

Apes of Eden - The Journey Begins

by Jon P. Gunn

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The Apes of Eden

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

by Jon P. Gunn

as told by

Literate Louie, the Scribe of the Tribe



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Chula Vista, California

Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Social Media](#)

[The Apes of Eden](#)

[Prologue and Invocation](#)

[Book 1 - Antiquities of Eden](#)

[Genesis](#)

[Exodus](#)

[The Fall](#)

[The Classicist](#)

[The Classicist continued](#)

[The Classicist \(concluded\)](#)

[The Missionaries](#)

[The Missionaries \(Continued\)](#)

[The Missionaries \(concluded\)](#)

[David and the Cyclops](#)

The Apes of Eden: The Journey Begins

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iCrew Digital Productions

Website: icrewdigital.com

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First eBook Edition: September 2013

iCrew Digital Productions is an independent publisher of digital works. We support the efforts of authors who wish to self-publish in the digital realm

ISBN 978-0-9851752-0-7

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The Apes of Eden

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Literate Louie, the Scribe of the Tribe

Prologue and Invocation

My present goal is briefly to describe
the mighty deeds of Eden's famous Tribe
from high antiquity to modern times
in lucid, readable Heroic Rhymes
that nearly any member of our band
with brains between his ears, can understand.

Permit me, first, a word on scribal Style:
Traditions have been fixed for quite a while;
and I shall follow them, however it
displeases readers lacking taste and wit.
I write as Eden's classic authors wrote.
Wherever possible, I try to quote
their golden iambs. Thus should every scribe
of Eden keep the records of the Tribe.
All tastes are not alike, I realize.
I nonetheless decline to compromise!
What compromise is possible? One type
of reader savors Art, the other, tripe.
There is no tepid "Middle Way" to go.
Like death, or pregnancy, it's Yes or No--
You'll either be enraptured by the terse,
majestic cadence of Heroic Verse
or else it drives you screaming up the wall.

There seems to be no neutral ground at all.

I don't expect my work to go to waste.

We have, among us, apes of cultured taste:

the Literate Elite. I write for those.

Let lowbrows read some Scribbler's dreary prose.

This book will fill some long-felt needs. For one,

our present tribal Archives weigh a ton.

The custom of inscribing all our lore

on chiseled slabs of stone, as heretofore,

has meant that history has put on weight

beyond my competence to estimate--

much less to carry. Nor have volunteers

come forth to share this load I've borne for years

through prairies, mountains, deserts, swamps and sloughs

as Eden's Tribe it's holy Quest pursues.

A sedentary race of stay-at-homes

is justified in storing weighty tomes,

but apes who have our quest-pursuing bent

with lighter reading ought to be content.

The land through which we travel now is rife

with deadly hazards to one's health and life:

explosive gas from smoking fumaroles,

and dragons darting out of clefts and holes,

and winged snakes, concealed in clouds of gray

volcano smoke, to pounce upon their prey.

It's difficult for someone to compete

unless he's quick and agile on his feet,

and not encumbered by a heavy sack
of Literary Treasures on his back.
And if the harsh, relentless truth be told,
I'm past my prime of life: I'm getting old.
A lighter load would be a boon to me.
I'm not as nimble as I used to be.
Besides, too many "documents" we keep
are uninformative--a cumbrous heap
of sherds and fragments which cannot be read;
or commentaries, made by scribes long dead,
on writings which were subsequently lost
among the swamps and deserts we have crossed;
or whopping tales the ancient used to weave,
which now not even gaffers can believe
or myths our Senior Tribesmen have themselves
devised--of goblins, pixies, spooks and elves--
which scribes with little talent of their own
as chroniclers, immortalized in stone.
We have some archives which exist in three
or four editions, none of which agree.
Least valuable of all our books are those
in cryptic tongues no living tribesman knows.
Be sensible: Do antiquaries need
archaic texts which none of us can read?
There's too much trash the Tribe of Eden owns
of which in vain we ask: What Mean These Stones?

The monsters we contend with, day by day,
have proven helpful, in a passive way.

The fuming pits abounding in this land
provide the chemicals with which I've tanned
the dragon-leather which, if bleached, makes quite
a choice material on which to write.

One modest credit more: I'm first to think
of using dragons' soot-black blood for ink.

If all goes well, I shall present the whole
of Eden's history on one small scroll,
in style and portability improved,
with errors and obscurities removed--
a text which may an inspiration be
to apes, throughout our future destiny,
instead of merely stirring up dissent
by giving quibblers grounds for argument.

In place of many clashing texts, I give
you one, coherent and definitive!

No "food for thought" is lost. I promise that.

I save the meat, although I trim the fat.

For this first time in many days, the view
is relatively peaceful--with a few
small winged serpents soaring in the night;
but not a single Dragon is in sight.

I'll seize this priceless opportunity
to finish editing my History
before another troupe of monsters choose
to interrupt me. Let's get started, Muse!

Scribe of the Tribe

December, 19067

The First Book of Louie

commonly called

The Antiquities of Eden

Genesis

According to the legends of our race
the Tribe originated in a place
called Eden. It lies "east," but east of where
is now no longer known. It's said that there
our first progenitors came down from trees
where they had ripened in the sun and breeze.
A second legend contradicts the first,
and says we fell from Heaven, roundly cursed
by worried gods who recognized that we
were latent threats to their supremacy,
and wisely chose to banish us to Hell
before they had a Great Revolt to quell.
We outmaneuvered them, and landed here
on Earth. Just how we did it isn't clear;
the legend's Happy Ending seems to be
a missing page in tribal history.

The "War in Heaven" is a common theme
in ancient lore--so common, it would seem,
that writers who refer to it suppose
it is a story everybody knows,
which needn't be repeated. Since they fail
to give the Plot, or even much detail,
it's hard to build a narrative around
the mere allusions, which are all I've found.
The War occurred; of that there's little doubt,
since apes cannot be brusquely ordered *out*.
Apparently the Tribe was put to flight,
but surely *not* without a brutal fight.

A third, still stranger, theory says we came
from human beings. That one's rather lame!
No ape with half his wits about him can
believe we Higher Apes evolved from Man--
the lowest of the primates, mere cartoons,
the moral peers of mandrills or baboons!
And yet this superstition still persists
among small cliques of crypo-atheists,
who flaunt their right to "freedom of belief"
with grudging toleration by our Chief.
Some ancient scribes, rejecting "theory," say
we've always been as we exist today;
we neither dropped from Heaven nor arose
"by evolution" from our racial foes.
That open-ended past I can't conceive,
nor do I know which theories to believe.
I only know that Eden, lush and fair,
exists, and we originated there.
How else can one explain how "Eden" came
to be our own distinctive tribal name?
From most surviving records, it appears
we stayed in Eden twenty million years--
but some say twenty billion. Others give
a shorter span. I can't be positive
when scribal records handed down to me
are mistransmitted so creatively.
We lived a tranquil and idyllic life
unmarred by hardships, danger, toil and strife.
In Eden every fruit this planet knew,

and every flower, in profusion grew.
The lotus blossoms, amaranths* and palms
enriched the zephyrs with their fragrant balms,
and rainbow-colored lovebirds trilled among
the vines, where grapes the size of melons hung.
The very weeds were elegantly decked
with breeds of flowers one would least expect.
We gorged on fruits, fresh-ripened every day
for our convenience, in profuse array.
Among the shady fronds we took our ease,
or chased each other up and down the trees,
or polished up our acrobatic stunts
on boughs that bore a dozen fruits at once,
dislodging pears on one another's head
and seeing mangoes ripen in their stead--
or any crop that met the moment's needs.
We pelted passersby with rinds and seeds.
We made up games, then freely changed the rules.
We grinned at our reflections in the pools.
Uncounted generations came and went
before we tired of ease and merriment.
In autumn of our twenty millionth year
some Mental Ferment started to appear.
A wise old ape, with fur of iron-gray,
would circulate among us, day by day,
persuading us that Eden could not be
unless created by a Deity.
He thought a cosmos ruled by natural laws
in order to exist, must have a Cause.

*At last I've found a rhyme for "amaranth,"
but have no place to use it: "coelacanth,"
a mythologic fish with "hollow spine"
(from which the name derives) who swam the brine
of fabled, purely-legendary seas
existing only in mythologies.

I'm trying to preserve this sort of gem;
some future poet may have need of them.
Perhaps my reader's not aware that "aardvark"
rhymes, at least trochically, with "card shark."
Also, as a last resort, an "orange"
rhymes the first two syllables of "porring-
er." (Mishyphenations can and do
beget such monsters by the cageful.) --Lou

He had a scroll that no one else could read,
which he unrolled when there arose the need
to prove some point about the proper way
to plan a universe. My archives say
there'd been no antecedent for his view
of Cosmic Verities--the false and true
which we, his philosophic heirs, agree
are fundamental to theology.

His views are never questioned, any more,
but no one had suggested them before,
and very few among us thought they could
concern ourselves. The few who understood
his far-fetched lore of Cosmic Deity

decried its lack of practicality.

Our tribal common knowledge was that Earth

was just a mote among the stars--not worth

a second's notice by a Being who

has vastly more important things to do.

Within a universe so grandly wrought,

this world was but a cosmic afterthought.

That Sage of old worked hard to set us straight,

and, point by point, out-talked us in debate.

He made us grudgingly begin to doubt

we really had the cosmos figured out.

He showed, with excerpts quoted from his book

the errors in our thinking. We mistook

Existence for Necessity.

"This land

exists," he said, "but try to understand

it wouldn't *have* to. Likely it would not

if sun or moon were only half as hot.

Were any of a hundred factors changed,

the world might be completely rearranged.

Suppose the moon and stars were just as bright

as sunshine is--we couldn't sleep at night.

But what compels the Lesser Lights to glow

so modestly? Does anybody know?

Suppose the sun came up before the dawn,

or set when twilight was already gone--

what Power holds in such precise array

these alternations of the night and day?

Has not some knowing, *caring* Intellect

arranged the world for us, in this respect?
Suppose (instead of horizontal) land
were *vertical* : where could a person stand?
And, if it were *inverted* , we would fly
to our destruction *down* into the sky!
Could living creatures on their own devise
this deft arrangement of the lands and skies?
Suppose the rainfall here were slightly more.
Our lake would gradually encroach the shore
(its equilibrium upset) until
its water inundates the highest hill!
If coconuts fell up, instead of down,
we wouldn't find them lying on the ground;
we'd have to climb the palm trees. Why do grapes
and berries grow within the reach of apes
instead of (for example) underground,
where they'd have sprouted by the time they're found?
Our favorite roots don't grow in rock, but soil,
extractable with negligible toil.
This all occurred by Chance, the Skeptics say;
but how can *chance* make things a *certain way* ?
By chance alone, the sky might not be blue;
it might be brown. Would that appeal to you?
We apes are brown. What color might we be
by chance? Blue apes would be a sight to see!
Consider trees: Were trees one foot in height,
how could we build our nests up high at night?
Or fingernails: exactly where they ought
to grow. Without them, how could fleas be caught?

