To the Professional Development Committee  
From John Sider  
May 20, 2005

This is my report on this semester’s Faculty Development Grant of released time from one course. Having made the translation of *Pearl* a higher priority than revising English 6, I’ve found that *Pearl* took all my time; actually, I finished the attached draft just today.

I intend this summer to refine it in numerous details, as much as possible, and it will be an assigned text for English 46—Survey of British Literature to 1800 (it’s not in the course textbook), instead of the same poet’s *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Many students have encountered the latter, but none the former—which I regard as one of the most significant documents of spiritual formation in all of English literature.

I intend also to revise my English 6 course along the lines described in my revised proposal of January 19, 2005, and I will report on that part of the project by the specified deadline of September 30, 2005.

Many thanks for these opportunities! Working so intimately with *Pearl* has been a great spiritual enrichment for me, and I believe the poem will encourage my students in their pilgrimage, as well as expanding their literary horizons beyond the bounds of The Norton Anthology of English Literature.
Pearl, for a prince such pleasing prize,  
Set in gleaming gold so gorgeously fret,  
I claim with confidence: in climes of sunrise  
Her magnificent match I never met.  
So smooth her surface, small her size,  
So radiant, round, and richly set,  
Of jewels in my journeys on which I've laid eyes,  
None vies with her value, that I have viewed yet.  
Great is my grief, that I should have let  
That prize be misplaced in a planted plot!  
I languish, lacerated by my love’s great debt  
To that pearl, my prize without a spot.

Often since, on the spot where it slipped away  
I wait on that wealth, with wistful desire,  
That gift that made me glad and gay,  
Drove out my grief, though deep and dire.  
Loss weighs my heart with black dismay  
And sorrow swells my soul with fire.  
Yet I never thought to see the day  
Such tuneful music could transpire  
As richly regales me when I retire  
To fancy its face with earth so fraught.  
O mold and clay, how you bemire  
My pearl, my prize without a spot!

Spices must spread on that spot of ground  
Where such royal richness rots in clay;  
There yellow, blue, and red are found  
Of brightest blooms in the blaze of day.  
Where it sank beneath the earthen mound  
Fruit and flower cannot fade away;  
Grain brought to barn can only abound  
When sprouts have sprung from seeds’ decay.  
All goods some further goods display;  
No seed so fine could come to naught,  
But spicery springs, to thrive and stay,  
From that precious pearl, prize without spot.

At this same spot of which I tell  
I found the garden growing green,  
(In festive August it befell  
When crops are cut with sickles keen)  
With fairest flowers to cover well  
The mound where last my pearl was seen,
And cornflower, camomile, clove to dwell
With scattered peonies between.
Seemly as sight of such a scene
Was the perfume pervading this fragrant plot.
Lowly there lay the love I mean,
My precious pearl without a spot.

On that spot I wrung my hands in the pain
Of grating grief that gripped me tight.
A bitter burden bound each vein,
Though reason could have calmed me quite.
To mourn my pearl, to rave and complain,
My reason flailing fiercely in fight,
I could not let Christ’s comfort reign;
My will in wildness wallowed in night.
As I fell face down on that flowery site,
Such sweets my senses swiftly sought
That slumber seized my grieving sprite
By that precious pearl without a spot.

In time my spirit sprang from that spot—
My body dropping down to dream,
My soul by God’s own grace up-caught
Where manifest mighty marvels teem.
Though where in the world, I well knew naught,
Hence I was haled among heights supreme,
Fairly confronted with a forest plot
Where resplendent rocks so richly beam
That the glittering glory of their gleam
Exceeds belief or imagination;
No weaver weaves such web, I deem,
Of half so glorious decoration.

The decoration of each hill side
Is cloud-capped cliffs most crystal clear.
With bulks in India-blue bedyed,
Forests fine and fair appear;
Leaves in burnished silver’s pride
Are quaking, quavering, quivering here.
With blazing brightness beautified
Their shimmering sheen is shining sheer.
Orient pearls, most rare and dear,
Gravel the ground in grand variation;
Brightest daylight seems dim and drear,
In light of such dazzling decoration.
This decoration spoke (though mute)
To dispel my darkness deliciously.
I tasted fresh and fragrant fruit
That succored, served, and supported me.
Bright-winged birds that cry and hoot
With flaming feathers were flocking free.
The best-plucked string of melodious lute
Might not match their melody.
When those creatures warbled harmony,
They sang in such sweet combination
No one could gain such gracious glee
As there amid that decoration.
All I saw was thus decorated
Following fortune on the forest way.
The glories that I contemplated
No talent of tongue could tell or say.
Forth I fared, fascinated,
No slope so steep my steps to stay.
Farther in the forest, fairly elevated,
A plenteous plot of pear-trees lay,
With bushes and borders, and the banks gay
Of a river of such golden delectation,
As I went to watch the waters play,
O Lord! how precious was that decoration!

The decoration of this dazzling depth
Was banks of beryl that brightly glowed.
Swirling sweet the current swept;
With whirling whisper the waters flowed.
Bright bottom-stones together kept
Like gleams through glass their glitter showed;
As streaming stars, while mortals slept,
Would shine when winter storms have snowed.
For every stone on the stream-bed bestowed
Was a gem of such brilliant coloration
That the stream sparkled like silver lode,
So precious appeared its decoration.

The dear decoration of hill and dale,
Of woods and waters and wondrous plain,
Bathed me in blessings and banished my bale,
Drove out distress, dispelling my pain.
A running rivulet down the vale
I traced in bliss, brimful my brain;
The farther I’d follow that freshet’s trail
The stronger the joy my heart would gain
Thus in Fortune’s testing, whether she ordain
To send us solace or troubles sore,
The day of her dealing will doubtless obtain
Ever and always more and more.

