To the Professional Development Committee
From John Sider
September 28, 2005

This is an addendum to my report of May 20, 2005, on my released time from one course last spring, by means of a Faculty Development Grant. I wish first to express again my deep appreciation for the opportunities this grant has given me.

In part that report says: “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.” By this time, however, I have more to report on the other topic of my released time, the translation of *Pearl*.

A good deal of my summer has been spent on it. With Marilyn McEntyre’s encouragement, I’ve been planning to offer my translation to Eerdmans for publication; they’ve already published two volumes of her original poetry. Since completing my first draft on May 20, I’ve put the translation through four intensive stages of revision, and just now have it ready for Eerdmans. (Attached is a copy of the fifth and final draft, with my introduction.)

I hope to persuade Eerdmans that in a version readily accessible to a general audience, the poem could attract a wide readership, especially among believers, because it is such an inspiring classic in the literature of spiritual formation. At whatever risk of immodesty, I believe a publisher will judge my translation more accessible and readable than the others presently available, while sustaining the alliteration and demanding rhyme scheme of the original language. (In case someone is interested in making the comparison, you’ll find also herewith samples of the other translations presently in print, alongside mine.)

Students in English 46 (Survey of British Literature to 1800) have already read my translation of *Pearl* this semester; for the future it will be standard fare in this course, and in English 152 (Chaucer and Medieval Literature).

Meanwhile, in preparing and teaching this semester’s two sections of English 6 (Studies in Literature), I’ve begun to implement my proposals for that course—in particular (to quote from my proposal of January 19, 2005), “revising written assignments and classroom exercises to address more directly . . . goals . . . to which the department has committed itself in writing, most especially:—increasing respect for the benefits of paying close attention;—deepening our understanding of what it means to read as people of faith.” For their first essay, students have undertaken a close reading of one scene from a Shakespeare play; and as for reading as people of faith, in class they have been (and will be) addressing such topics as Christian ideals of courtship and marriage (in *As You Like It*), of forgiveness (in *Much Ado*, and *Cymbeline*), and of responsible citizenship and government (in *Richard II* and *1 Henry IV*). In *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* we will return to the latter topic, and consider also how Christians can profitably synthesize Christian learning and ancient pagan culture. Some of these topics are new to my course, and some enhanced versions of a precedent.
In another academic year I intend to pursue the other aims mentioned in my proposal of January 19: “expanding students’ opportunities to read prose narrative (in Shakespeare’s sources, especially), and “increasing the lyric-poetry component of the course (poems about Shakespeare, especially).” The first of these will require different plays from those presently assigned; and the second, more research and reflection than I’ve found leisure for, as yet.
**Introduction**

While mourning the death of his young daughter, a father falls asleep on her grave and dreams of meeting her on the verge of paradise. This is the story of *Pearl*, a poem among the most remarkable in the English literature of spiritual formation.

The bereaved man has lost his “pearl” as a child of two, but sees her now a young woman, speaking to him across the boundary-river that separates him from her heavenly dwelling. Her coronet and white garment are adorned with pearls; and at her breast is the magnificent pearl of great price, symbol of the Kingdom and gift of her Lord, the Lamb of God.

In his belief that he has literally died and gone to heaven, the Dreamer’s grief turns to exquisite joy. Hence his bitter disappointment when told that without purification he cannot cross the river to join his Pearl Maiden. Resigned to this unwelcome truth but curious about her new life, he is astounded to learn of her exalted status as a queen, one among the brides of the Lamb. “How do you deserve this?” he asks. “What more honor could come to those who have borne faithfully the burdens of a long life?”

This moral indignation is a jarring note. But if the Dreamer appears unseemly in envying his daughter’s heavenly bliss, perhaps it says more about the tribulations of his life than about any peculiar spiritual weakness. If the Pearl Maiden seems insufficiently sympathetic, this bears dramatic witness to the inviolability of heaven’s bliss, and to the fact that “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). Gently but firmly she recounts Jesus Christ’s parable of vineyard workers who for unequal labors received identical wages. Those who die young are safe with God; indeed, no one may enter the Kingdom except as a child. The Pearl Maiden describes the Lamb of God in the language of the Revelation of St. John, and the Dreamer is granted a vision, at a distance, of the New Jerusalem (as in Revelation 21-22) — and finally of his Pearl singing to the Lamb in the choir of heaven.

*Pearl* is an uncommon combination of two familiar medieval traditions, dream vision and funeral elegy. Whether it is also autobiography we cannot now determine, though some interpreters have speculated confidently and extravagantly. In any case, the poet’s imaginative gifts of language, psychology, and spiritual insight are deeply and genuinely expressive of such a personal loss. This intersection of literary genres is one source of the poem’s challenging richness; another is its combination of three vision-traditions: of philosophical debate as in the Latin *Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius (c. 470-525), of earthly love-longing as in the 13th-century French *Romance of the Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, and of divine love as in the Italian *Divine Comedy* of Dante (early 14th century).

Like some actual dreams, literary dream visions are symbolic. The ultimate source of central symbol in *Pearl* is Jesus’ parable of the pearl (Matthew 13:45-46), which concerns the surpassing value of the Kingdom of heaven. (Altogether the poem includes well over a hundred biblical allusions.) Early Christian writers commonly understood the perfection of a pearl as representing Christ Himself, or many another topic of the faith, and this poem invokes some such symbolic values — the Virgin Mary and the resurrection particularly. Here, first and foremost, the Pearl is a young lady, as frequently in medieval courtly poetry; but the poet’s use of the image extends to the Lamb of God, the virtue of chastity, the righteousness of the saints, and the saints themselves, including the faithful reader (101.11-12):
To serve in His house is God’s design
For us precious pearls that He may prize.