There's no place on us where a flea can go
that can't be scratched with finger or with toe;
so even we were planned, in each detail,
to be ourselves, from brain to fingernail.

This *couldn't* all be chance. Please understand
this world did *not* 'just happen'--it was *planned* !
This proves--" (He paused to puzzle through his scroll)
"--that all these things are under God's control!"

He was the greatest thinker of the age.
Adducing arguments like these, the Sage,
since Order in the Universe persists,
convinced us a Divinity exists.

He pressed his thesis further, saying we
should go in quest of Cosmic Deity--
he'd met someone, he said, who'd thought it odd
that we, the Higher Apes, had not found God.

The Sage's name is more than I can guess
from documents surviving now. This mess
of tribal books is scratched on potsherds, stones,
or sculpulae and other broad, flat bones,
or shells, or slabs of rock, or sunbaked clay;
and some do not support what others say.

You'd think, when some great leader rose to fame,
that someone would at least record his name;
but, sorting archives, page by stony page,
the only thing I've seen him called is "Sage."

In all the lands our roving Tribe has crossed,
that's not the only history we've lost.
To say that careless scribes have brought disgrace

on our profession, understates the case.

Though certain scribes were chroniclers indeed,
one doubts that others even learned to read.

My predecessor was incompetent.

Possessing little Journalistic Bent,
as he "kept records," that unlettered hack
just "kept" them, unassorted, in a sack--
so that his long-neglected task devolved
on me, with all these problems unresolved.

Because it's evidently up to me
to straighten out our tribal history,
I'll make what sense I can of broken sherds
--and split infinitives, and misspelled words--
and trust my patient reader not to judge
a scribe too harshly, when he has to fudge.

But I digress. Our Leader from his perch
harangued us, swinging from a bough of birch
above the heads of our assembled band,
and gestured with his feet, and one free hand:

"With manifest Activity of Mind,
what mysteries we'd solve, what secrets find,
if we'd exploit our capabilities
instead of lolling idly in the trees.

As long as we're content to loiter here
and shrink from Exploration, in our fear
of High Adventure waiting in the large
uncharted world beyond this garden's marge
--if mere uncertainty leaves us agape
with fear--do we deserve the title, Ape?

Have we no higher destiny than this:
to bask in mindless idleness and bliss?
Who wants to be considered such a clod
he has to hedge when asked: Have you found God?
Let's find the Deity!" our prophet cried,
and swung excitedly from side to side.
"Let's forge a destiny that's really worth
the efforts of the wisest race on Earth!"
His theme, reiterated doggedly,
elicited some widespread apathy.
The bulk of us preferred our slothful beds
among the fronds. We quailed, and wagged our heads.
Those apes who understood the Sage at all
made weak excuses: Why this rousing call
to go intrude on someone else's haunt
while *having* everything we'll ever *want* ?"
No aspect of his theme was weaker than
its lack of object, or specific plan.
He told us we should be out searching, but
could only obfuscate when asked:
"For *what* ?"

Exodus

A few of us, however, were impressed
by aspirations which the Sage expressed.
We vacillated for a week or two;
but, as we argued, our ambitions grew.
His words had stirred a restless depth of ours
that wasn't touched by Eden's fruits and flowers.
Our long-submerged instinctive Thirst to Know,
once quickened, started day by day to grow
until the finest minds our race possessed
ignored the bored indifference of the rest
and joined the Sage. His following increased
to half the kingdom's citizens, at least.
Of ease and indolence we'd had enough.
At heart, an Ape is made of sterner stuff!
One day* enthusiasm reached a crest
and we began our Tribe's distinctive Quest.

*The year was not recorded, but the month
and day, for what they're worth, were April 1th.

Our Sage pronounced the signs and omens good.
We started, in a column, through the wood
alert for signs of God--although our task

could not begin till someone we could ask
turned up.

We spent the nights in trees. Each dawn
we forged ahead again. When we had gone
some hundred leagues, we came upon a Wall.
It stood about a half-sequoia tall,
and seemed--to some observers there, at least--

in both directions to be swerving east.

It dwindled in the distance, left and right,
across the wooded plane, no end in sight.

We met in council for a brief debate
on whether it was slightly curved, or straight.

Some thought it straight, while others said it swerved
a trifle east, as if the wall were curved.

We came to no conclusion, for the wall
curved only very slightly, if at all.*

*In certain ancient documents I've found
the wall of Eden's land described as round;
but that's a question which I gravely doubt
mere scholarship can ever straighten out.
Allusions to it, gleaned from here and there,
imply that other writers thought it square.
What shape is Eden? One assumes the land
is geometric, since divinely planned;
but can this be substantiated, when
the issue was disputed, even then?

Hypotheses abound, but facts are few;
I therefore hazard no opinion. --Lou.

It grew apparent, as our band drew near,
that this was Eden's westernmost frontier.
Our column halted at a lofty gate,
obstructed by a massive iron grate.
It looked impassable. The upper edge
was bordered by an overhanging ledge.
We couldn't climb it; that was plain to see.
The grate was locked, and no one had a key.
We held another council to decide
what size of ram would have to be applied.
While we exchanged opinions, pro and con,
we noticed an Outsider looking on.
A human, in a robe of brilliant red,
whose Halo floated just above his head,
appeared from nowhere, there beside the gate.
and turned, on hearing this unnatural being
ask us why we'd contemplated fleeing.
Shining wings were folded at his back--
equipment ordinary humans lack.
His pinions were of iridescent hues
like peacock feathers, mostly greens and blues,
complete with markings like a peacock's "eyes"--
a fact which, later, may have given rise
(when oft retold and bloated into myth)
to Argus Eyes a Cherub's dotted with.*

*This subject is discussed at greater length
in later scribal writings, on the strength
of statements by an "angel from on high"
(though "fallen") overheard by Eden's spy.
A Cherub, so our bestiaries say,
has eyes all over, peering every way.
No portion of a Cherub's body lacks
the Eyes that fleck his legs, and wings, and back.
Since real eyes no useful purpose serve
unless connected by an Optic Nerve
to certain regions of the Brain, behind
the Cerebrum, your author is inclined
to think the "many eyes" a Cherub sports
derive from Unreliable Reports.
Exaggerated cherub-tales may stem
from this particular account of them:
the peacock "eyes" which ornament their wings
have later prompted strange imaginings.
This is my own conjecture, I admit.
I've found no Text substantiating it.

I'll make this brief remark, and then resume:
I wouldn't want my reader to assume
that all antique historiography
deserves unquestioning credulity.
Catastrophes befalling Eden's Tribe
have caused the loss--no fault of any scribe--

of valid records (and mythology)
which, later, were recalled from memory.
And since our memorists of past events
aren't always well endowed with common sense,
some Fables are included in this log
that cloak the real past with mythic fog.
A scribe who feels he ought to do his bit
for tribal history, but finds his wit
unequal to the challenge, may avail
himself of some loquacious gaffer's tale--
and once it's written down, the tale appears
as true as facts we've known throughout the years.
Our tribal storytellers aren't the first
in that regard--at least they're not the worst.
Some things a scribe is called upon to do
demand he be as strong of back and thew
as in mentality; and when we must
decide between some dullard we can trust
and one of greater Subtlety, who may
be prone to dropping ballast on his way,
our clear-cut choice for Tribal Scribe is he
with strength to bear the weight of history--
a lot of which (before we learned the trick
of using scrolls) was graven on stone or brick.
So, as one may infer, not every scribe
has been the brightest member of the Tribe.
But lest I be misunderstood, this rule
need not imply a scribe must be a fool--

we always do our best to find the most
informed and literate, to fill that post;
but candidates with both the brawn and brain
required, are seldom easy to obtain.

Another complication dogs my work:
Too many ancient authors had the quirk
of glimpsing in our Tribe's mythology
fresh insights to epistemology.

They held the rather-problematic view
that other things than truth are really true.

Some even openly confessed a doubt
that truth should be expressly pointed out
--religious Truth, especially, they say,
can best be put across some subtler way.

Pretending not to tell the truth, one finds,
may bypass prejudice in others' minds,
so Truths are apprehended by the Heart
which one cannot discursively impart.

Instead of taking Intellect by storm,
one sneaks the Message in, in Symbol form
by using Parables to break the ice.

Just one or two examples will suffice:

To tell one's son to "have a dauntless will,"
makes no impression--but one can instill
such qualities through tales of derring-do
which are, by frank admission, quite untrue.

And tales our gaffers tell around the fire
presume ideals to which we should aspire,
thereby imparting truer truths to you

than dreary lists of Facts--which may be true,
but, lacking Deeper Meaning, won't enhance
your character, or change your moral stance.
To "tell it as it is" is too uncouth;
one has to Symbolize this Higher Truth.
This has its place, but not in history.
It isn't comprehensible to me
how anyone except a self-made dunce
can think his words both true and false at once.
Outlandish tales of angels, nymphs and elves
may have symbolic value in themselves
but don't reflect objective history,
and therefore have no relevance, for me.
Regrettably, my documents are full
of stories I dismiss as cock-and-bull,
but inextricably entangled with
attested facts. This subtle blend of myth
and truth has made a baffling mystery
of certain epochs in our history.
I've scrutinized each text I've come across
to separate the nuggets from the dross.
I hope I've been successful. Maybe not
in every case. I work with what I've got.
I cannot claim to have the final word,
and though I think the fables are absurd,
a few have been retained. The ones I've picked
are those I cannot flatly contradict,
and those so well entrenched in oral lore
they're vital to the Tribe's esprit-de-corps.

In other words, where valid records lapse,
I'm forced to fill the chronologic gaps
by citing, for what value they may be,
these myths of doubtful historicity.

At Eden's gate, the Cherub asked of us
our motive for the tribal exodus.

Not many of us had a quick reply.

We knew we had to go, but knew not why;
it was, somehow, too subtle to express--
a case of Spiritual Restlessness.

"It's come to our attention," said the Sage,
"that, lately, finding God is all the rage.

The project stirred our curiosity.

We're on a Quest, to search for Deity."

The Cherub chuckled. Taking one step toward
our startled band, he drew a flaming sword.

He didn't brandish it--just held it there
before his audience's gaping stare.

"I've no objection if you leave," said he,
"but few are those who get back in, past me.

My office is to warn you not to go,
since all you'll find is hunger, death and woe.

Time was when happiness could still be found
by Eden's exiles, if they looked around;
but now that Judgment Day has come and passed
the world's a wilderness, forlorn and vast.

Your Quest's in vain; but by the time you learn
the truth yourself, you'll find you can't return.

Since early times, I'm sorry to relate,
it's been no easy thing, to pass this gate.
Our residents do not know pain or fear,
and seldom wish to emigrate from here;
but foreigners, of every species there
have worldly wisdom--quite a nuisance where
our other citizens are innocent
of surplus knowledge, and Cerebral Bent.
"That's not the worst of it. In Eden's land
you've known no Evil. I'd dissuade your band
from learning greed, aggression and deceit,
without which no one gets enough to eat
in that decaying world that you will see
while searching--uselessly--for Deity."
"Who gave those orders?" cried our dauntless Sage.
"We apes have governed Eden since an age
before the oldest known antiquity.
We've had no king of such iniquity
that he'd exclude the hungry from our land--
much less would any ape have Wisdom banned!"
The supernatural human laughed again.
"There used to be a Viceroy here; but when
he grew too wise he had to be expelled.
(Must all you primates someday feel compelled
to clear your minds of our euphoric haze?
This had to happen, one of these first days!)
But there was no succession. Apes are blessed
with more cerebral neurons than the rest,
but no one told your tribe to take command.