I met in that manner more delight
Than a spacious season would serve to share.
A tenth of the gladness of that sight
No common earthling could declare.
I thought it must be heaven’s height,
Surely, these sheer slopes shining fair.
I wondered whether the water might
Betoken a bordering boundary there.
I supposed one would see a city somewhere
Beyond the stream on the farther shore;
But the depth of the river was danger to dare,
And mightily I longed, ever more and more.

More, and still more, I was moved to know
What else might even more astound;
Though the nearer side had solaced me so,
Fairer by far seemed the farther ground.
I stopped and studied the streamlet’s flow
But no favorable fording place I found.
In fact, when farther I sought to go
In greater dangers was I wound;
While in faith I felt most fully bound
To brave the peril with such joys in store.
Then a wondrous sight these longings crowned
That moved my mind still more and more.

More marvel my reason mastered quite,
For beyond the current my eye could trace
A cliff of crystal, clear and bright.
Its lovely light illumined the place
Where a flawless figure fine and slight,
A girl whose guise glowed with grace,
Was clad in a cloak of unclouded white.
I’d seen her before; I knew the face.
As glittering gold as one could chase,°
So shone that shape on the farther shore.
I looked at the lass a lengthy space,
Then still longer. I knew her more and more.

The more I mused on her comely mien
And her form and fashion finely bred,
I sensed a glory sweet and serene
Like nothing ever felt or said.
I’d surely have called her, had it not been
In the sudden surprise my senses fled.
In such a strange spot to be seen,
This sight my soul disquieted.
When lightly she lifted her lovely head
Her skin was as white as ivory of yore;
My mind was moved and much misled,
And ever the longer, more and more.

IV

16
More than I fancied, I felt fear rise;
Stock-still in awe, I dared not call.
With sealed-up lips and staring eyes,
I held as still as hawk in hall.
Something spiritual was my surmise,
But what if she vanished beyond recall?
I would not win her in any wise.
I feared some mishap might befall.
That gracious girl, so goodly in all,
Rose up, in her royal robes displayed,
So seemly made, so smooth, so small,
A precious prize in pearls arrayed.

17

Priceless pearls in prized arrays
On that ground by grace a body might meet.
Blooming bright as lily sprays,
Straight down the bank she came to greet.
Her mantle was white with glistening blaze,
Open-sided, and bordered neat
With the fairest I've seen, in all my days,
Of precious pearls, pleasing and sweet.
Her gown, decked likewise fair and feat,
With pearls aplenty overlaid,
Was folded in many a fulsome pleat,
Everywhere with pearls arrayed.

18

Arrayed in a coronet was the girl
Set with gems, shimmering with light,
Of no other kind than whitest pearl,
With finest flowers figured aright,
And naught else covering lock and curl.
Her flowing hair framed the fairest sight:
A face as solemn as duke or earl.
Her complexion was clear and whalebone white.
With golden sheen her tresses bright
Lay on her shoulders loose and unstayed,
Her neckband replete in pleasing plight
With precious pearl in a border arrayed.

19

Arrayed was her wristband (as every hem
At her hands and sides likewise was blessed)
With dazzling pearls, like her diadem;
And in burnished white the girl was dressed.
And one pearl was so wondrous, a faultless gem
Adorning the center of her breast
That all use of reason one might contemn
For conceiving its value above the rest.
With all terms and language ever expressed,
Tribute worthy that sight could never be paid,
The pureness and cleanness so manifest
Of that precious pearl where it was arrayed.

20

Arrayed in pearl, that precious piece
Descended the slope to the water’s side.
No happier human from here to Greece
Than I, when I saw her across the divide,
My kin closer than aunt or niece.
Thus much my mirth was magnified.
Bowing womanly, offering peace,
In gracious greeting that gratified
With joyous words to me she cried,
Doffing her diadem, that delightful maid.
In bliss to be born such a time to bide,
I replied to that sweet one in pearls arrayed.
“O pearl,” I said, “in pearls arrayed,
Are you my pearl, whose plight I grieved
And lamented in languor and lonely shade?
Much have I longed for you, unperceived,
Since into the grass from me you strayed.
While I was broken, blighted, bereaved,
You were led to delight of life new-made,
In a heavenly home, from harassment relieved.
What joy for my jewel has fate achieved,
While granting me this grievous chagrin?
For our hopes in each other were deceived;
A joyless jeweler have I been.”

That jewel, in gems bejeweled o’er,
Raised up her face and eyes of gray,
Put on her pearly crown once more,
And soberly soon began to say:
“You are much mistaken in your lore
To plead your pearl has passed away,
That rests so richly in royal store
In this gracious, glorious garden to stay,
And ever here to dwell and play
Where no loss or grief can enter in.
You’d have known that it securely lay,
If a noble jeweler you had been.

“But noble jeweler, if you are sad
For a dear jewel’s loss that you darkly rue,
To my mind it seems your meaning is mad,
A quarrel to be quickly quit as untrue.
A resplendent rose is the riches you had,
Flowering and fading as nature’s due;
But enclosed in this chest, to make you glad,
Into a pearl of prime price it grew.
Fate is no thief; you misconstrue,
Calling your cure a crime and sin.
Something of nothing it made for you;
No gentle jeweler have you been!”