Much of the Dreamer’s spiritual progress is rendered not symbolically, however, but in literal events. As his experience develops, his longing for the Pearl Maiden is largely displaced by longing for the bliss and comforts of heaven: first as relief from distresses of this life, but ultimately as the communion of the saints and union with God. The shape of the plot, then, combines with powerful symbols—and with the characterization of the Dreamer, the Pearl Maiden, the heavenly host, and the Lamb of God—to create for the reader an affective force for good that may well match, or even surpass, the poem’s substantial intellectual power. (For the vigorous tradition of scholarship and interpretation that Pearl has inspired, see Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron’s bibliography in The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript, University of Exeter Press, 2002.)

The poetic forms of Pearl are perhaps the most complex in the language; and their remarkable effect does as much as the substance of the work to account for its eminent place among English poems. For one thing the anonymous writer, a contemporary of Chaucer and presumed author also of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, has achieved a virtually unique musical quality of language. His verse line embodies an insistent four-stress rhythm, with variable unaccented syllables, of the kind that has recurred for a millennium and more from Beowulf and popular ballads to the lyrics of rock and roll. The intricate rhyme scheme of each twelve-line stanza, which is found in no other extant poem of similar length, creates a second kind of rhythmic, chiming effect. A third “musical” device is the poet’s way of preserving, in the majority of his Middle English lines, the Old English fashion of alliteration on accented syllables. Thus, for example, stanza 1 (Middle English spellings standardized):

Pearl, pleasant to princes pay,
To cleanly close in gold so clear;
Out of orient, I hardily say,
Ne proved I never her precious peer.
So round, so reken in each array,
So small, so smooth her sides were,
Wheresoever I judged gems gay
I set her singly in singlure.
Alas, I leesed her in an arbour;
Through grass to ground it from me yot.
I dwine, fordolked of love-danger
Of that privy pearl withouten spot.

In addition, Pearl is cast in twenty five-stanza sections (section XV alone has six stanzas), each marked by an end-rhyme common to its five stanzas. Each section is further distinguished by a word or phrase that recurs in the first and last lines of each of five stanzas—except for the beginning of each new section, which repeats, with variations, the catchword or phrase of the preceding section. And the last section is linked in this manner to the poem’s first line. With the inclusion of a sixth stanza in section XV, the poem has 1,212 lines; this feature and others have inspired various comments on its possible numerical symbolism.
1

Pearl, for a prince such pleasing prize,
Set in gleaming gold so gorgeously fret,
I claim with confidence: in climes of sunrise
Her marvelous match I never have met.
So smooth her surface, small her size,
So radiant, round, and richly set,
Of the 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 ever let
That prize be misplaced in a planted plot!
I languish with wounds of my love’s great debt
To that pearl, my prize without a spot.

2

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,
Driving out grief, though deep and dire.
Loss weighs my heart with black dismay
And sorrow sears my soul in fire.
Yet I never thought to see the day
Such tuneful music might 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!

3

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,
Flower and fruit cannot fade away.
Grain brought to barn can only abound
When sprouts have sprung from seeds’ decay;
All goods some further goods convey—
No seed so fine could come to naught,
But spicery springs, to thrive and stay,
From that precious pearl, prize without spot.

4

At this very 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 had been,
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.

5

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

II

6

And soon 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 not,
Hence I was haled to 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 a web, I deem,
Of half so glorious decoration.

7

The decoration of each hill side
Is cloud-capped cliffs of 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;
So that broadest daylight seems dim and drear,
By the light of such dazzling decoration.
This decoration spoke (though mute)
To dispel my darkness deliciously.
I tasted fresh and fragrant fruit
That supported, served, and succored me.
Bright-winged birds that cry and hoot
With flaming feathers were flocking free.
The best-plucked string of melodious lute
Might never match their melody.
When those creatures warbled harmony,
They sang in such sweet combination
That nowhere could grow more goodly glee
Than there amid that decoration.
Thus all I saw was decorated
As I followed fortune on the forest way.
The splendid sights I contemplated
No talent of tongue could tell or say.
Forth I fared, fascinated,
No slope so steep as my steps to stay.
Farther in the forest, fairly elevated,
A plenteous plot of pear-trees lay,
With bushes, banks, and borders gay,
By a river of golden delectation.
As I went to watch the waters play,
O Lord! how precious that decoration!

In the decoration of this dazzling deep
Were banks of beryl that brightly glowed.
Swirling sweet with the current’s sweep,
In whirling whisper the waters flowed.
Where bottom-stones lay bright by the heap,
Like gleams through glass their glitter showed—
As streaming stars, while mortals sleep,
Might shine when winter storms have snowed.
For every stone in the stream bestowed
Was a gem of such brilliant coloration
That the water sparkled like silver lode,
So priceless-precious 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, dispelled my pain.
The running rivulet down the vale
I traced in bliss, brimful my brain;
As farther I followed that freshet’s trail
The more I rejoiced in joyous vein.
Thus in Fortune’s tests, 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 they heralded heaven’s height,
Surely, these sheer slopes shining fair.
I wondered whether the water might
Betoken a border or boundary there.
I supposed one would see a city somewhere
Beyond the stream on the farther shore;
But the water’s depth was danger to dare,
Though I mightily 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 was to be found.
In fact, the farther I sought to go,
More dire seemed the danger that loomed around—
Though in faith I felt most fully bound
To run the risks, with such riches in store.
Then a splendid sight these longings crowned
That moved my mind still more and more.