There's no official, now, in all the land,
who has authority to rearrange
our immigration laws--they never change.
They're like the Laws of Medes and Persians. They
remain the same, forever and a day.
The only ones allowed to venture in
are those devoid of Knowledge, and of Sin.
Miraculously, those outside the Wall
will search in vain to find this land at all,
If you insist, you're free to go your way;
but be advised, you will have gone to stay--
an ancient prophecy foretells the fall
of all who venture past this Garden's wall."
"On my authority," our leader cried,
"you'll open up this gate, and stand aside!"
The Cherub frowned, and looked us over well.
What thoughts his beard concealed was hard to tell.
"I fear you have less sense," he said, "than pluck.
Go, then, and search for God. I wish you luck.
Don't stay too long. In four days' time, or five,
I might repatriate those left alive.
But watch your step, for once you've savored Sin,
it won't be possible to get back in."
He sheathed his sword, and opened up the gate.
Our forebears swaggered out to meet their fate.

I've copied this to show what sort of trash
remains as ballast, in this scribal hash,
and why I'm justified to sort it through

discarding what is patently untrue.

Unlikely as this fable seems to be,

it's not mythology's epitome.

An even stranger version of this lore
asserts we were expelled from Eden for
some theft, or minor misdemeanor, done
through ignorance, or else in harmless fun.

That "flaming sword," the tale goes on to say,
then kept us out by "turning every way."

But that's a superstitious myth which I
can flatly--categorically--deny!

Don't ever think we Apes are refugees
from some vindictive tyrant's harsh decrees.

No foe could scare us with a flaming sword.

The Tribe left Eden of its own accord!

A human with a burning sword, forsooth!

What bygone scribbler wrote that down as truth?

The Fall

The Tribe emerged from Eden, and progressed
the way we found our noses pointed: west.
As long as we remained within clear view
of Eden's borders, novelties were few.
The landscape looked familiar. The terrain
was much like Eden's vegetated plain,
though less luxuriant. The shrubs and trees
were less diverse in their varieties.
Though food was not abundant, it was still
sufficient. Day by day we found our fill.
We prowled around a while, a month or so,
then asked our Sage which way we ought to go.
Of that he wasn't certain. When he sought
suggestions from the magic Scroll he'd brought,
he found that tribal wags, with peerless wit,
had rolled Repugnant Matter up in it.
We'd known he had a flair for words. Now he
displayed a talent for profanity.
With grinning innocence, we heard the Sage
describe our natures, in a mighty rage.
He ruled the book a total loss, and just
discarded it in anger and disgust.
Since all he knew had come from it alone,
he found himself completely on his own.
He pondered, scratched his head, and looked depressed.
Perhaps, he thought, our Goal lay somewhere west;
because, you see, one fact was clear at least:
we'd just retrace our tracks by heading east.

The Tribe set forth, with aspirations high.
We made brave pledges: We'd succeed or die.
Progressing west, we saw the landscape change
to rolling hills, and then a mountain range.
Behind us in the distance, Eden's wall
had disappeared, concealed by forests tall
--or so the ancient chroniclers aver.
(A statement by the Gateman, earlier,
suggests an alternate hypothesis;
so which is less unlikely--that or this?)

Unwelcome facts emerged, before too long:
Outside our home, the world's constructed wrong.
The trees and berry bushes sprouted thorns,
and wildlife made good use of claws and horns.
These things perplexed us. Inside Eden's wall
we'd had no natural enemies at all.
The wolves and tigers there ate grass, like deer,
but predators had coarser tastes, out here:
they hunted apes.

Quick rivals grabbed the shoots
we most preferred. We had to chew on roots
or anything we found. We raised the question
whether roughage might upset digestion--
whether we were best advised to go
back home. A lot of us decided so;
and then when frost appeared, one chilly day,
these malcontents rebelled, and trooped away.
Presumably the fainthearts fled back east,

on Eden's bounty once again to feast
--to sell their souls for Luxury, and spurn
the tribal glory we would someday earn.
Our leader called the Tribe in council, then
(or what was left of it). He spoke again
of Pithecanic Destiny and such.
Our current woes, he said, were nothing much.
"Too long in useless indolence we dwelled!
Our lives have Purpose now! If we're compelled
to do without without our favorite nuts and grapes,
we'll take such things in stride! Are we not Apes?"
And all the Tribe in answer bravely roared,
"We'll be an indefatigable horde,
who'll march forever, if we must, in quest
of Values of the noblest and the best!"

The Tribe thrust deeper into wilderness.
The bounty of the land grew less and less.
Each day we barely found enough, and then
sheer lack of forage drove us on again.
We weren't impelled by lack of food alone;
our curiosity to see the world had grown.
Astonished by the landscape's sheer extent,
we wanted, now, to see how far it went.
We learned to cope with Predators in ways
unknown before. We found that Teamwork pays.
An ape who went to forage on his own,
could not contend with hungry wolves alone;
but if we stuck together, five or six

of us could fight them off, by swinging sticks.
We forged ahead, to search the rocky holes
of some great Canyon, for our formless goals,
till real scarcities had changed our mood.
Thereafter, all our searching was for food.
The hardships of our Quest were hard to know
ahead of time. We next encountered Snow.
Our teeth began to chatter--then our bones.
Our feet and fingers grew as numb as stones.
As life's necessities concerned us more
we gave less thought to what we'd come here for
---whatever that was.

Many drifted back

in hopes repatriation rules were slack.
It's doubtful that they got to Eden, though.
The archives say they would have had to go
past restless Glaciers which had blocked our way
back east. We evidently had to stay.
We tried to reach the canyons further end,
but first we had the winter months to spend:
The Avalanches, crashing from on high
impressed us as a chilly way to die.
With both the exits choked with snow and ice,
we tried to scale the ridges, once or twice.
Our mountain climbers started through the snow.
An icy canyon wind began to blow.
Acclimatized, throughout recorded time
to Eden's kindly, undemanding clime,
they weren't conditioned to that sort of thing.

We found their frozen corpses in the spring.
We spent that winter in the canyon's end,
and hoped spring thaws our confines would extend.

Since all of us were hungry as a shark,
we crunched on seeds, and gnawed on strips of bark
and other things we never would have known
were food for any race, much less our own.

We've always been a fast-adapting breed,
especially in times of pressing need.

Since herbivores must bear the famine's brunt,
we modified our tastes, and learned to hunt,
and changed our diet readily enough--
although our first techniques were rude and rough.

We hounded game till it was out of breath,
then inhumanely cudged it to death.

We seldom caught enough. An "om.ni.vore"
is "one who eats all foods" --then looks for more.

The tripe and gristle, giblets, fat and brain
were chewed on for the protein they contain.

Nor did we give up hunting in the spring;
we went on eating nearly everything.

The only difference was, when famine ceased,
our appetites accordingly increased.

Necessity had taught us first the way
--and then the attitudes--of beasts of prey.

We weren't unique. Voracious beasts would lurk,
all fur and fangs, in snowbound woodland murk;
and often some enormous, hairy shape

could with a single bite behead an ape
clear to his waist. Mere sticks did not suffice,
rebounding from a skull as hard as ice.

We met some predatory breeds of Men
who stalked in frozen gully, glade and glen
and seemed to think they had a better right
to use these hunting grounds. We had to fight
not only for the privilege to compete
for food, but lest we, too, be killed for meat.

These humans weren't the Basic Species. There
were shaggy Bigfoots, who could crush a bear
with grim embrace; and crossbow-shooting Gnomes
whose whiskers brushed their boots, who made their homes
in excavated mountain caves. One more
part-human species was the Minotaur:
the stupidest of human breeds, but quite
impractical to hunt. In hulk and height
they were a match for Bigfoots. Basically
they had the figures of humanity,
except that to their shoulders was attached
a longhorn cattle head, which hardly matched.

Despite their bovine teeth, they didn't eat
the pasturage, but lived on fresh-killed meat.

One scribe's description, which survives till now,
says minotaurs had tails, just like a cow.

Since competition was ferocious, we
were forced to use our ingenuity;
and new inventions started to appear:

the Axe, the Tomahawk, the stone-tipped Spear.
With better tools, we dealt more deadly blows.
We blared on sheep horns, to out-roar our foes.
Inventors may take credit, if they please,
but no invention brought us lives of ease.
When better weapons made the sport too tame,
we found excuse to tackle bigger game.
By promptly rising to emergencies
was Ape emancipated from the trees.
He then, with no external change of shape,
evolved from Happy Dunce to Killer Ape,
with spring-steel sinews, tiger-throttling paws,
and fangs to match his famine-toughened jaws;
with twice the courage of a bear, and wile
surpassing that of snake and crocodile;
with eyes as keen in darkness as in light,
and ears that plucked a whisper from the night:
a match for any predator alive--
a winner in the Struggle to Survive!
Our lives were full of hunger, strife and grime,
and Eden buried in the trash of time.

The Classisist

Although our travels, for the time, had ceased,
our fervor for the Quest had not decreased;
and in between our foragings we found
a little leisure time to look around
for information to allay our doubts
of God's existence, and His whereabouts.
Our Quest was complicated by the fact
that clues we had were few, and inexact.
God might take any shape--or none--so we
considered every possibility.

The Sage of Eden (who'd retained his post
as Leader, since he seemed to know the most)
was gathering some walnuts peacefully
among the fallen leaves beneath a tree,
when his attention was distracted by
a bovine roar, and then a human cry,
from two aggressive breeds of humans we
had battled in the forest recently--
and, interspersed with these, the thuds and whacks
of club and cudgel, possibly an axe.
He recognized especially the roar
of everybody's bane, the Minotaur.
A few of Eden's hunters had been lost
when minotaurs' and tribesmens' paths had crossed.

Amid the bullish roars the Sage could hear
some human cries of rage, and then of fear.
He set aside his walnut basket, and
took up his bludgeon, which was close at hand.
(We apes had learned to Be Prepared, of late.)
Thus armed, he hurried to investigate;
but since he wasn't sure what might be found,
he didn't risk approaching on the ground.
He climbed aloft, and with instinctive ease
went brachiating lightly through the trees.*

*The record's not specific, but it stands
to reason, since the Sage would need both hands
for brachiation, he would have to put
his club, or other baggage, in his foot.
All apes are highly quadridexterous. You
were probably aware of that. --Lit. Lou.

Arriving at the site from whence arose
the sounds of battle, he espied two foes
in mortal combat. One, a Minotaur
was of a strain we'd tangled with before
The monster stood some twenty-seven hands
and was a common hazard in the lands
outside of Eden. Human in physique
but half again as tall, the "human" freak
was muscled like a sirloin steak, and full
of dynamite. His head was like a bull.
The bull's antagonist (who lost, of course)

was also partly human, mostly Horse;
for where one might expect a horse's head
a human torso was affixed instead.

