$  are things of the past, replaced by easy “o;4” (four twelfths) and “o;2” (two twelfths).

In dozenal, counting goes “one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, elv, dozen; dozen one, dozen two, dozen three, dozen four, dozen five, dozen six, dozen seven, dozen eight, dozen nine, dozen ten, dozen elv, two dozen, two dozen one . . .” It’s written as such: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, ɿ, ε, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 1ɿ, 1ε, 20, 21 . . .

Dozenal counting is at once much more efficient and much easier than decimal counting, and takes only a little bit of time to get used to. Further information can be had from the dozenal societies (<http://www.dozenal.org>), as well as in many other places on the Internet.



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# PREFACE

**T**HIS LITTLE BOOK CONSISTS almost entirely of a single poem, *The Hero's Tale*, which was published in parts between 23 September and 13 December 1201. As such, it took nearly three months to write, much longer than it should take anyone to read. Originally published at its publisher's website, the text is there presented with links to its individual parts, but otherwise as a large "wall of text." As such, it was thought that a more properly prepared, typeset version would be desirable.

This edition is *annotated*; that is, notes are added to the text of the poem indicating important bits of symbolism, references, and so forth. In any long poem, there are bound to be large numbers of these, many of which will not be caught by the casual, or even the devoted, reader. Some may be obvious, as the breastplate given to our hero in Part V obviously hearkens to the "breastplate of justice" from Ephesians 6:12; others may be more obscure. This annotated edition should help the interested reader catch *all* the references, whether obvious or not.

Some of the symbolism in the poem is designed to promote traditional, Western Catholic imagery, much of which has been long forgotten, or at least diluted. A great help in this endeavor has been the timeless work of Émile Mâle, *Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, translated by Dora Nussey and originally published in the United States in 1135 (decimal 1913). The book is *dense*, and well worth multiple careful readings for anyone interested in traditional Western religious symbolism.

Focusing as it does on the trek through the virtues, this poem utilizes a lot of the traditional symbolism of those virtues. Some are fairly obvious: a young woman on a unicorn, bearing a shield with a maiden's face, could hardly be anything but chastity. Some are much more difficult: the young man with the dunce cap, carrying a club and eating cheese, dodging rocks thrown at him by boys, represents folly, but no one would call this symbolism obvious.

Some of our traditional Western symbolism might even be surprising. The camel bowing to accept its burden is humility, and has nothing to do with sloth, as one might expect. The woman with the dove represents humility, rather than peace, which the dove commonly now represents; a woman with a crown of olive branches takes the dove's place in that order. Perhaps most surprising, justice is *not* depicted blindfolded. A blindfolded Lady Justice is a comparatively new invention; traditionally, justice was depicted with the scale and sword, but with eyes open, so as to have the fullness of the evidence available to her. I have followed the traditional imagery here.

Some of the symbolism the author was forced to invent. For example, the Western tradition has a well-established type for cowardice: a soldier throwing down his arms and fleeing from a rabbit, surely one of the most harmless of mammals, and nothing of which a soldier should be afraid. There did not appear to be a traditional type for rashness, however. So, utilizing the common (false) legend that lemmings rush headlong off cliffs, I have used the lemming as rashness's emblem, and the valiant attack against something literally immovable, a stone wall, as his archetypal action. (The woman warrior, on the other hand, is a very traditional Western image of fortitude.) The wheel-salesman as an example of false prudence, or fraud; the cad crossing his fingers behind his back; these are equally my creations, though I hope and pray that they are, as I have tried to make them, consistent and congruous with traditional imagery.

Mâle notes that for most of our history, and throughout the Gothic era, Christians were unable to come up with a good visual image for the virtue of charity. He notes that the Renaissance was finally able to succeed in this; I have used that image in this text.

Some of my symbolism required stretching. Perhaps the most stretched is the helmet of salvation consisting of the crown representing hope. Still, I hope I have not done any violence to the text; and if the symbolism is wrong here, the crown works for hope even if the connection to the helmet of salvation is ignored.

The annotations in the text will suffice to explain the rest. They are not *complete*; it's not possible to annotate every line. And some readers will doubtlessly see successes and failures in passing the message I seek to pass which I have not noticed. However, in the hopes that this work may prove edifying and instructional, I offer it and my own notes on it to the world, and remain the reader's obedient servant,

Donald P. Goodman III  
Woodbridge, VA  
13 December 2011

## INTRODUCTION

O sing in me, St. John, and make my voice to sing  
the truth of that good man who struggl'd hard and long  
in seeking for the East, in searching for the king  
who is the center and the base of every song  
that's worth the singing; sing, St. Francis of the Sales,  
6 whose pen has written so much gold upon the page,  
and help me sing a worthy song that justly hails  
that foolish man whose journey turn'd him to a sage.  
So help me build a monument in words to sing  
this song of songs, by which a man can burst his cage,  
and guide my song about this mighty, marv'rous thing,  
10 and help myself and all my hearers take to wing.

*St. John is one of the patrons of writers, due to his beautiful prose in the first chapter of his Gospel. St. Francis de Sales is another.*

### I

So barefoot, dressed in tatter'd rags of green he stood  
before his journey started on midwinter's day,  
beyond half-starv'd, at edge of that vast, endless wood  
which stretches ever westward, offering a way  
for him to flee the rising sun, pursue the dark  
16 which that vast forest hides with many broad, smooth roads;  
the way to east, the way our hero sought to hark,  
much stronger wills and hearts and minds than his corrodes.  
But though he's tir'd and weary, still he firmly means  
to take the harder, better road, ere fear erodes  
all his resolve to seek the sunny, wholesome scenes  
20 which lie far to the east, on hope of which he leans.

*Green represents hope. Midwinter's day is the day on which the nights begin to shorten and days lengthen.*

*East and west are symbols of good and evil.*

So toward he rising sun our hero set his face,  
his long and ar'd'ous journey still before his feet,  
his wounded, bloody feet ill-suited for the race,  
his soul ill-suited for whatever threats he'd meet;  
his friends behind him, heading back into the west  
26 and calling out to him to follow, by his name;  
“Why take a rough and rocky road? This one is best!  
Why not come westward with us, back the way you came?”  
And he was sorely tempted, for his road was hard;  
he'd not begun; his friends had won fortune and fame;

*I Cor 9:20*

*Mt 7:12. The way east being a difficult road, and the way west an easy one, is a recurring theme.*

his green clothes were in tatters, his bare feet were scarr'd;  
30 why should he not turn back, before he'd gone a yard?

*Red symbolizes devo-  
tion and love.*

But then he set his jaw, his first step forward took  
and started down the steep and winding path he chose;  
although near dead from effort, and with fear he shook,  
he put one foot before the other, didn't close  
his heart to what slight courage still was in his breast,  
36 though sweat was soaking his red hair as on he went;  
the path gave him no stopping point, no place to rest;  
what could be worth such sorrows in the orient?  
The wind was cold, his soul was sad, his feet were raw;  
he sorrow'd, thinking that perhaps the woods were best;  
his path split into four as he thought to withdraw;  
40 then he looked up, and drew his breath at what he saw.

## II

*The lady in white is  
the Church, leading  
our man to virtue and  
to Christ.*

*Brown symbolizes hu-  
mility.*

*Fire is a symbol of love.*

*Ex 3:2*

*Luna has no light of  
its own, but reflects the  
light of the sun.*

He saw there such a lady as he'd never seen  
at that fork in his road, where one path split to four;  
dress'd all in perfect white, immaculately clean,  
array'd in wealthy splendor, but still clearly poor;  
her brown-skinn'd face beneath a mantle, color'd red  
46 as burning fire, hot as the sun, a brilliant flame  
which will not harm one hair upon her lovely head,  
though it will ever keep on burning, just the same;  
around her waist a cincture green, and tied across;  
her smile a calming grace, deserving greatest fame;  
a loveliness like Luna; he could plainly gloss:  
50 a brilliant, joyful beauty fill'd with baleful loss!