More marvel mastered my reason 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 manner glowed with grace,
Was clad in a cloak of unclouded white.
I had seen her before; I knew the face.
As glittering gold as a goldsmith could chase,
So shone that shape on the farther shore.
I looked at the lass a lengthy space,
Then longer. I knew her more and more.

As I mused still more 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 would surely have called her, had it not been
With the sudden surprise my senses fled.
In such a strange spot to be seen,
The 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.
More than I fancied, I felt fear rise;
Stock-still in awe, her stricken thrall
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 good 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 might a mortal meet.
Blooming bright as lily sprays,
Close by the bank she came to greet.
Her mantle, white in majestic blaze,
Was 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
Jeweled in gems resplendent 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 a fair sight—
A look as grave as lord or earl.
Her complexion was clear and whalebone white.
Like burnished gold her tresses bright
Lay on her shoulders loose and unstayed,
Her neckband replete in pleasing plight
With precious pearls in a border arrayed.

19

Arrayed was her wristband (as every hem
At her hand and side likewise was blessed)
With dazzling pearls, like her diadem;
In worthy white the woman was dressed.
One marvelous pearl, a matchless gem,
So adorned the center of her breast,
That use of reason one might contemn,
To weigh its worth above the rest.
In all terms and titles ever expressed,
No worthy tribute could ever be paid
The immaculate purity manifest
Of that precious pearl in perfection arrayed.

20

Arrayed in pearl, and white as fleece,
She came down the slope to the water’s side.
No human happier from here to Greece
Than I, when I saw her across the divide,
My closer kin than aunt or niece.
Thus much my mirth was multiplied.
Bowing womanly, proffering peace,
With gracious greeting gratified,
In welcoming words to me she cried,
Doffing her diadem, delightful maid.
In bliss to be born such a time to bide,
I answered that sweet 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 mourned you, unperceived,
Since into the grass you stole and strayed.
While I was broken, blighted, bereaved,
You were led to delight of life new-made
In a heavenly home, from sorrows 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 I have 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 complain 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 lament can enter in.
You would have known that secure it lay,
If a noble jeweler you had been.

“But noble jeweler, if now you are sad
For a darling jewel you darkly rue,
To my mind it seems your meaning is mad—
A quarrel quickly quit as untrue.
A resplendent rose was the riches you had,
Flowering and fading as nature’s due;
But enclosed in this chest, to make you glad,
To a prime pearl of 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 God’s ordinance to the skies
That soothes my soul in sweetness within.
If passage 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 mock? How mad you be!
Three of the thoughts you think so secure
Are thoroughly faulty, 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 hollow you see me;
Second, you say that in this country
Life with me here you mean to begin;
And third, that 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 all that crosses his sight.
His guilt is great for ungracious ways,
Who ascribes to God deceit or sleight,
When He promised his life to restore and raise
Though fatal fortune put it to flight.
In minding no more than your eye surveys,
His plighted pledge is perverted quite.
In this your pride has climbed to a height
Unfitting to faithful rectitude—
Trust ingo tale as true and right
But what your reason may conclude.

27

“Conclude for yourself: spoke you not before
As if humans should hurl harangues against God?
You mean to remain here evermore,
But to seek no permission seems very odd;
That boon, I aver, you would vainly implore.
Across to my place you would please to plod,
But before that lot you must learn other lore;
Your corpse must decay, as cold as a clod.
In the forest of Eden fatally flawed
(By Adam’s neglect and insult rude),
Each soul from life must stray abroad
Ere fording this flood as our Lord will conclude.”

28
“You conclude,” I cried, “that I must burn,
Persisting in pain? I will peak and pine!
And now that my prize, once lost, I discern,
Shall I die bereaved again, in fine?
Why should it vanish upon its return?
My sweet makes sorrows my soul to entwine.
What worth has wealth, but to make folk yearn,
If riches, when reaped, they must resign?
No more I care if I droop and decline,
Or how far from earth I may be pursued;
The prospect of losing 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.
Admit you are blessed as God can bless,
And love Him alike in weal and woe;
The reward of rage is smaller than cress.
Not so bold! Believe you must be brought low.
Indulge in your dance as any doe,
Or tout and trumpet your tortured mood:
When you flit no further, to and fro,
You must still endure what He shall conclude.

30

“You may conclude to accuse the Lord,
Yet He swerves not a step from His settled way.
Not a single straw will it swell your reward
Should you never again see happy day.
Dismiss complaint and dire discord;
Promptly plead for his mercy, and pray.
For to prayer He may His pity afford,
And move in mercy His might to display;
His comfort can your cares allay,
And softly soothe your inquietude.
But bottle up grief, or bleat and bray:
Still all is His to dispose and conclude.”