This creature was a Centaur--one of those
who hunt with spears, and fight with six-foot bows--
complete with human torso, arms and head,
but, from the navel down, a Quadruped.

The Sage remained concealed in greenery
and watched these mongrels fighting savagely.
Since both strange breeds of hybrid-human shapes
were racial enemies of killer apes,
he wasn't sure which side he'd take if he
were called upon to serve as Referee.

With this in mind, he sensibly resolved
to watch the fight, but not to Get Involved.
Though minotaurs were short on human wit,
sheer brawn, it seemed, would get the best of it.

Old Bullhead swung an iron mace, one blow
from which could lay a dozen foemen low.

The centaur only had a broken spear.
Although his nimble footwork kept him clear,
there was no realistic way that he
could do the monster any injury.

Deciding he could never win this fight,
the centaur turned, and tried to take to flight.

The minotaur renewed his own attack,
and knocked the centaur over on his back
then jumped away in time to dodge a kick

from hooves that might have slashed him to the quick.

The centaur kept the minotaur at bay
with flailing hooves, but couldn't get away.
He couldn't rise, for in so doing, he
could not have used his hooves effectively;
and that would give his foe an opening
to break his back with one effective swing.

Our Sage was touched by this pathetic scene
and changed his mind: Perhaps he'd intervene.
With several flying leaps from limb to limb
he put the battling humans under him;
then, poised upon a branch, he took a stance
of Readiness, and waited for his chance.

The minotaur was circling warily
around his downed-but-kicking enemy
to seek an opening to ply his mace
and end the combat with a coup-de-grace.

He saw a chance to reach the centaur's head
and raised his heavy mace to smite him dead.

Just then our Sage came pouncing from his branch
and hit the monster like an avalanche
of bashing club and pithecanic fur.

The minotaur saw nothing but a blur
of motion, energetic, quick, and brown,
which seized him by the horns and threw him down
by trying to unscrew his head. The beast
let out a bellow that was heard at least
a mile a way. He landed on his back,

as Eden's Sage continued his attack
with bludgeon blows about the horns and brain.
The monster rolled away, and moaned in pain.
The centaur scrambled to his feet to raise
himself to equine posture, and appraise
this Change of Circumstance. He glanced around
to see if any weapon could be found
in case his unexpected ally'd missed
his guess, and needed someone to assist.
He found a cudgel lying on a pile
of sticks. It fit his hands and fighting-style.
He swung the makeshift weapon once or twice
to test its weight. Convinced it would suffice,
he cantered back to watch the battle rage
between the minotaur and Eden's Sage.
The minotaur was on his feet once more,
determined he would even up the score
for his initial fall. He plied his mace;
but found the ape was in a different place
each time he took a swing. His weapon found
no target but a patch of empty ground;
and, every time he missed, the ape ducked in
to thwack him on the buttocks or the shin
then darted out again before his foe
could raise his weapon for another blow.
"Nice footwork!" cheered the centaur. "Your technique
could make us millionaires within a week!
I'll be your Business Agent, if I may,
when you go into this full time, someday.

You'll do as well as anybody did
with sword and crimson cape, in Old Madrid!
'El Mono Estupendo' you'll be billed.
The sold-out galleries will all be filled
with señoritas throwing roses, and
among them, Isabelle and Ferdinand
upon their royal grandstand, cheering for
El Gran Famoso Minotoreador!
"Now let's audition that gymnastic feat
that so impressed the fans in ancient Crete:
Just seize him by the horns, and when he rears
his head, do somersaults between his ears!"
"I'd try that stunt," our harried tribesman said,
"except my Straight Man seems to want me dead.
Without a little Line Support from you,
I may have bitten more than I can chew.
This tossing nosegays to the matador
won't help a person kill a minotaur!"
The monster, getting smart, began to swing
his weapon in a deadly, whirring ring
around his head. He rushed our tribesman, who
was forced to back away a pace or two,
until he got the Rhythm of the thing.
Then, bobbing down and up to duck each swing,
he launched another foray at his foe,
and whacked him smartly on his left big toe.
"Your difficulty is," the centaur said,
"you can't quite reach your adversary's head.
You need a longer staff. I have one here

which suited to your purpose would appear."

The minotaur, still bellowing with rage,
came charging once again upon the Sage.

His mace connected, with a thunderous sound
which very literally shook the ground.

A leafy blizzard fell from every tree
in their immediate vicinity.

Again the ape had nimbly dodged the blow.

"A good suggestion," he agreed; "although
I can't imagine when I'll find the time
I'll need for changing weaponry, while I'm
as busy as I am. Just one good Slug
and I'll be flatter than an apeskin rug.

To drop my guard for even half a breath
will spell my messy and untimely death."

And, as he spoke, he nearly Bought the Farm.

The blow he parried did no mortal harm,
but sent him flying off across the glade
just like a golf ball, landing in the shade
of an enormous, ancient chestnut tree.

The Sage recovered, almost instantly,
and made a frantic, feckless search around
the fallen leaves.

His club could not be found;

he'd lost it while careering through the air.

Here came the monster, with a savage blare,
head lowered, horns at point, mace swinging high
this time determined that the ape would die!

The Sage set both his thumbs beside his ears

and wagged his fingers, with insulting jeers.

He flapped his tongue and grinned. The minotaur
descended on him with Intent to Gore.

The Sage dodged suddenly aside, to see
the minotaur's right horn impale the tree.

He kicked and twisted, but to no avail,
as chestnuts rattled down like falling hail.

His mighty roars and struggles were no use;
he couldn't pull his stuck appendage loose.

The Sage wound up, and kicked him in the rear.

"If you've still got that cudgel, toss it here,"
he told the centaur, who had trotted in
to watch the Final Round, and see him win.

The centaur passed the ape the staff.

"I hate

to take advantage of his helpless state,"

he told the centaur, "But, if I refrain,
my prior efforts will have been in vain.

With all the recent Adverse Luck he's had,
this minotaur is going to be mad !"

"I gravely doubt that he would sympathize
with you, had matters turned out otherwise,"
the centaur said. "But Conscious must prevail.

I'll help him out."

He seized the lashing tail

and gave a yank. The monster gave a roar
and freed his horn.

The raging minotaur

ignored the ape and turned upon the foe

he'd nearly slain a little while ago,
who--now completely weaponless--fell back
before the monster's murderous attack.

But now he was distracted by the ape
who caught him squarely on his bristled nape
with his protracted cudgel.

With a roar,

the minotaur attacked the ape once more
with swinging mace--and this time caught a clout
between the horns, that nearly knocked him out.
He staggered, looking weary, wan, and weak
despite his forty stone of Sheer Physique.

The Sage took careful aim, and swung his bat
to score the Hit that knocked the monster flat.
Both ape and centaur scrambled hastily
to dodge their toppling foe's trajectory.
Old Bullhead flipped and flopped across the ground,
but he had met his Theseus, he found.
He mooed a feeble moo or two, until
he heaved a wistful sigh, and then
lay still.

The Classicist (continued)

The Sage stooped down to check the monster's pulse
with definitely- negative results.

"Our patient," he pronounced, "is out of pain.

I'd diagnose Concussion of the Brain,
if he possessed one. That was quite a fight
you got me in--though things turned out all right."

The centaur ventured closer, where he scanned
the sprawling hulk.

He shook the Sage's hand.

"I guess there's been a change of plans," he said,

"since, thanks to you, my Mortal Foe is dead.

It happened I was hunting apes today.

Instead, I have a favor to repay!

Whatever my objective was before,
it turned out I was hunting minotaur;
and this disgrace to Greek Mythology
was evidently bent on hunting me."

"By some coincidence," the ape replied,

"I went out hunting centaurs, till I spied
your internecine disagreement, here,
and got a sudden urge to Interfere.

I didn't think it over long, so I
took sides with you. I'm frankly not sure why.

As badly as we get along with men
of any breed (or any half-breed) , when

I saw a centaur losing out, I guess
I thought I liked the minotaur still less.
I guess I don't know what I thought. The fact
is, lacking time to think, I just react.
Perhaps subconsciously we tend to balk
at hunting people who can think and talk,
but minotaurs can only roar and moo,
which gave me grounds for taking sides with you.
Another reason is, you're mostly horse,
which means your morals can't be quite as course
as that of humans of another strain--
all humanoid except for head and brain."
The centaur raised his brows at this, but he
absorbed the racial insults silently,
not wishing to precipitate a war
with someone who could fell a minotaur.
"At least," he said, "we're in agreement as
to who the right to keep the booty has.
You've earned this heap of beef in honest strife,
so take my share, in payment for my life.
I'll even help you take the carcass back
to where you've camped, since there's a lot to pack."
"Well, I don't know," the Sage replied. "I made
the kill, but I'd negotiate a trade,
since other possibilities remain...
but this'll take a minute to explain:

"We came from Eden, where the food supply
is ample, and the grapevines never die.

We never even sampled meat, back home.
Before we chose to leave the place to roam
we always lived on fruits and nuts. Until
we got out here, we never learned to kill.
That's why the types of groceries apes prefer
remain the vegetals they always were.
The motive for our emigration was
not lack of sustenance. It was because
we felt a certain Vacancy of Mind.
There's something in this world we'd like to find.
I'm not sure what--but if you owe some debt,
then information 's what I'd like to get.
To be specific, what I'd like the best
is knowledge that will aid us in our Quest.
We apes are Seekers after Wisdom; so
why don't you tell me everything you know?"
The centaur looked surprised. "That's fair enough,"
he said, "but you may hear a lot of stuff
already known to you, unless you start
by hinting what you'd like me to impart.
If Knowledge is the payment you prefer,
I'm quite the Philosophic Amateur
and never loath to share the lore I know.
You must suggest your field of interest, though;
for nothing's drier than the dust, I fear,
but wisdom which one doesn't want to hear."
"For one example," said the ape, "a thing
some folks besides myself are wondering
is just a little personal, I guess.

We've wondered whether folks like you possess
two hearts, or one. You'd think there ought to be
one heart where humans have one normally,
and then another heart where all the rest
of equine species keep them, in the chest.
If centaurs have two hearts instead of one,
do both of them contract in unison?
If so, how can a horse's heart keep pace
with quicker pulse rates of the human race?
If both your hearts at different speeds are used
does Circulation sometimes get confused--
or does the blood of horse and man remain
in separate loops of Artery and Vein?
"Some other points of Physiology
have piqued our tribal curiosity:
For instance, horses' lungs are larger than
the lungs of normally-proportioned Man;
and yet the trachea and nostrils of
a man supply not only lungs above
inside your human ribcage, but, we know,
the larger pair of equine lungs below.
It's puzzling, how you folks coordinate
your horse, and human, respiration rate,
which wouldn't always be the same. The horse
would faster breathe while galloping, of course;
whereas the lungs inside your human chest
would breathe more shallowly, as if at rest.
But if you're chopping wood, your arms and hands
would exercise--your horse part merely stands,

while human lungs do all the puffing. So
one set of lungs breathes fast, the other slow.

