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Paradise Lost

BOOK I

The Argument

This first book proposes, first in brief, the whole subject, man's disobedience, and the loss thereupon of Paradise wherein he was placed; then touches the prime cause of his fall, the serpent, or rather Satan in the serpent – who, revolting from God and drawing to his side many legions of angels, was by the command of God driven out of heaven with all his crew into the great deep. Which action passed over, the poem hastes into the midst of things, presenting Satan with his angels now fallen into hell, described here not in the centre (for heaven and earth may be supposed as yet not made, certainly not yet accursed), but in a place of utter darkness, fittest called “Chaos”: here Satan with his angels lying on the burning lake, thunderstruck and astonished, after a certain space recovers, as from confusion, calls up him who next in order and dignity lay by him; they confer of their miserable fall. Satan awakens all his legions, who lay till then in the same manner confounded; they rise, their numbers, array of battle, their chief leaders named, according to the idols known afterwards in Canaan and the countries adjoining. To these Satan directs his speech, comforts them with hope yet of regaining heaven, but tells them lastly of a new world and new kind of creature to be created, according to an ancient prophecy or report in heaven, for that angels were long before this visible creation was the opinion of many ancient Fathers. To find out the truth of this prophecy, and what to determine thereon, he refers to a full council. What his associates thence attempt. Pandaemonium, the palace of Satan,¹ rises, suddenly built out of the deep: the infernal peers there sit in council.

¹ *Pandaemonium, the palace of Satan*: “Pandaemonium”, literally meaning “all the devils”, is a word coined by Milton.

Of man's first disobedience and the fruit
 Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
 Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
 With loss of Eden,¹ till one greater man²
 Restore us and regain the blissful seat,
 Sing, heavenly muse, that on the secret top
 Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
 That shepherd who first taught the chosen seed,
 In the beginning how the heavens and earth
 Rose out of Chaos;³ or if Sion Hill 10
 Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
 Fast by the oracle of God,⁴ I thence
 Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song,
 That with no middle flight intends to soar
 Above the Aonian mount⁵ while it pursues
 Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.
 And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
 Before all temples the upright heart and pure,

1 *loss of Eden*: Loss of Paradise.

2 *one greater man*: Jesus.

3 *heavenly muse... out of Chaos*: The invocation is to Urania, the muse of Astronomy, and therefore of all heavenly things, here identified with the Holy Spirit, who revealed to Moses (the "shepherd") how the world was created, either on Mount Horeb (according to Deuteronomy 4:10) or on the nearby Mount Sinai (according to Exodus 19:20). The top of the mountain is described as "secret" because it was covered with smoke (see Exodus 19:18) and hidden from view when God spoke to Moses.

4 *Siloa's brook... the oracle of God*: A reference to the Pool of Siloam near Solomon's Temple on the biblical Mount Zion ("Sion Hill"), now Temple Mount, in Jerusalem.

5 *the Aonian mount*: A reference to Mount Helicon in Aonia, a district of ancient Boeotia in Greece. The mountain was sacred to the Muses.

Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first
 Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread 20
 Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss
 And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark
 Illumine, what is low raise and support,
 That to the height of this great argument
 I may assert eternal providence
 And justify the ways of God to men.

Say first, for Heaven hides nothing from thy view,
 Nor the deep tract of hell, say first what cause
 Moved our grand parents in that happy state,
 Favoured of heaven so highly, to fall off 30
 From their creator and transgress his will
 For one restraint – lords of the world besides.
 Who first seduced them to that foul revolt?
 The infernal serpent: he it was whose guile,
 Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived
 The mother of mankind, what time¹ his pride
 Had cast him out from heaven, with all his host
 Of rebel angels, by whose aid aspiring
 To set himself in glory above his peers,
 He trusted to have equalled the Most High, 40
 If he opposed; and with ambitious aim
 Against the throne and monarchy of God
 Raised impious war in heaven and battle proud
 With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power
 Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' ethereal sky,
 With hideous ruin and combustion down,
 To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
 In adamant chains and penal fire,
 Who durst defy the Omnipotent to arms.
 Nine times the space that measures day and night 50
 To mortal men he with his horrid crew
 Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf
 Confounded, though immortal; but his doom
 Reserved him to more wrath, for now the thought

1 *what time*: When.

Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
 Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes
 That witnessed huge affliction and dismay,
 Mixed with obdurate pride and steadfast hate;
 At once as far as angels' ken he views
 The dismal situation waste and wild – 60
 A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,
 As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames
 No light, but rather darkness visible
 Served only to discover sights of woe,
 Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
 And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
 That comes to all, but torture without end
 Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed
 With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed.
 Such place eternal justice had prepared 70
 For those rebellious: here their prison ordained
 In utter darkness, and their portion set
 As far removed from God and light of heaven
 As from the centre thrice to the utmost pole.
 Oh, how unlike the place from whence they fell!
 There the companions of his fall, o'erwhelmed
 With floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire,
 He soon discerns, and, weltering by his side,
 One next himself in power and next in crime,
 Long after known in Palestine, and named 80
 Beëlzebub. To whom the arch-enemy,
 And thence in heaven called Satan, with bold words
 Breaking the horrid silence thus began:
 “If thou beest he – but oh, how fallen, how changed
 From him! – who in the happy realms of light
 Clothed with transcendent brightness didst outshine
 Myriads though bright!... If he whom mutual league,
 United thoughts and counsels, equal hope
 And hazard in the glorious enterprise,
 Joined with me once, now misery hath joined 90
 In equal ruin; into what pit thou seest

From what height fallen, so much the stronger proved
 He with his thunder – and till then who knew
 The force of those dire arms? Yet not for those,
 Nor what the potent victor in his rage
 Can else inflict, do I repent, or change,
 Though changed in outward lustre, that fixed mind
 And high disdain, from sense of injured merit,
 That with the mightiest raised me to contend,
 And to the fierce contention brought along 100
 Innumerable force of spirits armed
 That durst dislike his reign – and, me preferring,
 His utmost power with adverse power opposed
 In dubious battle on the plains of heaven,
 And shook his throne. What though the field be lost?
 All is not lost: the unconquerable will,
 And study of revenge, immortal hate,
 And courage never to submit or yield –
 And what is else not to be overcome?
 That glory never shall his wrath or might 110
 Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace
 With suppliant knee, and deify his power
 Who from the terror of this arm so late
 Doubted his empire – that were low indeed:
 That were an ignominy and shame beneath
 This downfall, since by fate the strength of gods
 And this empyreal substance cannot fail –
 Since through experience of this great event,
 In arms not worse, in foresight much advanced,
 We may with more successful hope resolve 120
 To wage by force or guile eternal war,
 Irreconcilable to our grand foe,
 Who now triumphs and in the excess of joy
 Sole reigning holds the tyranny of heaven.”

So spake the apostate angel, though in pain,
 Vaunting aloud, but racked with deep despair.
 And him thus answered soon his bold compeer:

“O prince, O chief of many thronèd powers,
 That led the embattled seraphim to war
 Under thy conduct and, in dreadful deeds 130
 Fearless, endangered heaven’s perpetual king
 And put to proof his high supremacy,
 Whether upheld by strength or chance or fate,
 Too well I see and rue the dire event
 That with sad overthrow and foul defeat
 Hath lost us heaven and all this mighty host
 In horrible destruction laid thus low,
 As far as gods and heavenly essences
 Can perish – for the mind and spirit remains
 Invincible, and vigour soon returns, 140
 Though all our glory extinct, and happy state
 Here swallowed up in endless misery.
 But what if he, our conqueror (whom I now
 Of force believe almighty, since no less
 Than such could have o’erpowered such force as ours),
 Have left us this our spirit and strength entire
 Strongly to suffer and support our pains,
 That we may so suffice his vengeful ire,
 Or do him mightier service as his thralls
 By right of war, whate’er his business be, 150
 Here in the heart of hell to work in fire,
 Or do his errands in the gloomy deep –
 What can it then avail though yet we feel
 Strength undiminished, or eternal being
 To undergo eternal punishment?”
 Whereto with speedy words the arch-fiend replied:
 “Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable,
 Doing or suffering, but of this be sure:
 To do aught good never will be our task,
 But ever to do ill our sole delight, 160
 As being the contrary to his high will
 Whom we resist. If then his providence
 Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,

Our labour must be to pervert that end,
 And out of good still to find means of evil –
 Which oft-times may succeed, so as perhaps
 Shall grieve him, if I fail not, and disturb
 His inmost counsels from their destined aim.
 But see, the angry victor hath recalled
 His ministers of vengeance and pursuit 170
 Back to the gates of heaven; the sulphurous hail
 Shot after us in storm, o'erblown, hath laid¹
 The fiery surge that from the precipice
 Of heaven received us falling, and the thunder,
 Winged with red lightning and impetuous rage,
 Perhaps hath spent his shafts and ceases now
 To bellow through the vast and boundless deep.
 Let us not slip the occasion, whether scorn
 Or satiate fury yield it from our foe.
 Seest thou yon dreary plain, forlorn and wild, 180
 The seat of desolation, void of light,
 Save what the glimmering of these livid flames
 Casts pale and dreadful? Thither let us tend
 From off the tossing of these fiery waves –
 There rest, if any rest can harbour there,
 And, reassembling our afflicted powers,
 Consult how we may henceforth most offend
 Our enemy, our own loss how repair,
 How overcome this dire calamity,
 What reinforcement we may gain from hope, 190
 If not what resolution from despair.”