This guest was then a jewel to me;
Her gentle rejoinders were jewels likewise.
I replied: “I relish your remedy,
My dear, that dispels my dumps and sighs.
May it please you approve my apology;
I presumed nevermore to possess my prize.
Having found it, I glory with gladness and glee
To live in those lovely groves where it lies,
And praise my Lord’s ordinance to the skies
That soothes my soul in sweetness within.
If to cross to you I had means to devise,
A most joyful jeweler now had I been.”

25

“Jeweler,” said that gem so pure,
“Why do mortals thus mock? How mad you be!
Three of the thoughts you think so secure
Are all ill-advised, each of the three.
Unwitting, your words will not endure,
Outrunning your reason’s celerity.
Trust in your eyesight makes you sure
That here in this valley I must be;
Second, you say that in such country
Life with me here you mean to begin;
And third, to ford this flood you are free:
But no joyful jeweler has power therein.

VI

26

“I judge that jeweler unworthy of praise
Who credits whatever comes to his sight.
He is much to blame for discourteous ways,
Who accuses God of deceit or sleight,
When He promised his life to preserve and raise
Though death and fortune put it to flight.
In minding no more than your eye surveys,
His plighted pledge you’ve perverted quite.
By this your pride surpasses a height
Unfitting to faithful rectitude—
In trusting no tale as true and right
But what your reason alone can conclude.

27

“Conclude for yourself if you spoke not before
As if humans should hurl harangues against God
You mean to remain here evermore,
But to ask no permission seems to me odd;
And yet for that boon you might vainly implore.
O’er the flood to this place you’d be pleased to plod,
But before that lot you must learn other lore;
Your corpse must decay, as cold as a clod.
In forest of Eden it was fatally flawed
By Adam’s neglect and insult rude.
Each soul from life must wander abroad
Before fording this flood as our Lord will conclude.”

28
“If you conclude,” I said, “that I must burn,
Persisting in pain, I will peak and pine.
Now that the lost once more I discern,
Bereaved again shall I die, in fine?
Why should it vanish upon its return?
My sweet makes sorrows my soul to entwine.
What does treasure serve, but to make folk yearn,
If what they have reaped they must resign?
No more I care if I droop and decline,
Nor how far from earth I may be pursued;
The prospect of parting with this pearl of mine
Is endless sorrow, one must conclude.”

29

“You conclude of nothing but distress,”
The maid replied. “Why murmur so?
Oft while lamenting loss of the less
Many find grief in some greater throe.
Know you’re as blessed as God can bless,
And love Him alike in good times and woe,
For the profit of rage is smaller than cress.
Be less bold; believe you must be brought low;
For though you dance as any doe,
And tout and trumpet your tortured mood,
When you can flit no further, to or fro,
You must endure what He shall conclude.

30

“Although you conclude to accuse the Lord,
He will not swerve one step from His way.
Not a single straw will it swell your reward
If you never again see a happy day.
Give up complaining and discord;
His mercy promptly plead and pray.
To prayers He may His pity afford,
And move His mercy its might to display;
His comfort may your grief allay,
And gently dispel inquietude.
But bottle up grief, or bleat and bray—
All is His to dispose and conclude.”

VII

31

Thus I concluded to that maid:
“Let it not count as rage at my Lord
If, fumbling for words, I foolishly brayed;
My heart, heavy with loss, was gored,
As springs and swelling streams cascade.
I rely on God’s great grace outpoured;
Spare me, I pray, rebuke and tirade.
Though I stray, may you (ever adored)
Regard and receive me, to comfort restored.
In kindly pity ponder this:
My grief and myself you’ve brought to accord,
You, the late ground of all my bliss.

32

You’ve been both my bliss and my pain,
Though the joy seems much outweighed by the care;
Once you were snatched from my domain,
My pearl was gone I knew not where.
Seeing it, grief is gone again.
Till parting, we were a close-knit pair;
God save our meeting now from strain!
We meet so seldom, here or there.
Though you’re gifted with speech that’s gracious and fair,
I’m earthen mold, and meddle amiss;
But the mercy of Christ and the saints I share—
These are the ground of all my bliss.
In bliss I see you blithely set,
And I in dole downcast indeed—
Which meagerly moves your mind as yet,
Though griefs often cause my heart to bleed.
But now that you and I have met,
I would not pause, but pray and plead
You sweet, in sober sort, to let
Me learn what way of life you lead.
My soul is solaced to see you proceed
To blessing, grace, and benefice;
Upon this path my soul may speed
To all my joy, and source of bliss.

“Now may your bliss be multiplied,”
I heard that splendid damsel say,
“Welcome this way to walk and bide,
For your discourse is dear to me this day.
Imperious ways and lofty pride
Here are hotly haled away.
Little does my Lord love to chide,
For meek are all who near Him stay.
In coming before Him, as you may,
Be demure and deeply devout, for ‘tis
What my Lord the Lamb will love for aye,
He who is ground of all my bliss.

The life of bliss you say I lead
You wish me to elaborate.
When your pearl slipped away, as you know indeed,
I was very young, born but of late.
But my loving Lord the Lamb decreed
To raise me to this wedded state,
And crowned me queen, in bliss to speed
To all eternity’s latest date.
In all His wealth I participate
As His beloved. I am wholly His:
His worth and place, surpassingly great,
Are the root and ground of all my bliss.”

“Blissful one,” I said, “may this be true?
Do not take it ill if I should err:
Are you the queen of heaven’s blue,
Whose honor all the earth shall declare?
We grant that Mary, from whom grace grew,
In virgin bloom a babe would bear.
Unless one surpassed her powers, who
Could refuse her right the crown to wear?
For her matchless manner debonair
We call her the Phoenix of Araby;
From her Maker, that maid beyond compare
Forth came like the Queen of courtesy.”