VII

31

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

32

Now both my bliss you have been, and my pain—
(Though the joy seemed far outweighed by the care),
Since you were snatched from my domain,
And my pearl departed, I knew not where.
Now I see it, my grief is gone again.
Till parting, we two were a close-knit pair;
God protect our parley now from strain!—
We meet so seldom, here or there.
You are gifted with speech both gracious and fair;
I am mortal muck, and meddle amiss!
But the mercy of Christ and His saints I share;
These are the ground of all my bliss.
In bliss I see you blithely set,
But in dole am I cast down indeed—
Which meagerly moves your mind as yet,
Though grief has caused my heart to bleed.
But now that you and I have met,
I would not pause, but pray and plead
That you, in sober sort, would let
Me learn what way of life you lead.
My soul is solaced to see you proceed
To blessing, well-being, and benefice;
Upon this path my soul may speed
To all my joy, and source of bliss.

"Much may your bliss be multiplied,"
I heard that darling 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 my Lord would love to chide,
For meek are the many who near Him stay.
In coming before Him, as you may,
Be demure and deeply devout, for this
My Lord the Lamb will love for aye,
He who is ground of all my bliss.

On the life of bliss that you say I lead
You wish me to elaborate.
When your love was lost, as you know indeed,
I was very young, born but of late.
But my loving Lord the Lamb decreed
To crown me queen in conjugal state,
And to bless and raise me, in bliss to speed
To all eternity’s latest date.
In His plenty I participate
As His beloved. I am wholly His:
His worth and place, surpassingly great,
Are the source and support of all my bliss."

"Yet, blissful one, can your tale be true?
Find no offense if by fault I err,
But are you queen of heaven’s blue,
Whose honor every clime shall declare?
We grant that Mary, from whom grace grew,
In virgin bloom a babe should 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
Came forth as the Queen of courtesy.”

Courteous Queen,” that comely one prayed,
Kneeling and turning upward her face,
“Matchless Mother and happiest Maid,
Blest beginner of bountiful grace!”
She rose forthwith, but rested and stayed
To speak to me a further space:
“Many find here the prize they assayed,
But pretenders find none, in any case.
Through all heaven, earth, and hell one may trace
Our Lady’s domain; yet most surely she
No rightful heir will ever displace,
For she is Queen of courtesy.

In the kingdom of God and His royal court
Is found this feature, by His fashioning:
Each one who may to that realm resort
Of all the country is queen or king,
Yet never does one the others thwart;
But prizes and praises their prospering,
Wishing their crowns worth five of the sort—
If heart could be happier in anything.
But my Lady, from whom our Lord did spring,
Holds sway over all in supremacy;
Which none here finds disquieting,
For she is Queen of courtesy.

By courtesy, clearly declares Saint Paul,
As navel, leg, or arm, or head,
Joined with Jesus Christ are we all,
And with His body truly wed.
Likewise each heart that heeds His call
Belongs to the Lamb who lives, though once dead.
Then consider if spite or sour 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.

“Courtesy,” I said, “I quite believe,
And charity, must here prevail.  
Unless my conjecture cause you to grieve  
(And unless in justice my judgment should fail),  
Yourself too high in heaven you heave,  
So young such queenly heights to scale.  
What more reward might a mortal achieve,  
Who has suffered earthly storm and gale,  
With perpetual penance to assail  
His flesh, in belief his bliss to see?  
What greater honor might avail  
Than crowning as king by courtesy?
“Such courtesy comes of too kindly hand,
If this tale be true that you relate.
Less than two years you lived in our land;
What duty to God did 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
Ill dealing, His truth 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”
Was that worthy woman’s word to me;
“We totally trust what He shall intend,
As divinely righteous in each decree.
Thus Matthew this matter of truth 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 resemble,’ says He,
‘A lord and his vineyard in good array.’
The season was seemly, this lord could see,
For tilling his land—now was the day.

“(Such a day these men can mark with skill.)
In early morning up he rose,
To hire help his plot to till,
And found some free at his dispose.
For their pay, the pledge he agrees to fulfill
Is a penny apiece. The bargain they close;
Then they till and twine on his fruitful hill,
Paring 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 arrived before the day had begun’
(Thus the reply from each one he got);
‘We stayed and stood from rise of sun,
But none in need came near this spot.’
‘Go to my vineyard; when daylight has run’
The lord directed, ‘I will allot
And deliver your due for what is done,
The return that in right and reason I ought.’
They went to work on the vineyard plot.
All day the master went his way,
And always new hands to the business he brought,
Till very little remained of the day.

45

“At the time of day for evensong,
Scarcely an hour till the sun would set,
There were still more idle, though sturdy and strong;
In earnest manner these too he met:
‘Why dally here idle all day long?’
They said that no one had hired them yet.
‘Go to my vineyard, join the throng,
And work to win what you can get.’
But 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 each for pay;
So that none may profess that I offend,
Stand them in line, and then purvey
To all a penny apiece to spend.
Start with those of shortest stay,
Deferring the first to the very end.’
But the first began to reprehend:
‘The 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

“Much more we have served, as well you know—
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 answered the lord to one: ‘Not so!
Here’s no fault, 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 do you mean, demanding more?”

48
“What is more: do you doubt my lawful right,  
To deal my own as I deem I should do?  
Or perhaps your eye is blinded with spite,  
When in fact I’m no cheat, but fair and true?  
‘Even so is my law,’ said Christ our light,  
‘That the last shall come to lead the queue,  
And the first be last, though raised to the height.  
Though many are called, the chosen are few.’  
Thus the poor are repaid and rewarded too,  
Though they come when day is well-nigh o’er;  
And if for their labor but little ensue,  
Their Master’s mercy is much the more.