*The Church as mother,  
a well-known analogy.*

“My son,” she said to him, when once he'd stopp'd his way  
and gaz'd upon her face, like harvest's moon alight;  
her voice rang out like music which a mother'd play  
to sooth her fussy child to sleep some stormy night.  
“My mother!” cried he, falling to his worn-out knees  
(for such she was, he knew; and she had called him son!)  
“Please guide me, Lady; hearken to my desp'rate pleas!  
The way's too hard; I fear I'm lost; what can be done?”  
“My son,” she said again, and gave him such a smile  
as warm'd his aching, freezing bones like rays of sun;  
“My son, you've suffer'd much, and come now many a mile;



60 but yet I fear you still must wander for a while.”

“You’ve brav’d the first and hardest of the many snares  
which draw so many men into the dark’ning west;  
you didn’t take the easy way, with easy fares,  
and easy, light, and weak’ning paths away from rest.  
But just as many of my children suffer’d much  
66 e’en after they’d been treading on the proper way,  
so it shall fall to all my children to do such;  
for greater pearls, a greater price a man must pay.  
Each one of these four roads, my son, you’ll have to take,  
though each will lead you back to where you stand today.  
Stay vigilant! Control yourself! And stay awake!  
70 Your future, your well-being, and your life’s at stake!

*Not only the martyrs,  
but also all the faith-  
ful.*

*Mt 11:39–37*

“Along these roads you’ll many barriers soon meet,  
some which along these steep and winding roads do lie;  
but you will find the hardest challenges to beat  
are those which in your breast infect and stultify,  
which your mind darken, rob you of your wholesome will,  
76 and make you stop your way, or take some other track.  
But know, through every hardship, it is worthy still,  
and know that I and all my children have your back.  
So journey first upon this northernmost of ways,  
and shy not from your troubles, ever make attack!  
Proceed, though difficulty cost you all your days!  
80 Your flesh will die, but virtue once won ne’er decays!”

*Communion of Saints.  
The north as darker  
than the south. The  
priest turns to the  
north to preach the  
Gospel at Mass.*

### III

The Lady then went up into the distant sky  
and disappear’d beyond a snow-white, silv’ry cloud;  
our hero, now invigorated, hale and spry,  
though tir’d and hungry still, was with new strength endow’d.  
So forth he went down that most northern of the four  
86 down which the Lady had directed him to go;  
but as he headed east, he heard an angry roar,  
which stirr’d within his soul an impulse base and low.  
Around the nearest bend, he saw two raging men,  
each circling the other, facing down the foe;  
they loudly traded insults, curs’d time and again,  
90 and hated in a way that only man can ken.

*The first of the car-  
dinal virtues which  
our hero must develop:  
temperance. Closest to  
the body and farthest  
from the soul, the road  
to it is also the farthest  
north.*

*Anger, a vice contrary  
to temperance.*

The two drew swords; e'er long the two would battle start;  
their hateful rage blaz'd out like fire from wrathful eyes;  
and as he watch'd, our hero took the stronger's part,  
and felt that rage, enjoy'd the wrath that in him lies.  
He saw the stronger, madder man would win the fight,  
96 and shar'd the all-devouring rage that he'd just found;  
he thirsted for the other's blood, relish'd the sight  
when one man spill'd the other's guts upon the ground.  
The victor curs'd his fallen foe; our hero cheer'd,  
his mindless anger loosing him from every bound;  
70 but then the victor look'd up, at our hero leer'd;  
and then six others like him at his back appear'd.

*Anger and the other  
six: the seven deadly  
sins. Each of those is  
a sin against temper-  
ance.*

“Go west,” the victor said; “Go west, and turn back now;  
your rage would guide your hand and make your blood to boil.  
Go west; to hold your wrath inside, you know not how;  
for in your breast, your rage will like a serpent coil,  
and any time will hated foe or dear friend bite  
76 with or without your wish, and it will fill your soul;  
go west, for in the east they hate this kind of fight;  
embrace your anger; only then can you be whole!”  
And then the victor and the others headed past,  
back westward, opposite our hero's noble goal;  
our hero turn'd back east, and there appear'd amass'd  
80 a multitude of figures, heading west, and vast.

*Gluttony.*

A man who carried with him massive bags of food  
and stuff'd his face unceasing, though he hunger'd not;  
a woman, scarcely clad, and with a man so lewd  
he grabb'd and grop'd at her, and her he often got;  
a man who carried in his arm a jug of wine  
96 and pour'd it down his throat e'en as he stagger'd west;  
another preen'd himself in clothes exceeding fine;  
but one of this great multitude led all the rest.

*Lust.*

*Drunkness, a type  
of gluttony.*

*Luxury.*

*Pride, the worst of the  
vices against temper-  
ance. Traditionally de-  
picted as a man falling  
from a horse. Prov  
14:16*

A man astride a steed sat tall with head held high,  
with outward glory, armor, sword, and horsehair crest;  
time and again it threw him; but with heavy sigh,  
100 he mounted it again, could never peaceful lie.

Our hero work'd east through the crowd, and wonder'd what  
all this could mean, what challenge waited for him there;

but past the multitude of passion, drink, and smut,  
he found there ladies, peaceful, and exceeding fair.  
A woman young upon a unicorn astride,  
106 her hair demurely veil'd, a shield with maiden's face;  
another woman held a dove; and by her side,  
a camel knelt to take its burden and the trace;  
another, fair and peaceful, wore upon her head  
a crown of olive branches, resting in its place  
upon a brow serene, from which all conflict's shed;  
110 but still another stood there, and the others led.

*Chastity.*

*The woman with a  
dove and the camel are  
both humility.*

*Concord (opposed to  
strife).*

The other ladies were quite lovely, but this last  
combined their features into one, put all to shame;  
and as he watch'd, they all upon her honor cast,  
but she appear'd to have no worry for the same.  
She bore two mighty jugs, one water and one wine,  
116 and pour'd them out together in a crystal glass;  
she held the cup out to him; it did not seem fine  
as that the drunkard he had seen had gulp'd en masse.  
"Please, drink," the lady said; "I know your thirst is great,  
and others offer wine of a quite different class;  
but theirs will lead you westward, will not make you wait,  
120 while mine starts bitter, but grows sweet, and will you sate."

*Temperance is tradi-  
tionally depicted as a  
woman mixing water  
and wine.*

After a time, he took the lady's proffer'd gift,  
and found indeed that it was bitter in his throat;  
it did not satisfy, did not his spirits lift,  
as drunkard's wine to drunkard's bliss could make him float.  
But as he drank it down, it did indeed grow sweet,  
126 and soon he felt he had the power for the fight.  
The lady smil'd at him; "I'm glad that we could meet,  
and put your thirst for other drinks to proper flight.  
This glass has given strength; you now may pass to east;  
though still your journey's scarce begun, it's started right.  
Though you may feel you've not progressed beyond the least,  
130 in truth, by drinking this, you've vanquished quite a beast,

a beast which could, quite easily, hang on your back  
and drag you to the west, with or without your will;  
but this, my drink, accustoms you to want and lack,  
and satisfies without the need for drunkard's swill.

Remember me! I will be with you on your way  
136 as long as you remember to imbibe my drink!  
Now go; proceed, while still you have the light of day!  
Go forth; proceed; your time is shorter than you think!”  
He bow’d and thank’d the lady, then to east he went,  
to where he knew the fork to four his road would link;  
the Lady wearing white our hero this way sent,  
140 and he would take that path, however curv’d and bent.

## IIV

*Our hero returns to the fork to four roads, each one of which represents a cardinal virtue.*

Our hero headed east; but soon himself he found  
back where the road did fork, from one to four did split;  
and though he sought her, looking there and all around,  
the Lady wearing white did not appear; but writ  
upon a sign, he found what he was seeking there,  
146 a message telling him which path he ought to take;  
“My son, the next road south is your path now; and bear  
your burdens knowing I am working for your sake.”  
So down the next road south he eagerly did hie;  
now east along a different road his way did make;  
ere long, as on the prior road, he soon did spy  
150 a sight confusing to him and his weary eye.