37

“Courteous Queen,” that fair one said,
Kneeling and turning upward her face,
“Matchless Mother and happiest Maid,
Blest beginner of every grace!”
She rose up then, but paused and stayed
To speak to me a further space:
“Many find here a prize they have prayed,
But pretenders find none, in any case.
Through all heaven, earth, and hell one may trace
Our Lady’s domain; and yet would not she
One rightful heir ever displace,
For she is Queen of courtesy.

38

“In the kingdom of God, His royal court
Has a property of His fashioning;
Each one who thither may resort
Of all the realm is queen or king,
Yet never does one any other thwart;
But joys in others’ prospering,
Wishing their crown worth five of its sort—
If one could be happier in anything.
But my Lady, from whom our Lord did spring,
She rules us all in supremacy;
Which none here finds disquieting,
For she is Queen of courtesy.

39

“By courtesy, declares Saint Paul,
As navel, leg, or arm, or head,
Members of Jesus Christ are we all,
And to His body truly wed.
Likewise each soul that heeds His call
Belongs to Him who rose from the dead.
Then see if hate or bitter gall
In the midst of your members is moved or bred:
Your head is not dispirited
Adornments on your arm to see;
Thus we with love and delight are led
To be king and queen by courtesy.

40

“Courtesy,” I said, “I do believe,
And charity must here prevail.
Unless my saying should make you grieve,
[Unless my judgment here should fail]
Yourself in heaven too high you heave,
So young such queenly heights to scale.
What more reward might one achieve,
Who has suffered earthly storm and gale,
With lifelong penance to assail
His flesh, in hope his bliss to see?
What greater honor might avail
Than crowning as king by courtesy?
Such courtesy comes of too kindly hand,
If this be true that you relate.
Less than two years you lived in our land;
What duty to God could you demonstrate?
Neither prayer nor creed could you understand—
And equated to queen at so quick a rate!
I cannot credit that God would command
Such ill dealing, truth's due to desecrate.
It is manifest, maid, you might be as great
As a countess in court, to carry some sway,
Or more likely a lady of lesser state;
But raised to queen? — too high a day!

"The day of His goodness has no end"
That worthy woman answered me;
We totally trust what he may intend,
Divinely righteous in each decree.
Thus Matthew faithfully has penned
In God's own gospel such guidance that we
By parable may comprehend
How heaven and earthly things agree:
'I and my realm are like,' says He,
'A lord and his vineyard in good array.
The season was seemly, he could see,
For tilling his land — now was the day.

"(Such a moment such men can mark with skill.)
In early morning up he rose,
To hire the men his plot to till,
And found some there at his dispose.
For their pay, the pledge he agrees to fulfill
Is a penny a day — the bargain they close.
They twine and till on his fruitful hill,
Cutting and pruning what overgrows.
At mid-morning the master to market goes,
Finding men idle, to his dismay.
"'Why are you idle?'" he says to those.
"'Don't you know the hour of the day?'"

"'We came here before the day had begun"
(Thus the reply from each one he got);
'We've stayed and stood since rise of sun,
But none commands us from this spot.'
'Go to my vineyard; when daylight has run'
The master said, 'I agree to allot
And deliver what’s due for what you have done,
The return that in right and reason I ought.
They went and worked on the vineyard plot.
All day the master went his way,
And always new men for the work he brought,
Till very little remained of the day.

45

At the time of day for evensong,
One hour before the sun should set,
There were still more idle, though sturdy and strong,
These more in earnest manner he met:
“Why stand here idle all day long?”
They said that none had hired them yet.
“Go to my vineyard, join the throng,
And work to get what you can get.”
Soon the world grew black as jet;
The sun was gone, the sky past gray.
He summoned the men to discharge his debt,
As nothing now was left of the day.

X

46

Well aware of the time of day,
He told the reeve how much to expend.
“Disburse what I promised them all for pay;
So that none may claim that I offend,
Line them up, and then purvey
To each alike a penny to spend.
Start with those of shortest stay,
Deferring the first to the very end.”
But the first began to reprehend:
“In toil and trouble all day we bore:
These had but one hour to sweat and tend;
To our mind it’s plain—we merit more.

47

“We have served more (it’s certainly so)
Enduring the long day’s heat and pain,
Than sluggards with scarcely an hour to show.
What makes them our match, as you maintain?”
*Then said the lord to one: “No, no!”
“*“Here’s no grievance, my friend, or wrong, or stain,
Collect what is coming to you, and go.
If I gave you a place for a penny’s gain,
What cause have you now to carp and complain?
Plainly, a penny you bargained for;
Beyond our agreement you reason in vain.
So what are you doing, asking for more?
‘What’s more: do you doubt my legal right,
To do with my own what I choose to do?
Or perhaps your eye is blinded with spite,
That I’m no cheat, but good and true?
‘Even so I decree,’ said Christ our light,
‘That the last shall come to head the queue,
And the first be last, though raised to the height.
Among many preferred, true friends are few.’
Thus poor men are rewarded too,
Though they come when day is well-nigh o’er;
And if from their toil but little ensue,
Their Master’s mercy is much the more.

49

Here more joy and bliss have I,
Of bloom of life, of dignity,
Than the wide world could win or buy
On any just or equable plea—
Though I but lately occupy.
I came to the vineyard tardily,
But my Lord took first in hand to supply
My reward in full, immediately.
Yet others live in expectancy
And labor at length with many a chore,
Hitherto having no hire nor fee,
And none, perhaps, this year and more.