49

“Here more of joy and bliss have I,  
Of life’s blooming beauty, of dignity,  
Than the wide world could win or buy  
On a judgment just, or an equable plea.  
Though I but lately occupy,  
And visit the vineyard tardily,  
My Lord saw fit from the first to supply  
My reward in full by his decree.  
Yet others live in expectancy  
And labor long with many a chore,  
Hitherto having no hire nor fee,  
And none this year, or next, or more.”

50

Then I mused the more—I could not refrain:  
“I reckon such reasons awry and frail.  
Ever ready and righteous is God’s reign,  
Else scripture is just a fabling tale.  
The Psalter’s saying is certainly plain  
In asserting what 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,  
Whether little or much they have merited.  
Our kindly King is quick to bless,  
Whether soft his dealings, or rough instead;  
The flood of his gifts exceeds our guess,
As the flow of fountains constantly fed.
Whoever holds in holy dread
Our Master, finds manifold means and space,
With bountiful blessings overspread,
From God’s supply of ample grace.

52

“But you state (setting my reason astray)
That I get my penny by imposition.
And I who alight too late, as you say,
Am hardly worth such recognition.
Yet is there one of mortal clay,
So pious always in prayer and petition,
As never to forfeit in any way,
His hope in heaven to have admission?
Oft many, with many years’ addition,
Exchange a good for an evil case.
Then mercy must minister to contrition,
Through God’s supply of ample grace.

53

“But ample is grace for the innocent.
Newborns, in order of delivery,
Are baptized by blessed sacrament,
Then joined with the vineyard company,
Though with speed the strength of death be bent
To darkness that makes their daylight flee.
To these, who have no no wrongs to repent,
The noble Lord gives His laborers’ fee.
They worked His will in their infancy;
Why should he not grant their course its place,
And reward them in full by His decree?
For God’s supply is ample grace.

54

“In ample grace did God admit
Humanity to consummate bliss;
By desire of the apple that Adam bit,
Our first father forfeited this.
We all were baulked of that benefit,
And doomed to die—our nemesis
Amid hell’s torments infinite,
Forever to dwell in that dread abyss.
But Christ brought cure for our deeds remiss:
His rich blood poured from the cross apace
With water, from a lance’s orifice,
Through God’s supply of ample grace.

55

“Ample the grace that gushed from that well,
Water and blood from His wound so 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 for our solace all is supplied,
Except what his sin has 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
Who may sin anew, but his steps retrace,
Though in grieving and groaning he must plead,
With pain of the penance imposed for his case.
But reason and justice are rightly agreed:
The pure enjoy a protected place.
From God no pronouncement could ever proceed,
That disgrace should dishonor an innocent face.
Guilty ones may be guided by grace
Through mercy, when men remain contrite;
But a body free of breaches base—
That innocent is safe and right.

57

“Likewise I know right well in this case—
Two sorts it is seemly not to spill:
The harmless ones shall see God’s face,
And those who all His laws fulfill.
These words in the Psalter one may trace:
‘Lord, who shall climb Thy high hill,
Or stay within Thy holy place?’
God’s 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 certainly shall attain,
To that courtly castle’s coverture;
These do not lead their life in vain,
Or nip their neighbors with fraudulent lure.
Of the righteous, Solomon’s speech is plain,
That Wisdom their honor will procure;
These on the trail of truth she will train,
A sight 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,
As seen in the psalm, when David cried:
‘O Lord, to judge me do not resort,
For to you none living is justified.’
Therefore when you are brought to the court
Where all cases come for God to decide,
In claiming right, you could be cut short
When you find this speech to you applied.
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?
Ponder what 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,
And a tender touch they came to pray.
His disciples rebuked them as overbold
And with their wisdom turned them away—
But heard their Master sweetly say:
‘Receive the young, whom I invite;
God’s kingdom comes to such as they.’
Thus always the innocent is safe by right.
“Christ called the innocent, courteous and mild,
And warned that none His Kingdom could win
Except by choice to come as a child,
But otherwise never to come within.
The harmless, the true one, the undefiled,
With no soil or smear of staining sin,
When he knocks, is received and reconciled;
They open in haste as to their kin.
And never-ending is the joy therein,
Which among many gems the jeweler sought,
And sold his substance to the smallest 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 this pearl is perfect, 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 mark of peace has brought.
Then forsake the world fantastical,
And purchase your pearl without a spot.”

“O spotless pearl, in pearls most 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;
Nor could an Aristotle declare
The place your nature occupies.
Your coloring with the lily vies;
Your angelic ways are gracious in aught.
Tell me, sweet, what signifies
Your rank, as a pearl so free of spot?”

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

65

"Why, spotless bride, now shining bright  
In rich and various royal state,  
What sort of Lamb is He, who might  
Marry you and make you His mate?  
You have climbed over others to highest height  
Of a life so lady-like and great,  
While 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 forbid 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.  
For we wives of the Lamb in joy serene,  
Are a hundred and forty-four thousand bright,  
As in the Apocalypse may be seen.  
And saintly John saw them all unite  
On the hill of Zion, that holy height.  
By spiritual sense he sighted 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 go to slaughter they made Him go;  
And as when the shearer seizes them,  
He muzzled His mouth before each foe,'  
When judged by Jews in Jerusalem.
“In Jerusalem they dispatched my dear,
Torn on the tree by the scoundrels’ scheme.
He bore our griefs, and had no fear
From sorrows and cares our souls to redeem.
His face was flayed with blows severe,
That face for splendor once supreme.
Though sin with Him could not inhere,
For sins He became of no esteem.
Racked on the cross in pains extreme,
Permitting His foes to mock and condemn,
Meek as a lamb without bleating scream,
He died for us in Jerusalem.