*Cowardice, traditionally depicted as a soldier casting down his sword at sight of a rabbit.*

A man dress’d as a soldier flung aside his sword,  
and fleeing headlong westward, scream’d aloud in dread,  
abandoning his oath to captain, friend, and lord;  
in terror of whate’er pursu’d him, on he fled.  
Our hero wonder’d what could so scare such a man,  
156 and so look’d eastward; there he saw the soldier’s fear:  
a rabbit, brown and soft, was grazing; yet he ran  
as if a regiment of foes was drawing near.  
And on he fled; our hero look’d back down the way  
back eastward and there saw the soldier’s braver peer;  
this second soldier sought to earn a soldier’s pay,  
160 but still knew not in what a soldier’s virtue lay.

*According to legend, the lemming charges off cliffs without fear and for no reason.*

Displaying all th’ accoutrements of lack of fear,  
this other soldier bore a shield with lemming’s form,  
his helm extravagantly plum’d, eyes wild and clear,  
he stood before a cliff-face, ready to perform.  
With neither grace nor measure, he attack’d the stone,

166 his sword bending and breaking, and soon, too, his bones;  
ere long, bloody and broken, he fell still and prone;  
yet not his injury, but he his loss bemoans.  
This warrior would fight a herd of elephants,  
a pride of lions, or an army, all alone;  
without regard to victory or settlements,  
170 all life for him is but a set of tournaments.

*Bravery without measure is recklessness.*

Proceeding past, our hero came around a curve  
and stopp'd; for there he saw a figure passing fair;  
a woman warrior, possess'd of iron nerve,  
prepar'd for, but not seeking, battle anywhere.  
Her robe, as red as blood, hung to her boots, with lace;  
176 her torso cover'd with a breastplate, dark and black;  
her shield was decorated with a lion's face;  
her head was guarded by a helm; her plume hung back  
and mix'd its red with hair of brown, in braid, and long;  
her mighty sword in hand, she weapon did not lack;  
and when she spoke, her voice rang like a martial song,  
180 and near behind her there appear'd a mighty throng.

*A woman warrior, the traditional representation of fortitude.*

*Red here is courage, the color of blood.*

*The lion, a traditional symbol of courage.*

“Brave hero,” she did say, “I bring you no good news,  
if what you seek is comfort, warmth, and peaceful ease;  
I promise you but hardship, and the chance to lose;  
discomfort, war, and pain, and stronger enemies.  
The horde you see behind me are the men who fail'd,  
186 the men who did surrender when the fight grew hard,  
or who did rush headlong, before they're helm'd and mail'd;  
but even they who pass'd, pass'd through it bruise'd and scarr'd.  
The path beyond this point is long, and hard, and steep,  
and will take all your strength, each foot and every yard.  
I swear to you, no matter what, that you can keep  
190 your way through all these trials, thus your reward to reap.

“But know, as well, that you will often wish to stop,  
for you will suffer much on this way, ere the end.  
But know that you can fight the urge to turn or drop,  
and I, from start to finish, help to you will send.”  
Our hero thank'd the lady warrior, and went,  
196 pushing his way through those who'd not the end attain'd;  
and he then wonder'd: all these others effort spent;

what different end could he expect once he was drain'd?  
But she had told him that he could still persevere,  
so on he went, and quickly, ere his strength had wan'd;  
but soon he met what made that horde aside to veer,  
170 what broke so many wills, which had been so sincere.

The road was nearly vertical, the air was cold;  
the frost bit through his tatter'd clothes and froze his feet;  
the wind blew strong and hard; its whistle seem'd to scold  
his weakness; hail upon his weary skin did beat.  
The blowing snow and ice sought but to push him o'er,  
176 while only weary muscles serv'd to pull him high;  
he climb'd for what seem'd like eternity and more;  
his limbs did scream in agony; he wish'd to die  
if only he could end the horrifying pain  
and thaw his frozen toes and fingers; Lady, why?  
Why must he so endure? could she not simply deign  
180 to bring him comfort, which her other sons did gain?

Indeed, he many times decided he should quit  
before he once again his weary limbs did move,  
rememb'ring that the warrior had promis'd it:  
that he could persevere, he could his mettle prove.  
She had not promis'd ease; indeed, she'd promis'd pain;  
186 and how she had deliver'd! but he still did rise;  
did he not seek the Lady? how could he complain?  
What hardship could he not endure for such a prize?  
And so, after so long, the warr'or woman rose  
again before his path, a smile behind her eyes.  
"Brave hero!" she did say, "you've suffer'd many woes;  
200 but you've endur'd and conquer'd countless awful foes!

"You have stay'd true and persever'd; please, take this gift,  
these boots to help protect your weary, injur'd feet;  
and know, whene'er you wear them, I your spirits lift,  
and help you when my other sisters you will meet.  
You now have strength to bear you up along your way;  
206 so please, continue eastward, till the fork you see;  
and as you journey, meet your sorrows day by day,  
and when the way grows harder, please remember me."  
Again he thank'd the lady, donn'd her gift, and east

*These boots will represent fortitude throughout the poem.*

he went, his strength assisted, nearly happily;  
he had travers'd now two of those four paths, at least;  
210 he now was that much closer to the Lady's feast.

## IV

When at the fork our hero had again arriv'd,  
he sought once more the Lady; he saw but the sign,  
the self-same sign he'd seen before; so unreviv'd,  
he took the next-south road, and for her face did pine.  
As all the others, this road started mostly straight,  
216 but now he knew that challenges would soon arise  
when he came round the bend, and they would not abate  
at all through his long journey, for his troubles' size  
would keep increasing; but the ladies he had met  
had help'd him, and would keep on, so long as he tries;  
so round the bend he came, his soul prepar'd and set,  
220 and what he saw he knew he never would forget.

A young man, barefoot, with the dunce's cone-shap'd hat,  
with pants but shirtless, with his left hand eating cheese,  
and in his right a club; and by himself he sat,  
just nibbling, so his hunger and his tongue to please.  
But flying through the air, there came a zipping stone,  
226 directed at, and barely missing, that man's head;  
he look'd back, fear now gripping him from flesh to bone,  
and his whole body shaking with a sudden dread;  
he saw a mob of boys, which pointed, jeer'd and mock'd,  
and soon were throwing many stones; the young man fled;  
the boys pursu'd him, like a bunch of vultures flock'd,  
230 not resting till the young man's silly head they'd knock'd.

*A medieval representation of folly or foolishness.*

When they'd pass'd on, ere long our hero saw once more  
a sight, this time a woman sitting with her child;  
but she herself into some other thing did pour;  
behind her, her small bairn was growing spoil'd and wild.  
Nearby, he saw a man who had some wares to sell,  
236 some broken wheels, crack'd, worn, and obviously poor;  
the salesman told him, "See, all of my wheels are well!  
Well-crafted, well-maintain'd, and good forevermore!"  
Our hero saw his heart; the man knew that he lied,  
but said within himself, "What am I truthful for?"

*Negligence.*

*Fraud.*

If I were honest, who would buy what I have plied?  
240 What would I eat, if to be honest I had tried?"

*Prudence.*

*The snake is a traditional symbol of prudence and wisdom, as well as of cleverness.*

Our hero then mov'd on; and soon, he saw again  
a lady beautiful, with face and eyes serene;  
she wore a robe of white, her sandals, he could ken,  
were strapp'd in snakeskin; buckles gold gave brilliant sheen.  
And on her head a golden circlet, shap'd as snakes,  
246 held back her brown hair, braided carefully, and long;  
before her legs, a shield her emblem for her makes:  
a serpent, coil'd about a pole, all hale and strong.  
"Brave hero," said the lady; "you've my sisters met!  
You've drunk her wine, and wear her boots; now hear my song!  
All men need things, and must do work those things to get;  
250 but in that need's the danger, in that work a threat.