50

Then I mused the more—I might not refrain:
“I reckon such reasons awry and frail.
Always ready and righteous is God’s reign,
Or else scripture is just a fabling tale.
The Psalter’s saying is certainly plain
On a notion (?) that no one can assail:
‘To each his desert you return again,
High king, whose counsels cannot fail.’
He who bore the day’s burden and did not quail,
And perceives you pocket payment before,
With your talent in taking, though less in travail—
So always for less, the return is more?

XI

51

“In the kingdom of God, about ‘more and less’
Doubts never nag,” that noble one said.
“For peers in parity here possess,
If much, or if little, they merited.
For our kindly King is quick to bless,
Whether soft his dealings or rough instead;
The flood of his gifts is limitless,
As the flow of fountains constantly fed.
Whoever holds in holy dread
Our Savior, has ample means and space;
With blessings they are overspread,
From God’s supply of ample grace.

52

“But see, you state my reasons stray;
I procure my penny by imposition.
And I who alight too late, as you say,
Am unworthy such a high condition.
Yet where is there one of mortal clay,
So pious always in prayer and petition,
That never did forfeit in any way,
His hope in heaven to have admission?
And such, more oft with their years’ addition,
Exchanged a good for an evil case.
Then mercy must make their guilt’s remission,
Through God’s supply of ample grace.

53

“But ample is grace for the innocent.
Baptized in order of delivery,
They are bathed in that blessed sacrament,
Then joined with the vineyard company;
But with speed the strength of death is bent
To darkness that makes their daylight flee.
To these with no wrongs they should repent
The noble Lord gives His workers’ fee.
They worked His will in their infancy;
Why should he not grant their course its place,
And reward them in full, immediately?
For God’s supply is ample grace.

54

Of ample grace was the benefit
Created for man, of perfect bliss;
By appetite of the apple that Adam bit,
Our first father forfeited this.
We were all baulked of that benefit,
And doomed to die—our nemesis
Amid hell’s torments infinite,
Dwelling forever in that dread abyss.
But quick cure came through Christ’s benefice:
Rich blood poured from the cross apace
With water, from a spear’s orifice,
Through God’s supply of ample grace.

55

Ample grace gushed from that well,
Water and blood from His wound wide.
The blood delivers from doom of hell,
The second death to override;
The water is baptism, truth to tell,
That passed when the pike had pierced His side,
Our deadly misdeeds to wash and dispel,
In which, through Adam, we would have died.
Now all for our solace is supplied,
But what his sin served to efface,
Which God in good time shall provide,
Through His supply of ample grace.

XII

56

There is ample grace for the soul in need
That may sin anew, but his steps retrace,
Though in grieving and groaning he must plead,
With pain of the penance implied in the case.
But justice and reason are rightly agreed:
The pure enjoy a protected place.
From God no pronouncement could ever proceed,
That disgrace should dishonor an innocent face.
The guilty may be guided by grace
Through mercy, when men remain contrite;
But one who is free of evils base—
That innocent is safe and right.

57

Likewise I know well in this case—
Two sorts it is seemly not to spill:
The righteous ones shall see God’s face,
And those who all His laws fulfill.
Thus says the Psalter in one place:
“Lord, who shall climb Thy high hill,
Or stay within Thy holy space?”
His ready reply reveals His will:
“He whose hands have hatched no ill
Whose heart is harmless, clean and white,
There his step stands firm and still.”
Thus always the innocent is safe by right.

58

The righteous also shall attain,
Most surely, to that tower secure,
These do not lead their life in vain,
Or nip their neighbors with fraudulent lure.
Of these righteous, Solomon’s speech is plain,
That Wisdom their honor may procure;
These on the trail of truth she will train
A show of God’s kingdom to ensure,
As if saying: “That sanctum sweet and pure
You may claim by courage in the fight.”
But doubtless, this dictum must endure:
Always the innocent is saved by right.

59

Of righteous men hear this report,
In a psalm of David’s when he cried:
“O Lord, to judge me do not resort,
For to you none living is justified.”
Therefore when you have come to the court
Where all our cases will be tried:
In claiming right, you may be cut short
By this speech that I have specified.
But He who in blood on the cross has died,
With His hands pitifully pierced quite,
May he grant you grace when you are tried
By innocence and not by right.

60

Can you read aright what is enscrolled?
Learn what the scriptures plainly display,
How Jesus joined with folk of old.
For wholeness and health that in Him lay
They brought their young for Him to hold;
His tender touch they came to pray.
His disciples rebuked them as overbold
And with their wisdom turned many away.
But they heard their Master sweetly say:
“Receive the young, whom I invite;
God’s kingdom is readied for such as they.”
Thus always the innocent is safe by right.
Christ called little ones, courteous and mild,
And warned that His kingdom no one could win
Unless he would come just as a child,
But otherwise never to come within.
The harmless, the true, the undefiled,
With no soil or smear of staining sin—
These, when knocking, are reconciled;
One opens in haste as to one’s kin.
And never-ending joy is therein,
Which among many gems the jeweler sought,
And sold his substance to the last pin,
To purchase a pearl without a spot.

This spotless pearl of precious price,
For which the jeweler gave his all,
Pictures the kingdom of paradise—
Thus allows our Lord so liberal;
For it is faultless, pure as ice,
Endless-round, and genial,
And common to all of conscience nice.
For the midst of my breast, thus virginal,
The Lamb, by His blood effectual
To me this token of peace has brought.
Forsake the world fantastical,
And purchase your pearl without a spot.