69

“In Jerusalem, Jordan, and Galilee,
Where John baptizes for salvation,
His words with the prophet Isaiah’s agree;
When Jesus arrives, by revelation
John preaches of Him this prophecy:
‘Behold God’s Lamb,’ thus his acclamation,
‘Who takes away forgivingly
The sin of the world in propitiation.’
Though never proffering provocation,
He remitted all sins by bearing them.
Who can declare His generation,
That was judged for us in Jerusalem?

70

“In Jerusalem thus my loved one, crowned,
Twice over (as each of these prophets conceives),
Is lauded as Lamb, and ever renowned
For the grace His meek demeanor achieves.
In Apocalypse a third witness is found;
With the other two it interweaves:
Set on the throne, with saints around,
There John the apostle plainly perceives
How he bares the book with the squared leaves
And seven seals, unsealing them.
And seeing that sight, each mortal grieves
In hell, and earth, and Jerusalem.

XV

71

“This Lamb of Jerusalem wears no whit
Of color but white beyond compare;
For never stain or spot might sit
On that richest of wool He is wont to wear.
The souls who no such spots permit
Become to the Lamb His spouses most fair.
And never arises fight or fit,
However many more come there;
Were each one five, we would fairly share—
The more the merrier, so God me bless.
With numbers great comes love to spare,
And honor more and never less.

72

"No less of bliss could we blessed 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 and find no rest,
Yet now we know as we are known.
Dying but once, with hope we are blessed.
In delight of the Lamb we can not be distressed;
He joys us more than words express.
Thus each one’s bliss is blessed and best,
And no one’s honor ever the less.

73

"Are you less than sure of this truth at my hand?
From Apocalypse, then, this word I cite:
‘On the mount of Zion I saw the Lamb stand,’
Says apostle John, ‘in His strength and might,
And besides, a devoted virgin band
Of a hundred forty-four thousand in white.
On their brows are the names, by God’s command,
Of the Lamb and His Father in letters of light.
Then a sound from heaven came bold and bright
Like wild-rushing waters’ effusiveness.
As thunder resounds on the highlands’ height
This sound, I suppose, was never less.

74

"‘Nevertheless, though shrill in sound,
And their voices voluble to hear,
They sang a new song, as I found;
A dear and sweet delight in my ear.
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 united near,
With the four beasts who pay their address,
And twenty-four elders grave and sincere;
Their song they sang never the less.

75

"‘Nonetheless, no one of wit most strong,
For all the skill that pertains thereto,
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,  
Resembling Himself in aspect and hue.  
For never trick or tale untrue  
Has touched their tongue in whatever distress.  
Nothing can part this courteous crew  
From that matchless Master, nevertheless.’’

“Nevertheless, my thanks accept,’’  
Said I, “my Pearl, though problems I pose.  
In testing 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 as one who simple sincerity knows,  
I ask you a thing in earnestness;  
Though madness or meanness my manner shows,  
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 request please not to shun.  
Have you no home within castle wall,  
Or manor, or seat? for here is none.  
You name Jerusalem’s royal hall,  
Where David’s days as king were spun,  
But here is no trace, nor could be one,  
Except in Judaea, that famous plot.  
As you are supreme under the sun,  
Your home should have no spoiling spot.

“The spotless host you celebrate,  
These thronging thousands all 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 with glories fraught.  
If elsewhere you have structures stout,  
Now guide me to that glorious spot.”

“You cite that spot of Jewish sod,”  
My singular sweet then said to me,  
“The city where the Lamb once 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.

“In titles these famous spots coincide—  
Both called Jerusalem, no less;  
By this name is nothing else implied  
But ‘City of God’ or ‘Vision of Peace.’  
The first did our means of peace provide,  
Where the Lamb chose death for our release.
The second with peace is sanctified,  
Everlasting, never to cease.  
That is the city to which we press,  
When once our flesh is laid to rot;  
There glory and gladness ever increase  
To that splendid throng without a spot.”

81

“Spotless maid so mild and meek,”  
I answered then that freshest flower,  
“Bring me to that holy peak,  
And direct me to see your delightful dower.”  
“God would forbid,” said she, “what you seek,  
“That you should trespass upon His tower.  
But from the Lamb I did bespeak  
You sight thereof, in a favored hour,  
Outside to see that blissful bower—  
But from the inside, not a jot.  
To step on that street you would have no power  
Unless you were pure, without a spot.