*Mt 7:14*

"Be therefore wise, as if a serpent, in this life,  
but do not use your wisdom as a cause of harm,  
but rather to extend the good and conquer strife;  
defeat the wrong with strength of soul, not strength of arm.  
Receive as well this belt, compos'd of serpent's skin,  
256 and buckl'd with pure gold, a sign of my regard;  
and even when your knowledge of your fate grows thin,  
your wisdom will not fail, e'en when your place is hard."  
Our hero took the belt and wrapp'd it round his waist,  
and thank'd her for her help in giving him the guard  
for wisdom which around his body he had plac'd;  
260 the lady smil'd, and of that wisdom offer'd taste.

*I Cor 11:10*

"Man's eye is limited," she said, "and sees but short,  
as through a glass, and darkly; nothing's ever clear,  
not e'en what's right before him, and he cannot sort  
his fate from others, what will bring him joy or tear.  
He sees what he can see, and chooses but that sight  
266 he judges is the best, what in the darken'd room  
that is the future seems to give the greatest light;  
to stumble in the blackness is his fated doom.  
So be ye wise as serpents; don't give in to night,  
no matter how the darkness overhead may loom;  
seek out, observe, and make the best of mankind's plight,  
270 and ever seek with all your wisdom for the right."



Again he thank'd the lady, bowing low to ground,  
for all her knowing counsel, and her queenly gift;  
and as he headed onward, he knew that he'd found  
another prize that would him toward the lady lift  
and further help him down the eastward road to go,  
276 and make his journey easier than it had been;  
for though the ladies' gifts did not his pain forego,  
they'd help him bear his burdens, and go on to win.  
Ere long, of course, he came back to a place that he  
could recognize, where he had once been gather'd in  
by that great Lady wearing white; and would he see  
280 that lovely face, beneath whose gaze he long'd to be?

## V

But still the Lady wearing white did not appear;  
our hero sigh'd and started down the next south road,  
as he had done before; and though he still felt fear  
at what might lay ahead, it was not such a load  
as it had been before; and as he eastward went,  
286 his sight fell on a father with his near-grown son;  
the father's face was loving, and his back was bent  
with all the work he'd done for him, his dearest one.  
The father stretch'd his work-worn arms to that young man,  
just hoping to embrace him, now that work was done.  
Who but a youth such cruelty bring a parent can?  
290 He turn'd his back; the breaking of a heart began.

*Ingratitude and injustice.*

Nearby, he saw a man who to a woman spoke,  
and earnestly explain'd what he wish'd her to know;  
he spoke with heart; her sympathy he did evoke;  
but, fingers cross'd behind his back, his heart was low.  
He saw a boss, whose worker begg'd him for his wage,  
296 a fair and honest wage; he had a family, too;  
the boss refus'd, his cruelty free of temp'ring rage,  
and paid the man a pittance, as he'd said he'd do.  
He saw a judge; the case before him had his friend  
as party in the wrong, who then went on to sue;  
because he knew the man, when trial had reach'd its end,  
270 the judge decided he'd the verdict to him send.

*Falsehood and lying.*

*Failure to pay an honest wage.*

*Corruption.*

And then he saw a countless multitude of men,

*General recounting of  
vices opposed to justice.*

none angry, but each bent on one another's harm,  
each seeking an advantage 'gainst another; then  
each pressing those advantages by strength of arm  
and sly in cunning. Some of them did seek to kill,  
276 and others but to injure lives and property;  
they struck; they maim'd; they stole; they robb'd; and yet they still  
had not exhausted their reserves of enmity.  
They backbit with their tongues; and each and every one  
abas'd himself with utmost of indignity  
before some item living with them under sun,  
280 and which e'en of their dignity possessed none.

*Aristotle said that nei-  
ther the morning nor  
the evening star was so  
wonderful as justice.*

But though the sun was in the sky, there came a light  
so brilliant that it blotted out all other rays,  
as sun blots out the moon when risen to its height,  
and th' morning and the evening stars throughout the days.  
He saw this, too, to be a lady, with a crown  
286 of gold upon her head, a smile beyond serene,  
which shone with glory as to him she sent it down  
and fill'd up with her beauty the surrounding scene.  
She held a swinging scale, made of the finest gold;  
a sword of shining steel, fit for the finest queen;  
her eyes look'd kindly on him, clear, and well betold  
300 a beauty young as it was ineffably old.

*The scale and sword,  
well-known symbols of  
justice.*

"My son," she said, still giving such a lovely smile  
as fill'd him full of wonder at her beauty grand;  
such loveliness he had not seen in quite awhile,  
since at his Lady's orders he'd reach'd eastern land.  
But other than his Lady, she was surely best,  
306 the greatest in her beauty, strongest in command;  
the greatest of her sisters, queen of all the rest;  
none in their glory could such honor e'er demand.  
"I see you've met my sisters; you have drunk our wine,  
you wear our boots and belt; before me now you stand.  
Now hear me, son, and I shall give you gifts of mine;  
310 as grand as are those others, these are still more fine.

"You know that there are many lovely things on earth:  
the flowers in the springtime, yellow leaves in fall;  
a mother with her child, still pain'd from giving birth;

but my gift unto you does far surpass them all.  
So clothe yourself now with it, let it warm your soul,  
316 and keep it 'fore your mind, whate'er you seek to do.  
Your journey oft will take you over storm and shoal,  
but these, however rough the travel, won't fail you.  
So many men have to come to me to seek my aid;  
so many, meeting challenges, back westward flew;  
but if you wear my garments, which for you I've made,  
320 then of no slide back westward need you be afraid."

She offer'd him a breastplate made of strongest steel,  
and then a cloak and hood, color'd the deepest red;  
and as he donn'd these items, he could surely feel  
their strength and power coming down upon his head.  
The breastplate made him stronger, holding back the blows  
326 of enemies who sought his ruin from the west;  
the cloak and hood both warm'd him, built the heat that flows  
from all that's right and healthy in his head and breast.  
"My son," the lady said, "you see this scale that I  
hold in my hand, the sword I hold, and all the rest;  
'tis not for nothing these I bear with open eye,  
330 these weapons greater than my sisters can apply.

"My sisters gave you gifts that help yourself to keep,  
to order your own life along the proper guides;  
but these, my gifts, will help you make the mighty leap  
to where your truest good by nature e'er abides.  
For no man is a world complete all on his own,  
336 but as the tree needs soil and rain and warming sun,  
he needs his fellow men; a candle's never shone  
that lights not better when it's not the only one.  
Remember me! Without my gifts your soul will die!  
But with my sisters and myself, you've nearly won!  
Remember me! For it's in me your good does lie,  
340 in me your happiness can never pass you by!"

And so our hero thank'd the lady and went past,  
now knowing better what he still had left to do,  
and thinking only of what could still fair and fast  
bring him his many challenges and hardships through.  
But as he once again approach'd that mystic place

*Eph 6:12*

*Justice has tradition-  
ally not been depicted  
as blindfolded; justice  
should see clearly.*

*Hearkens to John  
Donne's "No man is  
an island."*

346 where one road turn'd to four, he long'd again to see  
the Lady wearing white, her blessed, smiling face,  
who started this great journey, and who was its key.  
The fork came into sight; a thick, obscuring mist  
was lifted, and our hero fell down to his knee,  
and took the hem of her white robe, and it he kiss'd;  
350 the Lady had return'd! his heart was fully bliss'd!

## VI

“Dear lady,” cried he, “Mother, I have walk'd the path  
which you have pointed out to me, and much endur'd;  
I've seen debauchery and bloodshed, witness'd wrath;  
I've drunk the wine which to these things myself inur'd.  
I've stood and withstood mightily against such trials  
356 as I had ne'er encounter'd; I've become as wise  
as serpents, and my last path ever reconciles  
myself to other men, that all of us may rise.  
I've follow'd all your wishes, Mother; have I won  
what you have promis'd me, the greatest gift and prize?  
Can now I finally cease to struggle and to run,  
360 and dwell in warmth and happiness beneath the sun?”