“O spotless pearl, in pearls rare,
Wearing the pearl of highest prize,
Who formed,” I asked, “the figure you bear?
Your garment’s maker was gloriously wise.
Never from nature came shape so fair:
Pygmalion ne’er painted your face or eyes;
Aristotle’s learning could not declare
The place your nature occupies.
Your coloring with the lily vies;
Your angelic ways are gracious in aught.
Tell me, dear, what signifies
Your rank, as a pearl so free of spot?”

“My spotless Lamb who heals and cheers—”
She declared, “my dear destiny,
Chose me for His mate, despite my fears
That this seemed ill-suited to my degree.
When I went my way from your world of tears
He called me to His felicity:
“‘In you no stain or spot appears, 
My darling dear; then come to me.’
He gave me grace and potency, 
His blood my garment to whiteness has brought, 
He has crowned me clean in virginity, 
And decked me in pearls that have no spot.”

65

“Why, spotless bride shining bright, 
In rich and various royal state, 
What sort of Lamb is He, who might 
Marry you and make you His mate? 
Over others you’ve climbed to the height 
Of a life so lady-like and great. 
Many a fair one has had to fight 
For Christ, striving with sin and hate; 
But all those dear ones you frustrate, 
And from that marriage exclude the lot, 
Yourself alone, at such high rate, 
A matchless maid without a spot.”

XIV

66

“Spotless,” said that splendid queen, 
“I am (I repeat by reason and right), 
Unblemished, unblighted, and wholly clean. 
But ‘matchless queen’ is mistaken quite. 
We are wives of the Lamb in bliss serene, 
A hundred and forty-four thousand bright, 
As in the Apocalypse may be seen. 
And Saint John saw them all unite 
On the hill of Zion, that holy height. 
By spiritual sight he noted them, 
Dressed for the wedding all in white 
In the city of New Jerusalem.

67

“Of Jerusalem answer I afford: 
What sort of Lamb, you long to know? 
My lovely jewel, my Lamb, my Lord, 
My blessing, my bliss, beloved so— 
The prophet Isaiah rose to record 
In pity His meekness in midst of woe: 
“That glorious guiltless life was outpoured 
Though none had just complaint to show. 
As sheep to slaughter they made Him go; 
As when the shearer seizes the lamb, 
He muzzled His mouth before each foe”
When judged by Jews in Jerusalem.
In Jerusalem they did for my dear,
He was torn on the tree by rascals’ scheme.
He bore our griefs, and had no fear
From cares ourselves to redeem.
His face was flayed with blows severe,
That face for beauty once supreme.
Though sin with Him could not inhere,
For sins He became of no esteem.
Tortured for us in pains extreme,
And racked upon a rough-hewn beam,
Meek as a lamb without bleating scream,
He died for us in Jerusalem.

69

In Jerusalem, Jordan, and Galilee,
Where John was baptizing for salvation,
His words with Isaiah’s agree.
When Jesus came, by revelation
John spoke of Him this prophecy:
‘Behold God’s Lamb,” his commendation,
“Who takes away forgivingly
The sin of the world in propitiation.’
Though never proffering provocation,
He assumed Himself all sin and blame.
Who can reckon His generation,
That bled for us in Jerusalem?

70

"In Jerusalem thus my loved one, crowned,
Twice over (as each prophet conceives),
Is lauded as Lamb, and so renowned
For grace His meek demeanor achieves.
The third time is in Apocalypse found;
With t’other two it interweaves:
Set on the throne, where saints surround,
Him John the apostle plainly perceives
Baring the book with its squared leaves
And its seven seals, and unsealing them.
And seeing that sight each soul grieves
In hell, and earth, and Jerusalem.

XV

71

This Lamb of Jerusalem wore no whit
Of color, but white beyond compare;
For never stain or spot might sit
On His magnificent mohair.
Each soul who no such spots permit
Makes for that Lamb a wife most fair.
And never arises fight or fit,
However many more come there:
Were each one five, we’d fairly share—
The more the merrier, so God me bless.
With numbers great comes love to spare,
And honor more and never less.

No less of bliss might we be shown,
Who bear this pearl upon our breast,
Mere thought of discord they disown,
Who wear such pearls of the loveliest.
*Though our bodies waste amid earth and stone,
And you wail in woe without rest,
Yet here we know as we are known.
Dying but once, with hope we are blest.
In delight of the Lamb we can not be distressed;
He joys us more than words express.
Thus each one’s bliss is blest and best,
And no one’s honor ever the less.

If less you credit my account,
In Apocalypse is written this word:
**“I saw the Lamb stand on the mount
Of Zion,’ says John, ‘most strongly stirred,
With maids of a hundred thousand by count,
And forty-four thousand more who concurred.
The Lamb’s and His Father’s names surmount
Each brow, I found, in writing conferred.
A sound from heaven then I heard:
Like rushing waters limitless,
And thunder rolling in hills bestirred,
This sound, I think, was never less.

Nevertheless, though shrill in sound,
And their voices voluble to hear,
They sang a new song, as I found;
A delectable delight to hear.
Like harpers harping all around,
They sang that song sweet and clear,
Its theme most noble and renowned.
All together they chanted their cheer,
Around God’s throne assembled near,
With the four beasts who pay their address,
And twenty-four elders grave and sincere;
Their song they sang never the less.

Nonetheless, there was no one of wit so strong,
For all the skill they ever knew,
Could sing a single line of that song,
Besides the Lamb’s own retinue.
Redeemed far forth from earth, this throng
Are God’s first-fruits, fully His due,
And to the gentle Lamb they belong,
As like Himself in aspect and hue.
For never trick or tale untrue
Touched their tongue in whatever distress.
Nothing their union can undo
With that matchless Master nevertheless.”