Regardless what you do, one pair will be
relaxed, the other breathing heavily.

If all four Bronchi are connected to
one common Trachea, you'd have to do
a lot of useless breathing, since the flow
of air from one chest to the next would go.

There'd be depleted breaths of air among
the exhalations from another lung,
unless they all expand and then contract
in synchrony that's pretty near exact.

"Your Stomachs pose some questions, too. With us,
the Stomach's intake's the Esophagus;
but in a Centaur the connection's changed:
Your stomachs must be tandemly arranged,
with one inside your human abdomen
the other in your horse's torso. When
two stomachs stand in line, with one behind--"

The centaur interrupted: "Never mind
these vivisection questions. They exist;
but don't ask me--I'm no Anatomist!
No healthy human being is aware
of his anatomy, nor does he care
what Organs he consists of, where they are,
or what they do--unless he's 'under par.'
Ill health or injury's the only thing
that starts a hypochondri'c worrying.

Such questions are important, I agree,
but not of personal concern to me."

"That's disappointing," said the ape. "We do
have hopes of better understanding you.

We're int'rested in things like these because
till recently we thought a Centaur was
an old misunderstanding, from the land
of Greece, where people didn't understand
the art of Riding. Strangers wandered forth
from more nomadic cultures, further north
astride their horses; and of course the Greeks
mistook these men for double-bodied freaks.

Equestrians, when very briefly spied,
by Greeks, it seems, were misidentified.

But now we've really met some centaurs, and
there's lots of things we still don't understand."

The centaur laughed. "You underestimate
the people of our famous Grecian state!

That race created, single-handedly,
both Number Theory and Geometry.

If Anaxagoras could watch the sky
and see eclipses were engendered by
the transits of the Earth between the sun
and moon--and vice versa--anyone
who would, on chauvinistic grounds, believe
that his compatriots were too naive
to tell a horseman from a horse-man....No;
that simpleminded notion has to go!

I also hope you're not deluded with

the popular, derogatory myth
that Centaurs are a rude, uncultured race
who must from Animals their lineage trace--
an inhospitable and lawless breed
addicted to their every bestial need.
Such gross canards arose from Jealousy
of biped humans, in antiquity,
and still persist among the foolish, though
they're utterly untrue, as we can show."
"Well, no; I hadn't heard those slurs," replied
the Sage of Eden. "Notwithstanding, I'd
be curious to hear a little more
about your origins, in days of yore."
"We are descendants of Ixion and
of Nephele. Their son, we understand,
was somehow crossed with some Magnesian mares,
begetting hybrid, and superior, heirs
in whose efficient, graceful form you find
a horse's strength with human wits combined.
We centaurs, not the biped men, have kept
those fruits of ancient thought which bipeds swept
aside, preferring 'modernistic' schemes
of Metaphysics--mere sophistic dreams!
The Greeks the formal art of Logic wrought,
and to its ultimate fruition brought.
All Metaphysics and Theology
arose in Classical Antiquity.
Despite their later imitators' claim
it was the Greeks from whom these concepts came--

specifically from Aristotle: the
most famous Founder of Philosophy.
All philosophic systems later wrought
were footnotes, nothing more, to Grecian Thought."

"I think," the ape remarked, "that kind of lore
might be the very thing we're looking for.
I used to have a Book I tried to bring
from home, explaining just that sort of thing.
I'd have it still--except some pranksters' tricks
did damage to it that I couldn't fix.
If you could summarize a theme or two
from Grecian Thought, I'd be obliged to you."

The Classicist (concluded)

"I wouldn't mind a bit," the centaur said,
"and in your Quest you'll come out far ahead
if you confine your search for wisdom to
the course of study I define for you.
The philosophic field has come to be
a blend of nonsense with absurdity.
Aspiring students have to pick and choose
with utmost care, lest they their minds confuse
with sterile theorizings which engage
all thinkers since the classic Golden Age.
Originators in Philosophy
gave way to those whose object seemed to be
investigating those who, earlier,
reviewed the works of some philosopher
who had composed a critical review
of someone who had written something new
about the valid science, deep and vast,
originating in the classic past.
With critics criticizing critics, you
can see no useful work was left to do.
Post-classical philosophy is all
a trap in which unwary students fall
to waste their lives and intellects--unless
they're wisely warned, and level heads possess."
"Our goal is Valid Knowledge," said the Sage,

"and not in Speculation to engage.
If all the valid thinking has been done
by Greeks, that's good enough for anyone."
He found a seat upon a root of oak,
and listened closely, as the centaur spoke.
"The Greeks were first to place the emphasis
on Observation and Analysis,"
the centaur started in. "By this they laid
the grounds for all the progress later made.
The Greeks were also first successfully
to search for Generalized Validity.
They learned to reach beyond details of fact
and seek conclusions general and abstract.
They gave us Mathematics, as a base
for all the Sciences the biped race
in later ages managed to devise--
for which the 'Moderns' deemed themselves so wise.
They gave us Logical Analysis,
on which we place all present emphasis.
Among their many contributions, they
presented, in a systematic way,
their treatments of some basic questions: those
which in still-older times and cultures rose.
"The first of these they chose to emphasize
was 'That From Which' existent things arise:
the branch of science called Ontology--
the Basic Nature of Reality.
"In making lists, the classic custom's been
with Thales of Miletus to begin.

He made his mark as an astronomer,
geometrician and philosopher.

Without appealing to Tradition, he
proposed that Ultimate Reality
was Water. This he logically inferred
because this basic element occurred
in ample quantities; and, as we know,
without it, not a blade of grass could grow.

The later answers to this question ranged
from 'Elements,' which though themselves unchanged
produced in varied combinations those
materials from which Existence rose--
on up through concepts of 'the Infinite,'
so called because one cannot say that it
is one thing or another. It alone
can any substance be, from air to stone,
according to its relative degree
of rarefaction or condensity.

It was Anaximander who devised
the concept that 'the Infinite' comprised
the Substance of the Universe. The mind
rejects the notion that some special kind
of matter typifies them all. He found
it should be unrestricted, have no bound.

By saying matter has no 'normal' state
he managed early to anticipate
the view of 'modern' chemists, who agree
that 'everything consists of Energy,'
which we're familiar in every form

except its typifying, standard' norm.'

"But Anaximenes believed that Air
was typical of Substance. Though quite rare
while in its natural state, it also could
be densified to water, fire or wood;
and if compacted into solid blocks
is just as indigestible as rocks.

"He also managed to anticipate
the 'modern' theory that a silicate,
subjected to extremes of heat, will then
split into silicon and oxygen.

And oxygen, as surely you're aware
is the most vital element of air!

"The most ingenious metaphysic was
the observation, by Pythagoras,
that Number must the Basic Substance be,
since every Thing has size and quantity,
and, whether it is moving or at rest,
abides by laws numerically expressed.

Pythagoras was foremost to insist
the Soul and Body separately exist,
and that one's Soul, at death, will transmigrate
to start life over, in Some Other State.

"The controversy over Permanence
and Change was also much in evidence.

The Eleatic, Zeno, strove to prove
that even speeding arrows cannot move:
At each successive instant, arrows were
at rest, therefore no motion could occur,

just as no 'separation' we define
between adjacent points along a line.
An object cannot change position. First
one-half the distance has to be transversed.
Before that midpoint, it must first attain
one quarter of the distance--but in vain,
for eighth, sixteenth, and thirty-second parts
must first be reached. So motion never starts--
it wastes its time at points along a line
which is divided 'infinitely fine.'
"The difficulties in resolving these
conundrums soon engendered tendencies
toward Gnostic Relativity--the view
that nothing's ever absolutely true.
The Truth as such can never be removed
from what some clever Sophist claims he's proved,
so nothing's known except to that extent
that we're convinced of it, by Argument.
"But Socrates turned up in time to give
the Sophists' view that 'Truth is Relative'
a well-deserved critique. The Sophists feel
that nothing much, if anything, is Real.
One aspect of the Knowledge Problem lay
(as Socrates insisted) in the way
the Sophists use the ambiguities
of words to 'prove' whatever 'truths' they please.
He thought this pointed up the urgent need
for Rules of Rhetoric that all could heed
--some formalized criteria, by which

contestants in debate could make their pitch
and yet not leave unbiased judges with
the vague impression they had proved a myth.

"A precept often stressed by Socrates
(and hardly anybody disagrees)
is Reason's Duty to examine things,
exempting nothing from our questionings.

'The unexamined life,' he always said,
'need not be lived; one might as well be dead.'

He also stipulated: 'Questioning
must be constructive--not the sort of thing
that undermines an honest point of view
without replacing it with something new.'

"Since Reasoning Ability is viewed
as Humankind's Distinctive Aptitude,
and since it is incumbent on a man
to make himself as human as he can,
Morality--so Socrates opined--
is using and developing the Mind.

"This train of logic leads us to suspect
that Virtue's locus is the Intellect.

The essence of one's Virtue therefore lies
between the ears and just behind the eyes.

To that extent that human beings lack
Sound Judgment, are their moral standards slack.

The disadvantages of evil were
the damage done to one's own character.

No normal person voluntarily
elects to do himself an injury--

the problem is, we don't all realize
exactly where our best self-interest lies.
We therefore many evil choices make
despite self-interest, simply by mistake!
If malefactors only knew this fact
they'd have the sense to think before they act.
"No axiologist since Socrates
has solved the Values Issue with such ease;
yet 'moderns' now refuse to recognize
that evil deeds from Ignorance arise.
Dismissing Socrates as 'out of date,'
they fudge, and theorize, and obfuscate,
too stubborn to admit the issue's solved
and Error is the only thing involved.
"In Socrates and in his followers
we meet those eminent philosophers
of long-enduring, well-deserved repute
whose basic contributions constitute
the main traditions in the history
of Western science and philosophy.
In Plato's The Republic he relates
the salient features of Ideal States,
where measures will be taken to insure
for every citizen a lineage pure,
and equal opportunity for all
to find a social niche, then rise or fall
according to one's own abilities--
one's aptitudes and fallibilities.
Prospective statesmen who perform the best

on Euclid's books (by some objective test)
advance, because this talent we equate
with that required to run Affairs of State.
By this selective process, judges find
and elevate the Philosophic Mind.
The truly qualified will never stop
advancing till they make it to the Top:
that is, the Council of the Truly Wise
who would the central government comprise.
Those few who understand the True and Good
receive the posts an Archimedes should,
and higher concepts learn of Deity
in place of popular mythology.
"In Plato's scheme, an indolent buffoon
needs more endowments than a silver spoon.
If necessary, to eliminate
all nepotistic tendencies, the State
will overrule the Family, taking charge
of offspring, who'll be raised as 'kids at large,'
eliminating, to a great extent,
the Last Resort of the Incompetent--
a doting father who, besides a Name,
supplies the bribes to pave his way to fame.
Is it not strange to note, since Plato died,
not once has his ingenious plan been tried!
"Few intellects by later ages hatched
have Aristotle's Analytics matched
for thoroughly-objective and exact
analysis of scientific fact.

His books were much consulted, first by peers
and then Scholastics, for two thousand years.