The Lady's gaze was kind and loving, fill'd with grace,  
such that, although our hero knew that she must say  
his journey was not done, that he had more to face,  
he did not fear to hear her voice tell him the way.  
“My son,” she said, “my brave, brave son, you've travell'd far,  
366 and gather'd a great many tools for you to use;  
you've made yourself as good as nature says you are;  
you've chosen all that nature wishes you to choose.  
But when I came to you, I knew that this you'd do,  
and so I know my current charge you'll not refuse;  
you are what nature made you; now, be one of few  
370 to go beyond your nature, make yourself anew.

*Grace perfects nature;  
so now that our hero  
has gained the natural  
virtues, he must now  
move on to supernatu-  
ral ones.*

“A sculptor carefully studies how his object seems,  
and just as carefully seeks to imitate in lines  
exactly all the outlines, shapes, and formal themes  
that he perceives, and constantly he then refines  
what he has made, and soon, it is so true to life  
376 that none can tell the difference, if the life is still;

but not content with this, under the sculptor's knife,  
reach loftier achievements this fine model will.  
With careful, studied effort, which the sculptor takes,  
he keeps improving on it, using every skill,  
until he's more than imitated life with fakes:  
380 e'en better than the living he the sculpture makes.

"So must it be with you; my groom the world has made,  
and truly loves it; but to you, his special love,  
a chance at more than mere perfection he's relay'd;  
a way your perfect nature you can rise above.  
You have the paths of nature up till now travers'd;  
386 the cardinal ways of life you've travell'd and fulfill'd;  
now bonds of birth and nature you're prepar'd to burst;  
and even greater strength of soul to start to build.  
Before you, you will see the four are now just three,  
but three which have in many men that strength instill'd;  
and like the four, these roads will not a leisure be;  
390 you'll need the four if e'er their end you wish to see.

*"Cardinal" hearkens to  
the cardinal virtues, as  
well as the cardinal di-  
rections.*

*Moving from the car-  
dinal to the theological  
virtues ("the three").*

"Go forth, my son, and rise above what you have been,  
and e'er remember in the struggle, I am here;  
the race is long and difficult, so run to win;  
remember that both I and you have my groom's ear.  
For though you struggle, never think you are alone,  
396 and never think you have no help when on your way;  
you have more help than any man has ever known,  
or e'er can know, or can in human language say.  
Have confidence! and know that you were made for this,  
no matter how you're tempted to go off astray;  
remember, past the dark and vice and viciousness,  
398 lies sun and warmth and goodness, and a perfect bliss."

*I Cor 9:20*

And so she faded to the sky, and call'd to him,  
"Remember me!" E'er long she was completely gone;  
with lighten'd heart, our hero stirr'd a weary limb  
and fac'd the road before him, seeking for the dawn.  
Indeed, the four had turn'd to three, as she had said,  
398 all heading east; our hero chose the northern one,  
and ready with his cloak, his hood upon his head,  
and all his gear, he started toward the rising sun.

*I Cor 9:20*

Three roads were yet to go; would then his journey end?  
No matter! he would run until the race was done.  
What possibly could stop him, with so great a friend?  
He'd fight the fight, and run the race, and never bend.

*II Tim 4:7*

360

## VII

*The symbolism of passing through water is too widespread to cite. Not least the parting of the Red Sea and the sacrament of baptism are important examples.*

366

That mystic place had chang'd in more than that one way,  
for now a river flow'd between where he then stood  
and where the road did fork; he knew he must foray  
across it, by his strength, if only that he could.  
As he approach'd its banks, he saw its flow was fast,  
much faster than our hero, weary with his quest,  
could handle on his own; its breadth and depth were vast,  
and by near-hopeless sorrow was our hero press'd.  
How could he do what his great Lady had him told,  
if he could not e'en start before he was repress'd?  
She said she and her groom were with him; now, behold!  
A liquid block, which from his goal would him withhold!

400

But still, what other way was there for him to go?  
This place, which was his life, presented but two ways:  
he could turn round, go west, avoid the river's flow,  
a flow so rough and fast, 'twas bound to end his days;  
or he could still press forward, risk his life and limb  
amidst the torrid stream, and toward the eastern bank;  
it might cost him his life; the river, strong and grim,  
kept threat'ning him, as raging torrent rose and sank.  
To cross it, he'd need strength beyond the strength he had,  
a power well beyond that of his current rank.  
The river kept on raging, rushing, fighting mad;  
our hero could not conquer it, however clad.

410

But turning west was not an option, not a choice,  
for he had come so far, and had the Lady's word  
that should he persevere, he surely would rejoice,  
no matter how, along the way, this end seem'd blurr'd.  
So walk'd he to the bank; he felt the water's cold,  
as if the roiling surface cast it up and out  
as sun casts out its heat; he knew he ought be bold,  
but e'en the thought of crossing made him want to shout,  
for help, for mercy, anything to save the strain,

416

the certain death which he foresaw without a doubt;  
he steel'd his nerve; he had to cross it; that was plain;  
420 'twas best to plunge right in, to shorten all the pain.

So plung'd he in; the cold rush'd to his very bones,  
and none of all his gifts could help him keep control  
in that unbeaten crash of water, wood, and stones  
that pull'd him, spun him, tripp'd him, hit him, made him roll  
like sand found on the seashore, caught in Ocean's wave,  
426 and helpless, swept along and under; so was he,  
though manfully he struggl'd as he tried to save  
himself, but he was stiff'd by that flowing sea.  
And desp'rately he tried to keep at least his head  
above the maelstrom, gulping air while it was free;  
but always, that voracious water must be fed,  
430 and soon our man was swallow'd, as had been his dread.

At first, he kept his struggle, pushing up as firm  
and strong as he was able, striking for the top,  
where he'd find life and air, at least for some short term,  
until again below the surface he would drop;  
but soon, he knew he never would, and clos'd his eyes  
436 to beg his Lady's groom that he might hold him free  
of fault that he had fail'd to find where comfort lies,  
and slowly drown'd ere even starting on the three.  
His breath was leaving him, and in his soul he cries  
in sorrow that his journey ends ere he can see  
the end of all that he'd been shown by good and wise;  
440 his eyelids close to darkness, and our hero dies.

## VIII

Our hero's eyelids open'd, and he gasp'd for breath,  
his body drench'd and cold, but somehow still intact;  
he slowly rose onto his feet; for his own death  
had made him somehow stronger than before the fact.  
His boots and belt were with him, and his cloak and hood,  
446 as also was his breastplate; he retain'd his things;  
indeed, his great misfortune was a proper good,  
for though he died, the harder now to life he clings.  
He turn'd back to the river, saw the western shore  
across the raging current, which such gladness brings.

*Gn 22:17; he is becoming one of those descendants of Abraham through his baptism.*

*"Manfully"; I Cor 14:11*

*Jn 10:20-21*

*We keep the natural virtues when we acquire the supernatural ones; indeed, they are granted and strengthened.*

He'd reached the eastern bank; he could proceed once more!  
450 Into his sacred journey he himself could pour!

And so he turn'd again, and saw the fork to three;  
immedi'tely he started toward the northernmost,  
but then he stopp'd up short; already he could see  
the mysteries these mystic paths would have to host.  
He look'd upon three ladies, and their hea'enly grace  
456 outshin'd all those he'd seen, e'en added all to one;  
he thought he could forever gaze upon their face,  
and never miss the warming rays come from the sun.  
They stood before him, smiling kindly, each with crown  
of gold upon their heads, so fine they did him stun;  
their lips had never known the slightest sorrow's frown,  
460 and each of them upon him now was looking down.