“Nevertheless, my thanks accept,”
Said I, “my pearl, though problems I pose.
To try your wit I have overstepped,
You whom Christ for His chamber chose.
I am but mire and muck inept,
And you such a fresh and fragrant rose,
Who by your blissful bank have kept,
Where life’s delight forever grows.
Now sweet, who simple sincerity knows,
I ask one thing with candidness;
Though mean or mad my manner goes,
Yet hear my question nevertheless.
Nonetheless, clearly to you I call:  
If you should deem it can be done,  
As you are splendid, with no spite at all,  
My poor query please not to shun.  
Have you no home within castle wall,  
Or manor, or seat, for here is none.  
Royal Jerusalem you recall,  
Where David’s days as king were spun,  
But here’s no trace, nor could be one;  
It is in Judaea, that famous plot.  
As you are supreme under the sun  
Your home should have no spoiling spot.

This spotless host, as you relate,  
These thronging thousands so devout—  
A city great for numbers so great  
It behooves you to have, beyond a doubt.  
Such lovely jewels immaculate  
Would be abused, to bide without;  
And by these banks where now I wait  
I see no building hereabout.  
Alone, I think, you venture out  
To see this stream’s delights somewhat.  
If elsewhere you have structures stout,  
Now guide me to that glorious spot.

“You cite that spot of Jewish sod,”  
That singular sweet then said to me,  
“The city where the Lamb has trod,  
And suffered sore for our remedy  
(The old Jerusalem, far abroad),  
Concluding guilt’s old tyranny.  
But the new Jerusalem, sent from God,  
The apostle in Apocalypse plain could see.  
The Lamb, from blot and blemish free,  
Conducted His company to that plot;  
And as His followers faultless be,  
Likewise His city has no spot.

“Of these two spots is testified—  
Both called “Jerusalem,” no less—  
That nothing else is signified  
But ‘City of God’ or ‘Sight of Peace.’  
In the one our peace was ratified,  
Where the Lamb suffered for our release.
The other with peace is sanctified,
Everlasting, never to cease.
That is the place to which we press,
Once our flesh is laid to rot;
There glory and gladness ever increase
To that company without a spot.

81

“Spotless maid so mild and meek,”
I answered then that fresh flower,
“Bring me that pleasant place to seek,
And let me see your blissful bower.”
“God would forbid,” said that girl unique;
“That you trespass upon His tower.
But from the Lamb I did bespeak
You sight thereof, in a favored hour,
To see from outside that blissful bower—
But from the inside, not a jot.
To stroll that street you would only have power
Provided you were pure, without a spot.

XVII

82

“Am I to show this spot to you?
Then up this stream must you be bound,
While on this side I will pursue
Your course, till you see a lofty mound.”
No longer could I linger as hitherto;
Past finest foliage my way I found,
And beheld a hill, where in my view
The city stood—and I spellbound.
The brook between, on lower ground,
Brighter than sun in splendor shone.
In Apocalypse did the apostle expound
Its fashion, that fair and faithful John.

83

As John the apostle saw it of old,
I looked on that city of love and light,
Jerusalem the new, majestic in mold,
As if descending from heaven’s height,
All of refined and glistening gold
As gleaming as glass burnished bright;
And founded on jewels manifold,
Twelve courses fixed and founded aright,
Consisting each of a single stone,
A wonder to witness, as once did write
In Apocalypse the apostle John.

84
As named by John in his prophecies,
Each one I could tell and trace.
Jasper was the first of these;
I saw it on the bottom base,
Glinting green as the lowest frieze,
And sapphire held the second place.
Chalcedony, without impurities,
Glowed pure and pale in the third space.
Fourth was emerald, green of face,
And sardonyx the fifth stone;
The sixth a ruby, seen through grace
In Apocalypse, by apostle John.

85

And next John named the chrysolite,
As the seventh gem, set next below
The eighth, the beryl clear and white;
In the ninth, the topaz, twin hues glow.
A chrysoprase, the tenth, shines bright,
And jacinth, the eleventh tier, also.
The twelfth is the noblest stone in sight:
Amethyst blends red and indigo.
The walls above these courses show
In jasper, like glass that glistening shone.
By his description this I know,
From the Apocalypse of apostle John.

86

As John set forth, so I could see,
Tower ing atop the topmost tier,
The city which, perfect in symmetry
Of square dimensions, did uprear.
Its streets were golden in brilliancy,
And glinting like glaze the wall so sheer.
Inside, the abodes displayed filigree
Of all sorts of stones that could appear.
Then was each side of the manor here
To a distance of twelve furlongs drawn
In height and breadth and length, most clear,
For its measurement saw the apostle John.

XVIII

87

Of what John writes, I witnessed more—
Three gleaming gates in each wall’s side;
Hence twelve I saw in all the four.
Rich plates were to the portals applied.
Of a precious pearl consisted each door,
A pearl in perfection to abide.
Of Israel’s sons each portal bore
A name, in order that testified
Their destinies as should betide;
The oldest first was carved and hewn.
Such light illumined far and wide
They needed neither sun nor moon.

88

Of sun and moon they had no need,
For God Himself was their lamp-light,
Their lantern was the Lamb, indeed;
Through Him shone all the city bright.
Transparent walls could not impede
Or stay the eye from any sight.
The high throne you might see and heed,
With adornments all around it, quite
As apostle John was led to write.
There God Himself with men did commune.
From the throne a river ran forthright,
Brighter than both the sun and moon.