"In brief, as any Sophomore can see,
the Golden Age of Greek Philosophy
had kicked all questions thoroughly around
and every possible Solution found.

No new addition to these crowded shelves
can add to what the Greeks devised themselves.

"And so," the centaur summarized, "you see
that in the study of Philosophy,
the careful student must avoid the snares
of everything since Aristotle. There's
a Labyrinth awaiting, like the Pit,
and nothing gained by getting lost in it,
for those who venture past the Golden Age
of Grecian Thought, by even half a page. . .

"And now, if you'll excuse me, I believe
since Dusk approaches, both of us should leave.

If we delay, we're apt to meet with more
'fair game'--like that atrocious minotaur.

My life's not charmed, and I'm afraid I might
be still less fortunate, unarmed, by night."

The centaur heaved the Carcass to his back,
and turned to face along the forest track.

With one last word of thanks for all the good
the Sage had done, he set off through the wood.

The Sage sat thinking, making mental note

of headings for a book he later wrote,
until he, also, apprehensive grew
at pending dusk, and prudently withdrew.

The Missionaries

A tribesman who was foraging for food
amid the mountain forest's solitude,
approached an open space. He glanced about
for danger, then began to check it out
in search of berry bushes, mushrooms, roots,
or any other vegetables and fruits
that he could dry and store--he'd noticed there
were scents of winter famine in the air.
Good fortune brought him to a twisting vine
which on a sturdy shrub was seen to twine,
and loaded down with fully-ripened grapes.
While he was filling up his sack, the shapes
of two huge Shadows flashed across the ground.
He took an apprehensive look around,
but missed what cast them. They were flying fast,
and by the time the ape glanced up, they'd passed
beyond the foliage of surrounding trees.
He stopped to think: If things as big as these
were flying overhead, then maybe he'd
picked all the grapes his mate and cubs would need,
and it was time to take his well-filled sack
and mosey back along the forest track;
for, though it wasn't really twilight yet,
the sun stood westward, promising to set.
Was prompt return to safety wiser than
his earlier--much more ambitious--plan

to gather in a winter-long supply
of foods which could be eaten fresh or dry?
Examining his sack, he doubted that.
The bottom bulged, but most of it was flat.
He'd barely picked a self-respecting snack
to nibble on while he was hiking back.
He set to work again--but changed his mind
on hearing flapping noises from behind.
He turned, and spied what looked like monstrous crows
dismissing them, at first, as likely foes
until, with some concern, he noticed that
their wings were shaped like those of some huge bat;
although their other outlines, as they neared,
more human than chiropteran appeared.
The Bats had wheeled about, still fairly high,
and started circling earthward from the sky.
He saw them spiral toward the glade where he
still hoped to work--though now quite doubtfully.
It soon became apparent that this pair
of Creatures planned to make a landing there.

Our tribesman dropped his work and made a rush
to reach the dense, surrounding underbrush.
He found concealment, diving into it
to safety just before the creatures lit.
He thought, too late, of one mistake he'd made:
his sack was where he dropped it in the glade.
A sack's an artifact that it would take
his mate and him all afternoon to make.

One has to slay a deer and skin it, and
the leather must be scraped, and dried, and tanned,
and cut to pattern. Using awls of bone,
one punches holes, through which the thongs are sewn.

A sack is nothing apes of frugal mind
will simply walk away and leave behind,
so he was stuck here. He could not go back
to camp until he'd stolen back his sack.

He thought that since he'd have to wait near by
until the creatures left, he'd try to spy--
one never knows what one may overhear
from humans who believe there's no one near,
although when we interrogate them, they
insist they don't have anything to say.

He hurriedly, but very stealthily,
crept through the shrubbery and up a tree--
a vantage point from which he had clear view
of everything the Bats might say or do.

The gangrel beings who had landed there
were not a very prepossessing pair.

As he'd expected, they were human Things,
quite typical except for batty wings
with ribs like an umbrella, broad and black,
which they could fold conveniently in back.

Aside from that, these two were uglier
than most varieties of humans were.

Their skin was hairy, colored brownish-red;
and each had goat horns growing from his head.

Their toes and fingers sported feline claws.

White, pointed fangs protruded from their jaws.

It wasn't very difficult to tell

that these were devils, on parole from Hell.

The first was pudgy, and in stature small.

The other one was rather gaunt and tall.

Suspended from a baldric by a strip

of leather, was a scabbard at his hip

from which a broadsword hilt protruded; and

he held some kind of woodwind in his hand.

The dumpy devil had a brazen gong

supported from his shoulder on a thong.

He also carried, on his elbow's crook,

a bulky, solemn-looking, black-bound Book.

The lanky devil took a look around

and spied a fallen log upon the ground.

On this he sat. He opened up a map

and spread it out for study, on his lap.

He pointed with a claw.

"Right here," said he,

"is where I've calculated we should be;

and checking on this map, I'm certain of

the spot. We saw this landscape from above

while we were flying over; so we know

exactly where we are, and where to go.

The stonehenge where the covens meet tonight

is south of here, about ten minutes' flight,

so we have all the time we need, and more.

"It's quite important that you know, before

we get there, how to run things. Since you're new,

my job is to explain the ropes to you;
and though I know you've heard all this before,
I've got to run it past you, just once more:
Their Service, as you know, is rather crude.
They dance around a bonfire in the nude
to eerie music, tonally designed
to fuddle and disorient the mind.
They'll writhe to skirling pipes and throbbing drums
until the Nuncio from Hades comes.
If we're a little early, we can take
our part. They're honored if we play a break.
I'll use my clarinet; you pound your gong
to lead their lewd cavorting.

"Quite a throng

will be there. It's no ordinary Fest.
You'll see some covens from the east and west
as well as hereabouts. Three times a year
they all assemble at the stonehenge here--"
(he pointed at the map) "--below this bluff,
to honor Lucifer, and do their stuff.
They mix a magic ointment: herbal junk
that heats their blood, and tends to make them drunk.
They smear it on their bodies, then they prance
around the bonfire in a bawdy dance.
If some of them look tempting, take your choice
and in a little Dalliance rejoice.
Your face will not be slapped. To them, it's part
of Witchcraft and the Diabolic Art.
You'll see some satyrs there. They always bring

Refreshments--which they brew for just one thing:
to turn the heads of ladies. Satyrs live
for favors nymphs don't always want to give;
so if some mortal human demoiselle
enjoys attention, she'll do just as well.
The satyrs spike their wine with herbs they get
from Bacchus--unidentified, as yet.
"You're there for fun--but not exclusively;
you have a grave responsibility!
You'll have to watch the girls who get so high
they have the false impression they can fly.
While dazed, they think they're flying all around,
but actually they never leave the ground
(except, of course, on broomsticks). Lacking wings,
they're highly prone to stumbling over things.
If someone crashes in the bonfire pit,
it's up to you to snatch her out of it
before she catches fire. She'll be well greased,
which means her flammability's increased.
Last year, the fiend impersonating Him
sneaked off to gratify an idle whim
with some young neophyte. His negligence
resulted in some gruesome accidents.
It was mistaken for a Sacrifice,
which glossed things over--but it wasn't nice.
So keep your wits about you. Rock and Roll,
but exercise a little self-control.
No hardship, there; the pious life you led
on Earth, should help you keep a level head.

"When all the frolic's over, then you stand
before the altar, and...just Take Command.
You know your sermons; you'll know what to say.
Predict the coming of Misjudgment Day,
when God and all his host are overthrown
and Earth's controlled by Lucifer alone.
They'll have some questions. Tell them all you please
about our Diabolic Sorceries.
The more our loyal witches know, the more
they'll help us when it comes to all-out war.
"Did I leave something out? I guess that's all.
Go try your talents out, and have a ball.
I'll be near by, but out of sight. I'll take
no part--unless you make some gross mistake.
Meanwhile, we've got some time to kill, because
of course we weren't quite sure what time it was."
The dumpy fiend responded, "Who can say
for certain just what time of night or day
it is when we arrive? We know too well
our Bells can't be depended on, in Hell--
but how am I to know, at night, up here,
just how to choose the Moment to Appear?"
"We'll wait," his mentor said, "until the moon
ascends to where the sun would stand at noon.
These backwoods witches think our Leader's power
will reach full strength at just the Midnight Hour.
From elementary astronomy
you know the moon, at full, will have to be
directly overhead at midnight, so

you'll know, by looking, when to start your show.

Besides, we needn't be precise. The Rite
begins at dusk and last for half the night,
until 'the Fiend' arrives (in this case, you)
to add the Final Flourish, then they're through.

When once you've been there to impersonate
his Majesty, the Rite will culminate
in one great Orgy. We can both take part
in that, if so inclined. It takes no Art.

That's where we have our great advantage. We
can keep right on performing, physically.
while earthly males, including satyrs, each
has some ambitions that he'll never reach.

There will be satyrs there, but they can try
the ones we don't have time to satisfy."

"A problem that concerns me more," his fat,
half-hearted understudy said, "is that
impersonation takes a lot of gall.

I don't resemble Lucifer at all
except for wings and horns. He's twice my size,
and doesn't have these glassy-looking eyes
that I acquired--along with tail and claws--
through inadvertent breach of Holy Laws.

I'm somewhat stout, and my complexion's wrong.

Can I, a rank impostor, fool that throng?"

"That's not a problem. Witches everywhere
will choose tonight to have a Big Affair,"
his friend explained. "No witch is such a dunce
she'd think our Leader's everywhere at once.

They'll settle for an Emissary from
the government at Pandemonium.

Our Leader's proxies, as they know full well,
are ordinary citizens of Hell,
assigned to represent his Majesty
at every major sacrilegious Spree.

And common devils also figure large
in their mythology--so just Take Charge.

Don't fret about it; use your common sense.

The only thing you lack is Confidence!

Remember, you were hand-selected from
the applicants at Pandemonium

because you have a special mental quirk
you need for doing Missionary Work."

"I'll do my utmost," sighed the pudgy fiend.

"What bothers me is that we're all demeaned
by rites left over from a Pagan time.

Religion ought to be a thing sublime
which purifies and elevates the soul!

Can Satan's Cult aspire to such a goal
with naked dancing, flaring midnight fires,
and free indulgence in obscene desires?

I guess I wasn't ready for this trip
back up to Earth, with neither purse nor scrip."

"We've been through that," his more-pragmatic friend
shot back. "If venery will serve our End
it must be utilized! We have a war
of cosmic scope to win! Need I say more?

Our circumstances being what they are,

will Delicacy get us very far?"

For several minutes, conversation stopped;
and when it was resumed, this theme was dropped.

An autumn breeze was blowing from the north.

The pudgy devil, pacing back and forth,
kept blowing on his furry hands, as if
he felt his fingers getting cold and stiff.

"I wish we had a fire," he finally told
the taller fiend. "This wind is getting cold.

The climate's changed a lot, since I lived here.

It used to be quite mild, this time of years."

"The real trouble is," his peer replied,
"you've lived in Hades, ever since you died.

Our climate back at home would make this seem
--at first--like quite the opposite extreme.

When you're reacclimated, you will say,
that this is quite a balmy autumn day."