*The three theological virtues. He gets these before, rather than after, his struggles because they are infused in the soul at baptism.*

*The traditional color of faith, and of St. Peter, apostle of faith.*

*The traditional color of hope, and of St. James, apostle of hope.*

*The traditional color of charity, and of St. John, apostle of charity.*

The left was rob'd in white, a white so pure and clean  
that it could never tolerate the slightest stain;  
her belt was red, her eyes the brightest, clearest green;  
her golden hair outshin'd the crown upon it lain.  
The right was clothed all in green; a cincture red  
466 tied up her robe, and eyes of green gaz'd from her face;  
her golden hair shone brilliantly upon her head;  
her eyes look'd ever upward, toward her proper place.  
And lastly, she in center, dress'd in robes of flame  
which seem'd to burn, but never harm'd her perfect grace;  
with cincture green and hair of gold, she did proclaim  
470 the glories of the other two within her frame.

*Eph 6:14*

*The quintessential symbol of faith: the Lamb, the Eucharist.*

The first did hold in her right hand a mighty shield  
emblazon'd with her emblem; it was hale and strong;  
he had no doubt that none could make this lady yield,  
could stop her singing when she wish'd to make a song.  
At top, he saw a lamb; and from his hands and feet  
476 and side he bleeds profusely; into one they flow;  
and all together in a golden cup they meet,  
which underneath the lamb gives blood a place to go.  
Without a word the lady gave him such a shield;  
he took it from her rev'rently, and bowing low;  
with this, he thought, his victory would now be seal'd;  
480 what force could harm him, when by this he was conceal'd?



“My son,” the lady said, “the things you have not seen  
have guided you thus far; now follow them anew.  
You trust in what your lady tells you that they mean;  
now cling to them as misers to their money do.  
But unlike money, these you share and have e’en more,  
486 so show your shield to all, and fear not what they say;  
and be they rich as you, or be they sad and poor,  
you know that you have offer’d them the proper way.  
And when you’re threaten’d, show the shield! it will not break;  
it both protects and speaks, and will all fears allay.  
Your enemies are everywhere; so stay awake!  
490 and show the shield! let none its safety from you take!”

*II Cor 4:14; Hbr 5:1*

*Mt 16:15*

*Mt 24:32; Mc 11:29; et  
alia.*

The rightmost lady, cloth’d in green, then smil’d at him,  
and hanging in the air, a few feet from his face,  
appear’d his own gold crown; it in the air did swim,  
mov’d never closer, never farther from his face.  
He saw the lady’s crown, as well, now do the same  
496 as that before his face; on it she fix’d her eyes,  
and never mov’d them, never would until she came  
to journey’s end, when she could claim her rightful prize.  
Our hero knew his crown was his, and his to take  
if he could run this sacred race and to it rise;  
he knew that he could claim it, if he’d not forsake  
470 the things the Lady’d offer’d to him for its sake.

*A traditional depic-  
tion of hope: a lady  
with her eyes fixed on  
a crown she does not  
yet wear.*

*Eph 6:15*

*II Tim 4:7*

“My son,” the lady told him, and her happy gaze  
did not depart from her seraphic golden crown;  
“Do not forget for what you run, what glory lays  
beyond your journey’s sorrow, and your sorrow’s frown.  
A prize awaits you, prize beyond what you can see,  
476 what you can e’en imagine as the best of bliss.  
No ear has heard, no eye has the ability  
to take in such a surfeit of pure happiness.  
So run the race, and run it knowing you can win;  
but run so as to win, and e’er remember this:  
all joy and love and happiness that’s ever been  
480 is nothing near the prize that waits for you within.”

*I Cor 2:9*

*II Tim 4:7*

*I Cor 2:9*

The center lady then stepp’d forward; out she held  
in both her hands two objects, one at rest in each;

*The Sacred Heart of  
Jesus and the Immac-  
ulate Heart of Mary,  
perfect types of divine  
charity.*

two hearts, aflame but not consum'd, our man beheld;  
he look'd, a greater understanding for to reach.  
Her left hand's heart was girdl'd with a string of rose,  
466 of roses white as freshly-fallen winter's snow;  
it beat with unimaginally bitter woes;  
a sword pierc'd through it, handl'd by a friend, not foe.  
The right-hand heart was girdl'd by a string of thorns,  
which pierc'd and punctur'd every time a beat would go;  
this string's the only thing this beating heart adorns,  
500 this beating heart which bleeds and suffers as it mourns!

*Lc 2:28*

*Mt 23:25; Jo 17:2*

*Ex 3:2*

“My son,” this lady said; “you see I'm all aflame,  
as are these hearts I show you; but we're not consum'd;  
remember what these fiery items all proclaim:  
a love to death, a death which cannot be entomb'd.  
My sister here in white your steel protection gave;  
506 but steel without a flame is useless, soft and weak;  
my sister cloth'd in green gives crowns out to the brave;  
but without flame in vain for gold she'll ever seek.  
My fire gives life to both my sisters, and to you,  
as air alone makes able throat and mind to speak.  
Be kindl'd! Burn as hot as these I've shown you do!  
510 Ne'er let it dwindle! Ever kindle it anew!”

*I Cor 11:11*

*Eph 6:15*

She plac'd the hearts beneath her mantle, by her breast,  
then drew a mighty sword, and held it by the blade,  
with pommel pointing upward, hilt now facing west,  
and blade of steel all red with flame, as if just made.  
“Take this,” she said; “this sword will strike down enemies  
516 which seek to quench your fire, or take your helm or shield;  
before it any foe of wisdom breaks and flees,  
and foolish ones are quickly made to bow and yield.  
For fire defeats all enemies and every foe,  
and clears the weeds and chaff from every farmer's field;  
fear not, but wield the sword! extinguish every woe!  
520 fear not, but wield the sword! your Lady wills it so!”

*Mt 3:10; Lc 3:15*

Our hero took the sword, while down upon his knees,  
and thank'd all three of them with all his soul and heart;  
he said that all he wish'd was that he them could please;  
each laid their hands upon his head, then did depart.

But still our hero had a part of each in him,  
526 for still he bore their gifts, and sought them all to use;  
and so he set his face to east, now strong and grim,  
determin'd once again to run and not to lose.  
The road lay still before him, and let no man say  
that he would shy away; no, he that path would choose!  
He'd surely meet more hazards; but still, come what may,  
530 he'd meet them moving forward on the proper way.

## IIX

So now, at last, equipp'd as he must be equipp'd,  
our hero rush'd straight toward the northernmost of ways,  
his crown before his eyes, his shield now firmly gripp'd,  
his sword aflame, the better light to spread and raise.  
Before, when running on the four, he'd labor'd long,  
536 near kill'd himself before acquir'd a needed gift;  
but since he'd cross'd the river, for a simple song,  
he'd gotten priceless treasures by a perfect thrift.  
It seem'd so easy, effortless, to these accept;  
would now his journey be as effortless and swift?  
But though they're freely given, they're not freely kept;  
540 what sorrows lay along the roads on which he'd stepp'd!

He kept his way; ere long, he was approaching near  
a herd of hairy beasts, all gather'd in one place;  
though all had eyes and ears, they couldn't see or hear;  
each bore a deep malevolence upon his face.  
Nearby, a pack of men, as like him as can be,  
546 each paying homage to a filthy, monstrous beast  
and begging favor from a creature he could see,  
yet claiming freedom, though from bondage unreleas'd.  
For each such man, around his ankle, had a chain  
attach'd to his own monster; and its length decreas'd  
with every importuning; with this tight'ning rein,  
550 ere long each man his liberty had surely slain.