XVII

82

“Am I to show this spot to you?  
Then up this stream you will be bound  
(While on this margin I pursue  
Your course), till you come on a lofty mound.”  
No longer I lingered as hitherto;  
Past finest foliage my way I found,  
And beheld a hill, where in my view  
The city stood, a sight to astound.  
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 new, majestic in mold,  
As if descending from heaven’s height,  
All of refined and glistening gold  
As gleaming as glass when burnished bright,  
And founded on jewels manifold—  
Twelve courses, firmly fixed, unite  
As twelve foundations bonded tight,  
Consisting each of a single stone,  
A wonder to witness, as once did write  
In Apocalypse the apostle John.
As named by John in his prophecies,  
Each tier I was able to tell and trace.  
Jasper stone, the first of these,  
Comprised, I saw, the bottom base,  
Glinting green as the lowest frieze;  
And sapphire lay in the second place.  
Chalcedony, with power to please,  
Glowed pure and pale in the third space.  
Fourth was emerald, green of face,  
And the fifth, a sardonyx, brightly shone;  
The sixth a ruby, seen through grace  
In Apocalypse, by apostle John.

And next John names the chrysolite,  
As the seventh gem, set next below  
The eighth, a beryl clear and white;  
In the ninth, a topaz, twin hues glow.  
The tenth, a chrysoprase, shines bright,  
And jacinth, the eleventh tier, also.  
The twelfth is the noblest stone in sight;  
Amethyst blends purple and indigo.  
Above are jasper walls that show  
Like glass when radiance shines thereon.  
By his narration this I know,  
From the Apocalypse of apostle John.

As John set forth, so I could see  
Towering above the topmost tier  
That city, in singular symmetry  
Of square dimensions, itself uprear.  
Its streets were gold in brilliancy,  
And glinting like glaze the rampart sheer.  
The dwellings within bore filigree  
Of all sorts of stones that might 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 measuring witnessed apostle John.

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.  
A precious pearl comprised each door,  
A pearl in perfection to abide.  
Of Israel’s sons each portal bore
A name, in order that testified
The lot that should each one betide;
The oldest first was carved and hewn.
Such light illumined so far and wide
That they needed neither sun nor moon.

Of sun and moon they had no need,
For the Lord Himself was their lamp-light,
And their lantern was the Lamb, indeed;
Through Him shone all the city bright.
The 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 moved to indite.
There God Himself and men commune.
From the throne a river ran forthright,
Brighter than both the sun and moon.

Never shone sun or moon as sweet
As the flowing fount from the throne forth let,
Swiftly swirling through each street
Without pollution's taint or threat.
No temple stood within to greet,
Nor was church or chapel to be met;
The Almighty's ministry was complete,
The Lamb discharger of our debt.
Those pearly gates have never yet
Been closed, but open and opportune;
But entry there may no one get
Who is spoiled by spot beneath the moon.

The moon may gain thereby no might:
Too spotted she is, too poor and spare
(And also it is never night).
Why should she climb her courses there,
Unfit to vie with the vibrant 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 supplying rich ware,
Renewing themselves with every moon.

Beneath the moon a marvel so great
No heart of flesh could ever endure,
As that comely sight to contemplate,
So glorious in its garniture.
I stood stock still in dazed state
From awe of its elegant forms' allure,
While feeling neither freedom nor weight,
So ravished I was with radiance pure.
For I dare to claim, with conscience sure,
Had one borne bodily that boon,
Though all the learned labored his cure,
His life were lost beneath the moon.

XIX

92

Much as the mighty moon may rise
Ere day gives place to the dark night's frown,
So suddenly, to my surprise,
There comes a procession of renown.
A throng appears before my eyes
Unbidden, filling this blessed town—
All virgins, dressed in similar guise
To my dear in diadem and white gown;
Thus likewise each, wearing a crown,
Is decked in pearls and dressed in white.
On each bright one's breast is hanging down
That precious pearl of pure delight.

93

In pure delight they pass apace
On golden streets of glassy gleam;
Apparel'd with pearl every case,
A hundred thousand 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 see them stream,
Though many, yet modestly 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.
And when those elders saw Him near,
Humbly before 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 celestial joy should be sung outright.
With them the laud of the Lamb to swell
Indeed I drew a deep delight.

95

In delight to look on the Lamb of God
I marveled, with mystery occupied.
Best He was, most worthy of laud,
Matchless and most to be magnified;
In glorious white he was clothed and shod;
Though meek of manner, superb to preside.
But close by his heart was gaping broad
A woeful wound, still wet and wide,
Streaming with blood from His snow-white side.
“Alas!” I thought, “who spewed such spite?”
Any mind should feel grief multiplied,
Rather than thus to take delight.

96

Yet no greater could His delight have 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 host that thronged that scene;
How they flourished in lively company!
Then saw I there my little queen,
Whom I dreamed in the dale had stood by me;
Greatly and gladly she gloried in glee
Among her mates all robed in white.
I would have waded willingly,
For longing of love, in that deep delight.
By eye and ear, delight most rare
Melts to madness my mortal mind.
When I see my sweet, I sigh to be there,
Though beyond the banks she is enshrined.
I suppose that nothing may now impair
My intent to fling forward unconfined;
And though I might die, yet would I dare
To leap in and leave the bank behind.
But something baffles that purpose blind;
For God Himself my desire denies,
Because the crossing that I designed,
Fits not my Prince's enterprise.

He prized it not that I flung myself so
At those wondrous waters, crazed in self-will;
Though rushing and rash in haste to go,
Yet suddenly I was stopped stock-still
For as I bolted for the bank below,
The stirring served my slumber to kill.
In the flower-garden I woke in woe,
My head reposing on that hill
Where my pearl was lost in earth, to my ill.
Though in dire dismay, with dismal sighs,
I said to myself, as I stretched my fill:
"May all proceed as that Prince may prize."