"I'm warm enough while flying, in the sun,"
the fat one said; "but, resting, I've begun
to feel this penetrating northern breeze.

If we don't build a fire, I think I'll freeze."

The taller devil sadly shook his head.

"We'll have to get you toughened up," he said.

"If operations here upon the Earth
continue, what's a missionary worth
who has to preach his sermons from a pot
where cannibals have kept him piping hot?

For now, we'll humor your effete desire.

Let's rustle up some wood, and build a fire."

The devils spread their wings and flapped around
the clearing, dropping often to the ground
to pick up sticks and logs. They brought them back
and heaped them up together, in a stack.

"That should," the senior devil said, "suffice.

We'll have a good, warm fire in just a trice."

He drew his sword.

Our watching spy, amazed,
stared owl-eyed as the metal smoked and blazed.

He'd heard the gaffers of the Tribe relate
the tale of what they'd seen, at Eden's gate,
so he had heard of flaming swords; but he
assumed such things were mere mythology.

(We'd left when he was very young. Our Sage,
now very old, had been of middle age.)

The hellfiend laid his sword upon the ground
and piled some sticks on top, and all around.

The wood ignited from the flames beneath.

The fiend returned his broadsword to its sheath;
then both the fiends sat down upon the log
to warm themselves, with little dialogue.

The ape picked out a soft spot in his tree,
and settled down to wait, impatiently.

The Missionaries (continued)

The sun went down, and twilight turned to night;
but neither of the devils took to flight.
The moon arose. The fiends sat idly by
and watched it inch across the starry sky.
Our waiting tribesman yawned, and watched the moon,
expecting it to reach the zenith soon;
but nothing moves more slowly than the sky
when someone wishes time would hurry by.
As they awaited midnight, in the wood,
the fiends amused themselves as best they could.
The senior devil cursed the dark of night,
then drew his sword; and by its flaring light
he made some annotations on his map.
The fat one spread his Volume on his lap
and whiled away a half an hour or so
perusing pages, by the campfire's glow.
"I wish you'd throw that stupid Book away,"
our tribesman heard the senior devil say.
"At your age, I should think you'd know quite well,
there's no redemption, once you're sent to Hell.
Unholy Lucifer! Who's ever heard
of Bible-reading fiends? That's too absurd!
"I know damnation is eternal," said
the pudgy fiend. "As sure as I am dead,

those Pearly Gates have been forever slammed,
and I'm among the Legions of the Damned.

To lost salvation I've become inured,
but one undimmed Obsession has endured:

I have to know--I must find out, someday--
the charge against me--how I went Astray.

The Portal Keepers told me where to go,
but said the Reason wasn't mine to know:

I'd lost the right to ask them to reveal
wherein I'd sinned--and there was no Appeal.

Although I've seldom mentioned this before,
no question ever has obsessed me more:

For all the centuries I've had to dwell
amid the scant amenities of Hell,

I've never ceased to wonder at my fate:
my unexplained rebuff at Heaven's gate.

It baffles me! I'm sure I've never been
involved in anything approaching Sin!

I cultivated my immortal soul.

I never perjured, murdered, lied or stole.

From adolescence on, my thoughts and deeds
were patterned on examples in the Screeds.

I never coveted my neighbor's wife,
nor ox, nor ass, nor vineyard, all my life
while I resided in the world of men.

If Evil's been my way of life since then,
I've not had much alternative. How could
a fiend of Hell do anything called Good?"

"And from your study of that Book," returned

the senior devil, "tell me what you've learned!
Since you and I have been acquainted, you
have read it half a dozen times, clear through!"
"I've puzzled through it, lo, these many years,"
the trainee sighed, "but no new clue appears.
I still can't pinpoint what Mistake, by me,
was unforgivable. Regrettably
the Scripture is the only source I've got
to know which acts are sins, and which are not,
and which of them by Faith are justified
and which are too offensive to abide.
But my misdeeds were venial, at the most.
I never once blasphemed the Holy Ghost!
I'd been a Preacher of the Gospel. I'd
been certain of salvation, when I died.
I used to be so sure, my whole life long,
that nothing I had done was very wrong.
My life was dedicated to the cause
of reprimanding others' moral flaws.
I pounded pulpits, ranted, roared and raved;
yet I--not they--the flames of Hades braved.
How could those sinners have been saved, while I
--their Moral Shepherd--was condemned to fry?
Of all the punishments I've borne, the one
that's hardest is not knowing what I've done!"

"I'll tell you what," the lanky fiend replied.
"You're not the only righteous man who died
and got to Heaven, and was turned away

because of tithing he forgot to pay
and didn't think of later; or a word
of irritation which was overheard,
recorded in a Scroll, and there remained
to prove the Holy Name was once profaned;
or fleeting moods of hatred, lust or greed
which never surfaced as a sinful deed,
but were sufficient to condemn him with.
Forget that 'mercy-and-compassion' myth!
It's never been a part of Heaven's Plan--
they'll crucify you any way they can!
Perhaps you had some Lapse of Faith, which those
who judge you so-called 'sinners' later chose
to hold against you. Any lapse will do
when someone doesn't like the looks of you
as naked spirit--by no flesh enclosed--
with every defect of your soul exposed.
The game called 'Not Committing Any Sin'
Is one the Dominations couldn't win,
much less mere humans.

The exact extent

to which, at resurrection, you 'repent'
has more to do with it than what you give
in contributions, or the life you live;
but being willing to repent cannot
erase an innate, unrepentant blot
within the basic fabric of your soul--
a matter over which you've no control.
"I'm not like you. I neither lived nor died.

Archangel was my rank, condemned for Pride
and cast from Heaven. All I did was ask
why I was given the unwelcome task
of casting out a so-called 'renegade'
who'd made the same mistake I later made!
But Pride's a well-known Imperfection, so
I went where other Fallen Angels go.
"I felt quite persecuted, as I fell
through raging storms of fire, engulfing Hell;
but though it stings when first you hit that stuff,
we grow accustomed to it soon enough.
I don't regret damnation. I've enjoyed
the work in which I'm presently employed:
persuading earthly malcontents to fight
against Morality, and Truth, and Right
(and training younger fiends to do the same
while I get all the credit and the fame,"
he added with a chuckle. "Never mind
the humor. Devils get their due, you'll find.)
"The life we're living really isn't bad.
Salvation has its drawbacks. If you had
to work for Principalities and such
you'd realize you didn't lose too much
by your rejection and damnation. Here
you have a chance to build a new career.
Already you're a Missionary's Aide
and understudy, with a higher grade
awaiting you as soon as you achieve
some skill in making neophytes believe

in Satan's Coming Reign upon the Earth,
and just how little True Religion's worth.
I'll only have to keep an eye on you
for one more Witches' Sabbath--maybe two--
just long enough to make completely sure
you'll keep our doctrines evil and impure,
and don't revert to Habit--and amaze
the girls with phrases from your preaching days.
You have a future here. In Heaven you
would find there's nothing useful you can do.
What might a Preacher of the Gospel say
to souls already pure in every way?
There's nothing up in Heaven anyone
can do, of any use--it's all been done!
Besides, in Heaven, once it's settled where
you fit, you're in a dead-end job; and there
you're stuck for all eternity. You'll find
that any Exaltation is a grind
when you've enjoyed the same old 'glory' for
a dreary twenty thousand years or more.
Yet what, among the Perfect, can you do
to recommend a higher place for you?"
"That isn't what I've always heard before,"
the understudy said. "In days of yore
in Gospel Seminary, we were told
our Glory would eternally unfold
in ever-higher heavenly degrees
that keep expanding for eternities.
The afterlife I'd set my hopes upon

entailed Advancement that goes on and on."

"It doesn't work that way," his mentor said.

"The superstition is that once you're dead
and get accepted for salvation, you
are further glorified by what you do
while you're in Heaven; you continue with
your soul's development--a bald-faced myth!

While self-improvement is a worthwhile goal
for Earth or Hell, the resurrected soul
who manifests ambition (or regret)
implies he hasn't reached Perfection yet,
and thus impugns the competence of them
who handed him his shining diadem!

"I can't describe the sense of uselessness
you'd feel, if you'd attained Eternal Bliss.

You sing the praise of God, but when you're through
there's simply no constructive work to do.

No help is ever wanted. Crystal gold
does not need burnishing, however old.

There's no construction work. The wall, the street,
and all the Many Mansions are complete.

They hire no seamstresses or cobblers, there;
their robes and sandals never need repair.

No records need be kept--except to say,

'Today was yet another perfect day!'

No books are ever written; no one cares
for worldly learning or mundane affairs;
and what we think of here as 'ignorance,'
they cultivate as 'blessed innocence.'

No gardens need be tended. Everything
one wants to eat is ripe for harvesting,
and falls unbidden into someone's hands
accepting tacit wishes as commands.

No trees are planted, since there's ample shade
from Trees of Life, whose leaves can never fade.

One needn't manufacture candles. Light
is always ample, both by day and night.

One neither marries nor is given in
a marriage--nor do people live in sin--
so no one ever needs a lawyer; nor
(since there's no Parting) an Executor.

There's nothing one can teach, in any field:
if angels need to know it, it's 'revealed.'

A pulpiteer like you, of course, would be
an unemployable anomaly
where everything the faithful must believe
is visible, and hard to misperceive;
and anyone expressing any doubt
of what he doesn't see, is hustled out.

"If you insist on working, they will find
some silly task to occupy your mind,
like checking Heaven's streetlamps, to be sure
that every light is absolutely pure;
or making manuscripts of Holy Screeds
that no one but the penman ever reads;
or keeping careful track of all mistakes
some mortal, living on the surface, makes,
to use as evidence against him, when

he comes to Judgment, from the world of men;
or finding make-work jobs for others, who
feel just as useless and as bored as you.

"The exaltation state at which you live
--like 'happiness'--is strictly relative.

On social scales, no matter where you go,
there's someone over you, and some below;
so never mind your Glory. Rather mope
because promotion is a futile hope.

Exalting you dilutes the Glory of
the state of exaltation next above,
so adding to your Bliss would not be fair
without promoting every angel there.

Your 'exaltation' thus remains unchanged
unless the Hierarchy's rearranged;
and native citizens of Heaven keep
outsiders at the bottom of the heap.

The Crown and Raiment you receive may be
like that of angels; but seniority
comes first in all executive careers.

The Angels, logging twenty thousand years,
have those positions filled--and there they'll stay
until the universe has passed away!

"In Hell we find a thousand things to do.

In Heaven, though, there's simply nothing to
accomplish. Any change one tries to make
implies the Architect has made mistakes;
so even thinking that the Status Quo
requires improvement, means you have to go!