Thus Satan talking to his nearest mate
 With head uplift above the wave and eyes
 That sparkling blazed; his other parts besides
 Prone on the flood, extended long and large,
 Lay floating many a rood,² in bulk as huge
 As whom the fables name of monstrous size,

1 *laid*: Extinguished, put down.

2 *rood*: A unit of land equal to a quarter of an acre.

Titanian or Earth-born, that warred on Jove,¹
 Briareos or Typhon,² whom the den
 By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea beast 200
 Leviathan, which God of all his works
 Created hugest that swim the ocean stream:
 Him, haply slumbering on the Norway foam,
 The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff,
 Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
 With fixèd anchor in his scaly rind
 Moors by his side under the lee, while night
 Invests the sea and wishèd morn delays.
 So stretched out huge in length the arch-fiend lay,
 Chained on the burning lake, nor ever thence 210
 Had risen or heaved his head but that the will
 And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
 Left him at large to his own dark designs,
 That with reiterated crimes he might
 Heap on himself damnation while he sought
 Evil to others, and enraged might see
 How all his malice served but to bring forth
 Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shown
 On man by him seduced, but on himself
 Treble confusion, wrath and vengeance poured. 220
 Forthwith upright he rears from off the pool
 His mighty stature; on each hand the flames,
 Driven backward, slope their pointing spires and, rolled
 In billows, leave i' the midst a horrid vale.
 Then with expanded wings he steers his flight
 Aloft, incumbent on the dusky air,
 That felt unusual weight, till on dry land

1 *Titanian or Earth-born, that warred on Jove*: A reference to the Titans and the giants. Both were born of Gaia (Earth) and fought Zeus. Milton's appellative for the giants is a reference to their Greek name "*gigantes*", which is widely taken to mean "earth-born".

2 *Briareos or Typhon... Tarsus held*: Briareus was one of the hundred-handed monsters of Greek mythology. Typhon, a fearsome mythological giant, was said to live in a cave in Cilicia, whose capital was Tarsus.

He lights, if it were land that ever burned
 With solid as the lake with liquid fire;
 And such appeared in hue as when the force 230
 Of subterranean wind transports a hill
 Torn from Pelorus,¹ or the shattered side
 Of thundering Etna, whose combustible
 And fuelled entrails thence conceiving fire,
 Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds
 And leave a singèd bottom all involved
 With stench and smoke: such resting found the sole
 Of unblest feet. Him followed his next mate,
 Both glorying to have scaped the Stygian flood
 As gods and by their own recovered strength, 240
 Not by the sufferance of supernal power.
 "Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,"
 Said then the lost archangel, "this the seat
 That we must change for heaven, this mournful gloom
 For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
 Who now is sovereign can dispose and bid
 What shall be right: farthest from him is best
 Whom reason hath equalled, force hath made supreme
 Above his equals. Farewell, happy fields
 Where joy for ever dwells: hail horrors, hail 250
 Infernal world – and thou, profoundest hell,
 Receive thy new possessor: one who brings
 A mind not to be changed by place or time.
 The mind is its own place, and in itself
 Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.
 What matter where, if I be still the same,
 And what I should be, all but less than he
 Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
 We shall be free; the Almighty hath not built
 Here for his envy, will not drive us hence; 260
 Here we may reign secure – and, in my choice,
 To reign is worth ambition, though in hell:
 Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.

1 *Pelorus*: A famous Sicilian promontory on the Strait of Messina.

But wherefore let we then our faithful friends,
 The associates and co-partners of our loss,
 Lie thus astonished on the oblivious pool
 And call them not to share with us their part
 In this unhappy mansion, or once more
 With rallied arms to try what may be yet
 Regained in heaven, or what more lost in hell?" 270

So Satan spake, and him Beëlzebub
 Thus answered: "Leader of those armies bright
 Which but the omnipotent none could have foiled,
 If once they hear that voice, their liveliest pledge
 Of hope in fears and dangers, heard so oft
 In worst extremes, and on the perilous edge
 Of battle when it raged, in all assaults
 Their surest signal, they will soon resume
 New courage and revive, though now they lie
 Grovelling and prostrate on yon lake of fire, 280
 As we erewhile, astounded and amazed –
 No wonder, fallen such a pernicious height."

He scarce had ceased when the superior fiend
 Was moving toward the shore; his ponderous shield,
 Ethereal temper, massy, large and round,
 Behind him cast; the broad circumference
 Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb
 Through optic glass the Tuscan artist¹ views
 At evening from the top of Fesole,²
 Or in Valdarno,³ to descry new lands, 290
 Rivers or mountains in her spotty globe.
 His spear – to equal which the tallest pine
 Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the mast

1 *the Tuscan artist*: Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), who described his observations of the lunar surface in *Sidereus nuncius* (1610). Milton visited the old scientist in Arcetri, near Florence, in 1638. Galilei is the only historical figure mentioned in *Paradise Lost*. Here "artist" means "a person engaged in a practical science; a savant" (*OED*).