Little I prized it, to be expelled
So fast by forcible restraint
From that vibrant vision unparalleled.
A languorous longing made me faint;
And woefully then I wailed and yelled:
"O perfect pearl, my precious saint—
What treasure to me, the truth you upheld
In this vital vision! If you acquaint
And teach me truly, without attainct,
That now you walk in such wondrous wise,
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 yearned to gain no more than He gave,
Had I followed forbearance faithfully
As advised by the Pearl, bright and brave,
I might know more of God's mystery,
Perhaps, and more of His presence save;
But folk aspire to prosperity
More than in reason and right they may crave.
The eternal regions thus I must waive,
My joy transmuted otherwise.
Lord, only the mad thus misbehave,
Ever to cross your enterprise!

101

For the Prince’s emprise, to renounce caprice
Good Christians readily may incline;
For I find His kindness cannot cease
As Lord, as God, as Friend divine.
Upon this mound I made my peace,
While lamenting my pearl I lay supine:
To God my darling to release
In Christ’s dear blessing (and in mine),
He whom in form of bread and wine
The priest to us daily signifies.
To serve in His house is God’s design
For us precious pearls that He may prize. Amen. Amen.

Draft 5 text completed September 27, 2005.
**Pearl, 49-50**

J. W. Sider

“Here more of joy and bliss have I,
Of life’s blooming beauty, of dignity,
Than the wide world could win or buy
On a judgment just, or an equable plea.
Though I but lately occupy,
And visit the vineyard tardily,
My Lord saw fit from the first to supply
My reward in full by his decree.
Yet others live in expectancy
And labor at length with many a chore,
Hitherto having no hire nor fee,
And none this year, or next, or more.”

Then I mused the more—I could not refrain:
“I reckon such reasons awry and fail.
Ever ready and righteous is God’s reign.
Else scripture is just a fable tale.
The Psalter’s saying is certainly plain
In asserting what 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
Perchance, for years yet more.’

Marie Borroff (Norton)

“My story seems unreasonable.
Your reasoning seems to me unstable.
Unreasonable is what you say.
Ever ready God’s justice on high doth reign.
Or a fable doth Holy Writ purvey.
The Psalms a cogent verse contain,
Which puts a point that one must weigh:
‘By You are earned rewards assigned,
And held in due proportion.
And yet shall not for some years more.’

J. R. R. Tolkien (Houghton Mifflin)

More is my joy and bliss herein,
The flower of my life, my lady’s height,
Than all the folk in the world might win,
Did they seek award on ground of right.
Though ‘twas but now that I entered in,
And came to the vineyard by evening’s light,
First with my hire did my Lord begin;
I was paid at once to the furthest mite.
Yet others in toil without respite
That had laboured and sweated long of yore,
He did not yet with hire requisite,
Nor will, perchance, for years yet more.’

Then more I said and spoke out plain:
‘Unreasonable is what you say.
Ever ready God’s justice on high doth reign.
Or a fable doth Holy Writ purvey.
The Psalms a cogent verse contain,
Which puts a point that one must weigh:
‘By You are earned rewards assigned,
And held in due proportion.
And yet shall not for some years more.’

William Vantuono (U of Notre Dame P)

“More glory and bliss have I herein,
Of ladyship great and life in bloom,
Than all the mortals in world might win,
Receive by labor rightfully.
The more and plainly I spoke my mind:
‘Your reasoning seems to me unstable.
Instant and right is the rule divine.
Else Holy Writ is only a fable.
The Psalms openly asserts,
In a verse whose words that sense convey:
‘You grant to each his true deserts,
To You are earned rewards assigned,
And hold in due proportion.
And yet shall not for some years more.’

Casey Finch (U of California P)

“More merry mirth have I here won,
More bounteous bliss has come to me
Than in the world would anyone receive by labor rightfully.
Although the day was nearly done
Before I worked the vine, yet He
Rewarded me at once. Thus none
Was paid before the Lord paid me.
Though others worked more worthily,
And stepped and swayed in their chore,
Yet none received his fief and fee
Nor might for many years or more.”

Brian Stone (Penguin)

‘More bliss and joy I have herein,
Through perfect life and ladyship great,
Than anyone in the world might win
By claiming fair reward from Fate.
Yet hardly had I started forth—
At dusk to the vines I made my way—
But my Lord at once knew my labour’s worth,
And paid me in full without delay.
Yet others came early, spent the whole day,
Labouring and sweated long and sore,
And notwithstanding received no pay,
And may not for a year or more.’

Then more did I speak out my mind:
‘Your story seems unreasonable.
God’s righteousness rules all mankind.
Or Holy Write is a foolish fable.
In Psalms you shall the saying find,
Indeed quite indisputable.
‘By You are earned rewards assigned,’
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Admits no cavil or disputation:</th>
<th>Which decrees a point determinable.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘You render to each his just reward,</td>
<td>‘You give to each his just desert,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O ruler of every dispensation!’</td>
<td>High King of perfect judgment capable.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now he who all day kept his station,</td>
<td>If one has stayed the long day stable,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you to payment come in before,</td>
<td>And you for payment come before,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then the less, the more remuneration,</td>
<td>Then less of work makes one more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And ever alike, the less, the more.”</td>
<td>payable,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And ever onward, less work gets more.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

O cherished King unchangeable”!
If one worked more in toil and trouble
Yet you’re rewarded first, then for
Less work more wealth is payable.
So more is less and less is more!”