One of the beasts approach'd him as he made his way  
along the road; its grin was fill'd with sharp'ned teeth;  
its eyes a red like coals, its voice as far away,  
and yet a sound like to his own it did bequeath.  
"I see," it said, its grin now full of wicked glee,

*The cardinal virtues  
can be developed nat-  
urally, over time and  
habit; but the theologi-  
cal virtues are infused  
at baptism.*

*Idolatry: the worship  
of created things.*

*Ps 95:11-13*

*Like him: Ps 95:14*

*Bondage: truth (and  
faith, which accepts it)  
will set us free. Jo 8:28*

*The beast is in some  
ways like him.*

556 “a man now comes our way, and seeks the fabled east!  
But does he know the way? the straight path can he see?  
Thinks he that he can find it, ’thout a helpful beast?  
You, man,” the beast went on, “seek you to pass this way?  
Seek you for peace and happiness, for drink and feast?  
You cannot pass until you’ve learned the game to play;  
560 you cannot pass unless our price you will to pay.”

The number of the beasts and of adoring men  
made seem he told the truth, that only he could grant  
safe passage through the mob of filth; but then again,  
the way into his soul his Lady did implant.

566 “I know the way,” our hero said, “and need no aid;  
my Lady guides me through, from start to very end.  
Of losing the right path, I’m simply not afraid;  
my Lady knows the ways down which she will me send.”  
“Your lady?” said the beast, with wicked, evil grin;  
“you must have cross’d the river, to have such a friend.  
We’ve many such who trust the Lady, hope to win,  
570 yet still will take their chain; yay, many such have been.

“They rise out of the river, clean and full of life,  
all ready to run straight to sun, without delay;  
but then they see the way is hard and full of strife;  
ere long the river seems so very far away.

They flounder; we can pick them up; they come to us  
576 and don their chains, and glad to have them; so will you.  
Why struggle ere accept? Avoid the fight and fuss.  
I have a chain right here; it fastens soft and true.  
You cannot just evade us; we are here to stay;  
our darts will wound and puncture; so what will you do?  
We’ll never let you pass ere you the toll shall pay;  
580 so pay it now; the benefits the costs outweigh.”

*Eph 6:14*

As hid’ous as he was, the beast made sort of sense,  
when contemplating all our man had then endur’d.  
What had it gain’d him, but a journey more intense?  
What had his Lady done, but further reassur’d?  
The monster promis’d rest, a shortcut on his way;  
586 our hero was so weary, toward the chain he lean’d.  
It didn’t seem like much; could he then peaceful lay,

if only he'd be shackl'd to this monstrous fiend?  
But still, he saw the beast as it was truly form'd;  
his weariness had not his mem'ry so demean'd  
that he forgot the river, nor his sight deform'd  
590 to suffer mind to be so badly misinform'd.

*Concupiscence darkens  
the intellect and weak-  
ens the will.*

“My Lady, she has freed me; I pursue the right;  
I need no monsters and no chains to serve as guide;  
you needn't thus appeal to me with tales of fright;  
I'm not without some courage and some righteous pride.  
I serve the Lady, she who shows what can't be seen,  
596 and need no other like yourself to show the way.  
So keep your chain; I'll keep the Lady, mighty queen,  
and nothing my allegiance to her shall allay.”  
And so our hero headed past that monstrous shape,  
resuming his great journey now, without delay;  
but then the fiend cried out, “Let not the man escape!  
570 Shoot darts! Assault and kidnap! Murder, rob, and rape!”

*II Cor 4:14; Hbr 5:1*

*Darts: Eph 6:14*

And every one of those foul creatures turn'd his face,  
each with one slave or more, to face our hero's might;  
each rais'd a fiery dart and readied for the chase;  
our hero flex'd his sword-arm, readied for the fight.  
And all at once the beasts let fly; he rais'd his shield,  
566 and countless darts bounc'd harmlessly down to the ground;  
his sword flash'd bright before him; he would never yield,  
though all the monsters in the world were his way bound!  
The horde advanc'd; his sword was striking beasts and men!  
He show'd the shield, and mighty power he then found!  
Some men who saw it toward the river fled again,  
560 and beasts were terrified beyond their monstrous ken!

*Eph 6:14*

*Some are converted by  
the example of faith,  
and the enemy flees be-  
fore it.*

Behind its shelter did our hero make his way,  
and no attack could touch him; so, secure and hale,  
he made it past the monsters and their hapless prey,  
to keep on running eastward on this sacred trail.  
And as the beasts and slaves kept fading off behind,  
566 so powerless to harm him, with his mighty guard,  
he heard them wailing, raging; for both deaf and blind,  
they hated some believ'd what they could not regard.  
But leaving them far in the past, our hero knew

he need no longer fear the beasts with whom he'd sparr'd.  
And holding tight his treasures, he still eastward flew,  
600 until the road he travell'd turn'd to three anew.

## IX

And at that sacred fork, he took the middle way,  
his crown before his face, and ever eastward bound;  
he knew not what new challenges before him lay,  
but knew he would not stop till his reward he'd found.  
What prize? he didn't know; but it was worth the race;  
606 he knew that it was worth it; she had told him so!  
He had to trust her gifts to help him keep his pace,  
and never let his weariness bring efforts low.  
So onward did he press, though tired and hungry still,  
his thirst for rest too great to let his travels slow;  
but then before him rose a monumental hill,  
610 and looking up its slope, he nearly lost his will.

'Twas more a mountain, looming upward like a tow'r,  
and full of crags and brambles that did block the road;  
the road was rough and twisted, and the wind did scour  
whatever dar'd the mountain's fastnesses to goad.  
Our man would have to climb, when he could barely move,  
616 e'en with all the enthusiasm of the fight  
that he'd had with the beasts; this hill would surely prove  
his dedication to the path of good and right.  
And so, with all the resolution he could find,  
our hero started climbing, using all his might;  
the hill would need a strength of very different kind  
620 than that for which the Warrior's boots had been design'd.

*Mere fortitude does  
not suffice for supernat-  
ural goals.*

To say it was a struggle is to speak too light,  
belittle an experience so full of pain,  
so full of agony, and dark as blackest night,  
it seem'd the sun would never rise, nor suff'ring wane.  
Far worse than anything he had endur'd before,  
626 he drew on every gift the Lady'd sent his way;  
he'd heard of struggles like his own, in other's lore,  
but never dream'd that he this price would have to pay.  
He call'd upon the Lady's and her children's store,  
but still, he was the man who on the path must stay.

*The sacraments.*

Exhausted, worn, and weaken'd, e'en the gifts he bore  
630 seem'd weights to drag him from the sky and toward the floor.

On his way up the mountain, he did meet a man,  
who also tried to make the trek up toward the east;  
"Good friend," our hero said, "some water, if you can,  
or bread, so that my journey will not here be ceas'd."  
"Give up!" the man exclaim'd; "you'll never make it there!"  
636 The journey's hopeless; never can the end be found!  
Give up before you climb into e'en thinner air!"  
Then with his sword he spill'd his guts out on the ground.  
But then another pass'd our hero, gave him bread,  
and soon he saw a multitude, all eastward bound;  
and though the trip was difficult, he then could tread  
640 with peace in sorrow, with the others safely led.

*A traditional type of  
despair: a suicide  
falling upon his sword.*

*The Eucharist.*

*The Church; the Com-  
munion of Saints.*

At length he reach'd the summit and he started down,  
and now the way seem'd easy, without pain or fear;  
e'er long he'd near forgotten sorrow's bitter frown,  
that he'd been far too mis'erable to shed a tear.  
And while he headed down, one of the number sat,  
646 his face relax'd and blissful, as if at the end.  
"It's all downhill from here," he said, "and that is that!  
Why should we stress to follow every way and wend?"  
And so the man stay'd down, no further progress made;  
no more this man to rising sun would ever trend.  
So many trials behind him, beaten, he had laid;  
650 but only ease was needed for his will to fade.

*Presumption.*

But ever did our hero keep his eyes ahead,  
affix'd to that gold crown which freely he'd receiv'd  
from that fine lady wearing green, who'd truly said  
it's greater than all others that can be conceiv'd.  
So as he reach'd the bottom of this massive hill,  
656 accompanied by fellow trav'lers, tired but strong,  
he knew that neither ease nor struggle e'er would kill  
his will to run this race, however hard and long.  
For struggle saps the will, deprives the soul of hope,  
and ease removes the urgency to move along.  
So neither then assume, nor in your sorrow mope;  
660 keep eyes upon the crown, for in its light we cope!