2 *Fesole*: Fiesole, near Florence.

3 *Valdarno*: The valley of the River Arno, which flows through Florence.

Of some great admiral,¹ were but a wand –
 He walked with to support uneasy steps
 Over the burning marl, not like those steps
 On heaven's azure, and the torrid clime
 Smote on him sore besides, vaulted with fire;
 Natheless he so endured, till on the beach
 Of that inflamèd sea he stood and called 300
 His legions, angel forms, who lay entranced
 Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks
 In Vallombrosa,² where the Etrurian shades,
 High-overarched, embower – or scattered sedge
 Afloat when with fierce winds Orion armed³
 Hath vexed the Red Sea coast, whose waves o'erthrew
 Busiris and his Memphian chivalry
 While with perfidious hatred they pursued
 The sojourners of Goshen, who beheld
 From the safe shore their floating carcasses 310
 And broken chariot wheels, so thick bestrewn
 Abject and lost lay these, covering the flood,
 Under amazement of their hideous change.⁴
 He called so loud that all the hollow deep
 Of hell resounded. "Princes, potentates,
 Warriors, the flower of heaven, once yours, now lost,
 If such astonishment as this can seize
 Eternal spirits – or have ye chosen this place
 After the toil of battle to repose
 Your wearied virtue, for the ease you find 320
 To slumber here, as in the vales of heaven?

1 *admiral*: Admiral ship.

2 *Vallombrosa*: A town and forest near Florence. The name "Vallombrosa" literally means "shaded valley".

3 *Orion armed*: The constellation Orion, associated with stormy weather, was often depicted in the figure of a hunter, or armed man.

4 *Red Sea coast... hideous change*: See Exodus 14:21 and 15. The "sojourners of Goshen" are the Israelites, who were fleeing from that region, chased by Pharaoh ("Busiris", from the name of a mythical Egyptian king killed by Hercules) and his cavalry.

Or in this abject posture have ye sworn
 To adore the conqueror, who now beholds
 Cherub and seraph rolling in the flood
 With scattered arms and ensigns, till anon
 His swift pursuers from heaven gates discern
 The advantage and, descending, tread us down
 Thus drooping, or with linkèd thunderbolts
 Transfix us to the bottom of this gulf?
 Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen!" 330

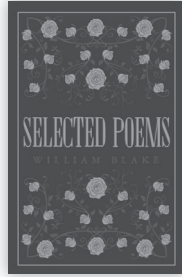
They heard and were abashed, and up they sprung
 Upon the wing, as when men wont to watch
 On duty, sleeping found by whom they dread,
 Rouse and bestir themselves ere well awake.
 Nor did they not perceive the evil plight
 In which they were, or the fierce pains not feel;
 Yet to their general's voice they soon obeyed
 Innumerable. As when the potent rod
 Of Amram's son in Egypt's evil day,
 Waved round the coast, up called a pitchy cloud 340
 Of locusts, warping¹ on the eastern wind,
 That o'er the realm of impious Pharaoh hung
 Like night, and darkened all the land of Nile,²
 So numberless were those bad angels seen
 Hovering on wing under the cope of hell
 'Twixt upper, nether and surrounding fires,
 Till, as a signal given, the uplifted spear
 Of their great sultan waving to direct
 Their course, in even balance down they light
 On the firm brimstone and fill all the plain – 350
 A multitude like which the populous north
 Poured never from her frozen loins to pass
 Rhene or the Danaw when her barbarous sons
 Came like a deluge on the south and spread

1 *warping*: Floating, whirling.

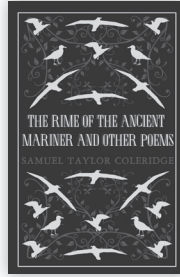
2 *As when... the land of Nile*: See Exodus 10:13–15. "Amram's son" is Moses.

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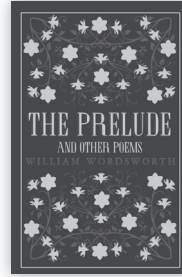
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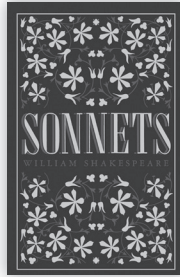
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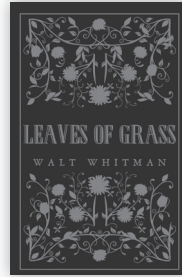
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