89

Never shone sun or moon so sweet
As the flowing fountain hither met,
Swiftly swirling through each street
Without pollution’s taint or threat.
No temple was within to greet,
Nor church nor chapel ever set;
The Almighty’s ministry was complete,
The Lamb the sacrifice for our debt.
Those pearly gates have never yet
Been closed, but open and opportune;
Entry there may no one get
Who is spoiled by spot beneath the moon.

90

The moon may gain thereby no might:
Too spotty she is, too poor and spare
(And also it is never night)—
Why should she climb her courses there,
Unfit to compete with that glorious light
That shines on the river everywhere?
The planets are in too poor a plight,
And the sun itself too dim to compare.
Beside that water bright trees bear
Twelve fruits of life both late and soon
Twelve times a year they supply rich ware,
Renewing themselves with every moon.

91

Beneath the moon a wonder so great
No fleshly heart could ever endure,
As that comely sight to contemplate,  
So marvelous its garniture.  
I stood stock still in dazed state  
With the awe its elegant forms procure,  
While feeling neither release nor weight,  
So ravished I was with radiance pure.  
For I dare say, with conscience sure,  
Had one borne bodily that boon,  
Though all the learned labored his cure,  
His life had been lost beneath the moon.

XIX

92

Much as the mighty moon may rise  
Before the daylight dwindles down,  
So suddenly, to my surprise,  
Came a procession of renown.  
A host appeared before my eyes  
Unsummoned, filling this noble town,  
All virgins, dressed in similar guise  
As my crowned dear in her white gown;  
And likewise each one, wearing a crown,  
Was decked in pearls and dressed in white.  
On each one’s breast was fastened down  
The blissful pearl with great delight.

93

In pure delight they passed apace  
On golden streets of glassy gleam;  
Their garments of pearl in every case,  
Hundred thousands hither teem—  
Too hard to pick the happiest face!  
Before them leads the Lamb supreme,  
On His head seven golden horns in place;  
And His garments precious pearls, I deem.  
Toward the throne I saw them stream;  
Though many, yet are they ordered quite.  
As mild as maids at mass they seem;  
So forth they draw with deep delight.

94

The delight inspired by His coming here  
Is matter too much for me to tell.  
Those elders, when they saw Him near,  
Humbly at His feet they fell.  
Legions of angels were called to appear  
And scatter incense, sweet to the smell.  
Then greater the glory, glee, and cheer:  
All sang to praise that jewel well.  
The sound might strike through earth to hell,  
That heaven’s joy should be sung outright.
With them the laud of the Lamb to swell
Indeed I drew a deep delight.

95

Delight to look on the Lamb of God
Made me marvel, mystified.
Best He was, most worthy of laud,
Matchless and most to be magnified;
In glorious white he was clothed and shod;
Though meek in manner, magnanimous beside.
But close by his heart was gaping broad
A woeful wound, most wet and wide;
His blood streamed from His snow-white side.
“Alas!” I thought, “who spewed such spite?”
Any mind with grief should be mortified,
Rather than thus to take delight.

96

Yet the Lamb’s delight no less had been.
Although He had suffered savagery,
No hint could one see in His look serene,
So glad and glorious His majesty.
I gazed on the crowd that filled that scene;
How they flourished with vitality!
There I saw then my little queen,
Whom I dreamed in the dale had stood by me;
Greatly and gladly she gloried in glee
Among her mates who were so white.
I would have waded willingly,
For love-longing, in that great delight.
By eye and ear, delight most rare
Melts to madness my mortal mind.
When I see my sweet, I wish to be there,
Though beyond the banks she is enshrined.
I think that now naught could impair
My intent to fling forward unconfined;
And though I might die there, yet I would dare
To leap in and leave my shore behind.
But something thwarts that purpose blind,
For God Himself my way denies;
Although to cross I may have designed,
It fits not my Prince’s enterprise.

He prized it not that I flung myself so
At wondrous waters, so crazed in self-will;
Though rushing and rash in my haste to go,
Yet swiftly I was stopped stock-still
For just when I bolted for the bank below,
That stirring served my slumber to kill.
In the wonderful garden I waked in woe,
My head reposing on that hill
Where my pearl was lost in earth, to my ill.
With dire dismay and dismal sighs
I told myself, as I stretched my fill:
“Now may all be as that Prince may prize.”

Little I prized it, to be expelled
So quickly, by forcible restraint,
From those vibrant visions unparalleled.
A heavy longing made me faint,
And mournfully then I wailed and yelled:
“Oh pearl,” said I, “my famous saint,
What treasure to me—the truth you upheld
In this vital vision! If you acquaint
Me truly, without attaint,
That you are fixed in such glorious guise,
I am happy then, in this vale of complaint,
That you are now that Prince’s prize.”

If that Prince’s emprise had contented me,
Had I grasped no more than what He gave,
Persisting therein faithfully
As the pearl advised, so bright and brave,
I might now know more of God’s mystery,
Perhaps, and more of His presence have;
But perpetually man seeks prosperity
More than by right he ought to crave.
Eternal regions thus I must waive,
My joy transmuted otherwise.
Lord, only mad folk misbehave,
Ever to cross your enterprise.

101

In the Prince’s emprise to be at peace,
Good Christians easily may incline;
For I find His kindness never to cease
As God, as Lord, as Friend most fine.
Upon this mound I gained increase,
As lamenting my pearl I lay supine,
To God my dearest to release,
In Christ’s dear blessing (and in mine),
He who in shape of bread and wine
The priest to us daily signifies.
To serve in His house is His design
For us precious pearls that He may prize.