*II Tim 4:7*

## X

Again the roadway turn'd to three at that strange place  
to which he had return'd so many times of late;  
and now he took the southernmost, at such a pace  
as he did hope would hasten him unto his fate.

*The sword of the  
Spirit. Eph 6:15*

666 And as he headed down the way, his burning blade  
burn'd ever brighter, ever hotter in his hand,  
but did not burn or even pain; but would it fade  
in any part of where he went, his promis'd land?

*Ex 3:2*

And down the road, he found no obstacles that block,  
no threats against which bulwarks must be kept and mann'd;  
his Lady held against all those, a steady rock,  
670 the anchor for his ship, the crystal for his clock.

*Mt. 14:16. Rock, an-  
chor, traditional types;  
crystal, a new type of  
the Church.*

*Selfishness.*

And to the northern side, a woman stood and star'd,  
her eyes affix'd upon an open box she grasp'd;  
as he approach'd, she look'd up at him, teeth all bar'd,  
and hiss'd and shut the box, now clos'd up tight and clasp'd.

*Cruelty and hatred.*

676 Our man then saw that at her feet were starving bairns,  
so hungry bones were poking nearly through their skin,  
and cold, and shiv'ring; soon they'd need not clothes, but cairns,  
siz'd for their tiny bodies, short and shocking thin.

The woman look'd down at the children, eyes aflame;  
with hatred kick'd the saddest things that e'er had been,  
then fled away to north, ascribing wrong and blame  
680 to those so cold and hungry they were nearly lame.

*The woman offering  
her heart to God and  
her goods to her fellow  
man: a traditional im-  
age of divine charity.*

But to the southern side, he saw another dame,  
most beautiful, right hand conceal'd under her cloak  
and at her breast, the other hidden just the same  
inside a bag, strapp'd round her shoulder like a yoke.  
686 Then she approach'd the children, face so full of grace  
and deep'ning love, the starving waifs seem'd by its sight  
to gain some strength, to stir from their appoint'd place,  
to see some hope of 'scaping from their woeful plight.

*Sheep are another tra-  
ditional type of char-  
ity.*

690 Her bag was nearly empty; yet still, all the same,  
she drew forth wool and mutton, sooth'd their pain and fright;  
and with her other hand, drew forth her heart, aflame,  
and held it upward, to her truest love proclaim.

As she led off the children, still another came



from northern ways, a man, dress'd up as he was dress'd;  
he wore the strongest boots, like his; they were the same;  
a belt of snakeskin 'round his waist was closely press'd.  
He wore a cloak and hood that were of deepest red,  
696 and bore a mighty shield of steel to stand as guard;  
a crown like to his own hung out before his head;  
the lack of flaming sword alone the likeness marr'd.  
Indeed, as he approach'd, our hero saw the man,  
that it was he himself, though to believe 'twas hard;  
it matter'd nothing whether he believe it can;  
690 the one he now beheld was built on his own plan.

“O, trav'ler!” said the other man, and rais'd his hand  
in greeting to our hero, who's his very twin;  
“It's good to finally meet you, in this eastern land,  
though long we've known each other, sharing kith and skin.  
Indeed, we two are one; we are the very same;  
696 we're one in birth, and one in life, and one in death.  
We couldn't lose each other, nor our self declaim;  
when one of us needs air, the other draws his breath.  
But now we meet in flesh, the flesh we've always shar'd;  
now we decide what we must do before our death.  
How can we live our life by sorrow unimpair'd?  
690 How can we from these hateful miseries be spar'd?”

*“Kith and kin” is not  
strong enough, for  
these are one and the  
same.*

Our hero open'd mouth, but up the other held  
a hand to silence questioning he knew would come.  
“Don't ask about your journey; have you not expell'd  
enough illusions of the east to keep you mum?  
Such promises of rest and peace; what have you gain'd?  
696 What sign have you that anything to gain exists?  
Your journey's made you nothing more than broke and pain'd.  
What does a man in such a case? A man resists!  
He faces down the will of him who's wrong'd him so,  
and fights it down to tooth and nail and bloodied fists;  
he never lets such bitches hold him down so low,  
700 nor hateful bastards send him off to pain and woe!

*Hatred and ingrati-  
tude, preaching self-  
ishness and sloth (the  
refusal to exert the  
needed effort).*

*Discord, contention,  
schism, strife, and  
sedition: all vices op-  
posed to charity.*

“No, friend; you need to stand up for yourself today;  
let none, not e'en your lady, tell you where to go,  
or what to feel, or how to act, or what to say,

or what it is important that you come to know.  
For you're the measure of your good and proper end;  
706 you make your destiny, you know your proper place;  
there's no one in the world your will can justly send,  
can make you turn away from what you wish to face.  
Forget them! Hate the one who would direct your will,  
the one who'd take your power to direct your pace!  
You are the one who wills to move or to keep still!  
710 And only you decide what can your will fulfill!"

Our hero ponder'd this, remember'd all the pain  
he had endur'd as he'd travers'd the sacred way;  
how long in suffering and woe he'd helpless lain,  
how easy was the path that to the west did lay.  
He thought how often he had felt abandon'd, lost,  
716 and lonely, no one watching over his poor head;  
how many joys and pleasures which had been the cost  
of this long way on which he'd let himself be led.  
Was this his destiny, to struggle and to fight  
until, eventu'ly, he lost and fell down dead?  
Could all this pain and suffering be truly right?  
720 Beyond the inky darkness, was there really light?

Perhaps the other man had found the answer true,  
the way for him to end his journey and find rest.  
Perhaps he should reject this path, the Lady, too,  
and voyage on the easy roads back to the west.  
Perhaps the Lady's mission to him was just cruel,  
726 a task for him to toil at without point or end;  
perhaps his long devotion mark'd him as a fool,  
embracing woes he easily away could fend.  
Our hero squar'd his shoulders, firm'd his shaking jaw;  
could he to but himself his full devotion lend?  
Could he not say the truest miracles he saw?  
730 Did he not know the love that lay behind the law?

*Mt 18:23*

"I'm nothing," our man said, "if on the easy way:  
an empty tomb shap'd like a man, and nothing more.  
My destiny's beyond myself; and come what may,  
my Lady leads me to the one that I adore.  
I love the one who waits for me at journey's end;

736 I love the guide he sent to lead me to his face;  
and none away from rising sun can now me send;  
not now, when love is drawing me unto my place!  
I've not forgot the water which I had to ford,  
nor all the aids I've gotten as I run this race;  
if even I will fight against my guiding lord,  
740 perhaps it's not for nothing he sent me a sword!"

Our hero rais'd his fiery blade and ran him through  
from point to hilt, sunk in the traitor's hateful guts;  
the sword was sharp, the blade was guided straight and true,  
and all the worst of self was purg'd by mighty cuts.  
The flames burst from the sword like flames burst from the sun,  
746 devouring the body, burning brighter still  
upon the blade; and up his arm the flames did run,  
and all the space upon his body they did fill.  
The likeness of the hottest fire our man assum'd,  
a fire which burn'd and glow'd as strong as was his will;  
and newly strengthen'd, eastward he his way resum'd,  
750 aflame with fire which burns, and ne'er to be consum'd!

*Ex 3:2*

## CONCLUSION

Our hero's sacred journey was not over yet,  
nor would it be for yet some long and ard'ous time;  
the eastward road is hard and narrow; few will get  
their way up to the gates through such an ard'ous climb!  
But he had emptied from himself whatever held  
756 him back from his great journey; he himself did slay  
with flaming sword the emptiness his flesh had shell'd,  
and fill'd it up with fire, forever there to stay.  
And so, though mark'd with sorrow and with battle-scar,  
he did persist along that narrow, sacred way,  
fore'er approaching closer to what's ever far:  
760 the love that guides the sun and moon and every star.



# COLOPHON

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