Since Heaven's perfect, if some Change occurs,
it can't get better so it must get worse,
and woe betide the prideful fool who can
suggest improvements on a Perfect Plan!
"That Joy Unending is a farce as well.
It's like the 'endless punishments' of Hell
to which we soon become accustomed, then
go looking for Variety again.
Our 'endless' pain becomes our average state
--the medium in which we operate--
avoiding flames we know are really hot
and seeking out a merely-searing spot
where, long ago, we gnashed our fangs and roared
but by which 'torments' now we're merely bored.
The principle applies to Heaven's 'Bliss.'
It isn't long before you're taking this
for granted; and become a bit annoyed
when there's no greater bliss to be enjoyed.
"Consider this besides: Eternal bliss
may someday be the Angels' nemesis.
The heavenly contentment, peace and love
thought 'normal' by our enemies above
can't motivate them to the same extent
as does the anger, hate and discontent
engendered by the senseless, cruel wrongs
so long endured by Hell's resentful throngs.
We fiends are strengthened by our unjust fate,
while angels morally degenerate.
"Don't feel so bad about damnation. You

survived an ugly shock, and still pulled through.

Besides the strength of character obtained,
you've full immunity from 'Justice' gained:

You've been through Hell, and now there's nothing worse
the self-styled 'Ruler of the Universe'
can try to scare you with."

"That's not quite true."

the trainee said. "There's Outer Darkness, too,
beyond the confines of Creation's pale
where spirits weep, and gnash their teeth, and wail.
Would you--for all your love of evil--face
that Realm where there is neither time nor space?"

"That's poppycock!" the wiser fiend replied.

"Whoever told you that one, really lied!

Belief that such a state exist's beneath
consideration. Spirits don't have teeth!

It's just a phrase they used, in days of old,
as now we'd say we're 'left out in the cold.'

Re-read the Book of Matthew, and you'll see
the author used it metaphorically.

We've scientists in Hell. Why don't you ask
some Graduate to undertake the task
of telling us how there can be a place
with no coordinates in time or space?"

The junior fiend fell silent. He could see
the question had no answer, logically.

His argument by common sense was doomed.

He listened while the wiser fiend resumed:

The Missionaries (concluded)

"The plain fact is, there's only one place worse
than Hades, in the whole wide universe.

You've heard our Leader say he'd rather rule
in Hell than serve in Heaven. He's no fool!

Their social order isn't any joke
for those who have to live beneath its yoke.

"The rank and file of Heaven's citizens
are Angels--whose prestige surpasses men's
immensely, from the savelings' point of view;
but in their Choir their privileges are few
compared with what their overlords enjoy.

They're customarily addressed as 'Boy,'
and dare not let their betters know they care
for fear they'll be expelled, and sent Down There.

Their halos gleam; their robes are white as snow;
but socially, they're lowest of the low.

Their Glory may be vastly greater than
the glory of a resurrected man,
but they're the Hierarchy's dust.

"Above

the Angels stand Archangels: second of
the hierarchy. That's the rank I held
before I got too Proud, and was expelled
to start life over.

"Ruling over these

Archangels are the Principalities,
exalted over angels just as far
as human beings over earthworms are!
Do you think serving them is any fun?
It's not a fate I'd wish on anyone;
and, take my word, it won't ennoble you
to suffer all the nonsense I went through!
"Above the Principalities are Powers,
with exaltation two ranks up from ours.
A Power was the highest Being we
Archangels even qualified to see--
and that was never very gladly done.
It's somewhat worse than staring at the sun.
Their Glory's so immense, it made us feel
ten fathoms lower than a roach's heel.
"But they're not even near the top. They must
prove worthy of some lofty Virtue's trust,
whose exaltation as compared to Powers
was as a Principality's to ours,
two glories up from Principalities,
and, from the bottom, fifth of nine degrees.
"But even Virtues don't have any say,
since they're beneath the Dominations' sway.
But Dominations grumble, grouse and groan
at being body-servants to a Throne--
who has no true authority at all,
because he's at some Cherub's beck and call.
"The Cherubim (Grade Eight) must be the most
adaptable of our Celestic Host.

In fact, it's seldom possible to say
just what they'll look like, on a certain day.
The Eighteenth Psalm (which I presume you've heard)
describes a Cherub as a horse-sized bird;
but those Ezekiel saw, six centuries
B.C., were picturesque monstrosities
with faces pointing north and south and east
and west: one human, three some bird or beast.
They fundamentally resembled men
but with extremities that totaled ten,
including legs: four wings per Cherub, and
beneath each wing a human arm and hand.
The ways their shoulder blades and collar bones
connect, are Anatomical Unknowns.
Each Cherub had a Wheel that followed him
around, with rows of Eyes around the rim.
These Sports appear in Chapter One, and then
with one important change, in Chapter Ten.
The second time Ezekiel saw these things,
their Eyes had spread to arms, legs, backs and wings
like Optic Measles. They would be the bane
of their optometrist--he'd go insane.
"In other Bible passages, you'll find
their faces have from four to two declined.
Much later, Revelation Four reveals
they've kept their Many Eyes, but lost their Wheels;
and three of them have switched their human norms
for bovine, aquiline and lion's forms.
Besides these awesome body-changing tricks,

each Cherub has increased his wings to six.

This shows how far their rank surpasses ours:

They've been awarded self-creative powers.

"Yet one who ranks among the Cherubim

still has a Seraph lording over him.

The Seraphim have more authority

than any Choir. Their high priority

derives from exaltation next to God's.

They terrorized us less-exalted clods.

The doorposts trembled when a Seraph spoke,

and his vicinity was filled with smoke.

I've seen these things; and if my word's in doubt

re-read Isaiah Six, and check me out!

"If you'd enjoy a sense of feeling small,

I recommend you sneak inside the Wall

to catch a glimpse of those resplendant Things

with fiery breath and half a dozen wings

and bodies they can change to any shape

to leave their awestruck underlings agape,

who, by their place in Heaven's High Command,

may--very meekly--in the Presence stand.

The drawback is, one ray of such a Light

as they emit, would blast you out of sight.

"And so, my pulpit-pounding friend, why mope

at losing your unrealistic hope

that you could even start to qualify

to dwell among the Moguls of the Sky?

A start is all you'd ever get, you know.

There's no great kudos for a Holy Joe.

Unless you've made a martyr of yourself
you'll be assigned the very bottom shelf!

Who wants to grovel with that servile crowd
to whom no independent thought's allowed,
and who, to keep their exaltation, must
accept a status lower than the dust?

"But now I've changed the subject. What you asked
was why you never in salvation basked
although the life you lived was in accord
with rules you thought 'proceeded from the Lord.'

The reason for your luck at Heaven's gate
is obvious: You'd rather dominate
a congregation (Never mind their creeds!)
than leap to serve some Holy Mogul's needs.
You're 'bloated up with pride,' like all the rest
of us--a fault which cannot be suppressed.

You lack the humble, self-effacing soul
that makes an Angel easy to control.

The Keepers of the Gate did not look twice
to notice that--they pegged you in a trice--
but were, of course, reluctant to admit
your strengths had anything to do with it.

"You are a Leader. Heaven's lords prefer
a less-assertive type of follower.

You have the talent to address a crowd
and keep your audience completely cowed
and spellbound, drinking in each golden word
of your harangue, no matter how absurd.

That's what I meant in speaking of a 'quirk'
that's badly needed in our line of work.

Your gift explains not only your success
in firing earthly dupes with holiness;
but also your quite-unexpected fate
before your Judges, at the Pearly Gate.

Who wants a saveling, up in Heaven's Realm
who, unpredictably, may overwhelm
with blazing oratory, some gathered crowd
who'd never dared express their thoughts aloud,
but might be yearning to cast off the load
of long-resented service, and Explode?

That happened, you'll recall, in days of old
when Pride was less effectively controlled.

You can't believe what havoc once was wrought
while God permitted independent thought:
We had a war up there! Some angels held
dissenting views, and had to be expelled.

It took three days to quell them--much to God's
embarrassment--despite his better odds.

That's why they had no time, at Heaven's Gate,
for listening to you expostulate.

Besides, the very fact that you had tried
to argue, would have been an act of Pride.

Celestic judges use their last resort
before all others: Cut the matter short!

Their fear of shattered bliss is much too strong
to run the risk of being proven wrong.

Who knows what sort of violent discontent

might shake the broad Celestic Firmament,
if resurrects and angels listen to
subversive elements who talk like you?
Eternal self-complacency just might
be sleeping on a bed of dynamite!
"You've been a missionary all your life.
You found no time for Vice--much less a wife;
you never met a girl whose character
could measure up to what your standards were.
This means that you devoted all your time
to battling false beliefs and moral crime.
Why let such dedication go to waste?
Go on! Just choose your Cause with better taste.
You've mastered Magic Theory very well;
you'd be a credit to the Host of Hell.
So turn your talents to a worthy cause:
teach sorceries, instead of Holy Laws!
The choice is yours, of course. We can't compel
a Man of God to serve the cause of Hell;
but fiends could own this Middle World someday
with your support.

"That's all I have to say."

The ape, who'd heard this dialogue unfold,
was spying still--but growing bored and cold.
The reason he had listened patiently
was that the fiends had mentioned Deity
on numerous occasions; and to find
exactly That was what the Tribe designed.

If he could gain the information we
required to locate Cosmic Deity,
he'd be the Tribe's New Hero, and the rest
could hurry back to Eden, with our Quest
an unalloyed success!

The only snag

was, conversation had begun to lag.
The senior devil put his map away.
His understudy found no more to say.
He paced the ground and pondered--back and forth
from north to south and then from south to north,
hands clasped behind his back, head bowed in thought
while, in his mind, a Holy War was fought.
His black, reptilian eyes were seen to glow
beneath drawn brows. His tail lashed to and fro.
The Inner Struggle, wrenching at his soul,
at last burst through his outward self-control.
He stopped abruptly, gnashed his fangs in ire,
and hurled his Volume in the glowing fire.
As one by one the pages charred and curled,
the flames leaped up, and smoke clouds bulged and swirled.
The fiend exhaled. He looked renewed and soothed.
His shoulders straightened, and his forehead smoothed.
"I feel," he said, "as if a mighty load
has fallen from my soul. Let's hit the road!
I've grown impatient, now, to do my part
in promulgating Diabolic Art!
I feel a stirring sermon taking form.
I'll be red hot, instead of just lukewarm!"

I'll pound that pul--um--alter stone and rave.
I'll make those sinners change their hearts and save
--um--what I meant was, damn their souls to Hell.
I hope you'll hear me. This will go quite well.
My soul's just brimming with Satanic Art!
I've really had a wondrous Change of Heart!
At last I've seen the Darkness, thanks to you!
My heart's completely evil, through and through!
Regrettably, we must await the hour
of His Satanic Majesty's full power."
He estimated, glancing at the moon,
still just above the trees.

"It won't be soon

enough for me! And yet we still have hours
before my former evangelic powers
can be unleashed to serve a Worthy Cause.
I'll prove that I deserve these wings and claws!"
"That's good," his mentor said, "but let's go slow.
Old habit's hard to modify, you know.
There's still no rush. I hope you're not averse
to taking time beforehand, to rehearse."

The ape was now quite bored. He saw he still
had several chilly, dreary hours to kill.
He hadn't fully realized before,
he'd miss his favorite hours of sleep, and more.
Perhaps he didn't really need that sack
he'd thought he had to requisition back.
It's not as though the sack were very new.

the seams had raveled in a place or two.

It might not take as long to fabricate
a new one as to wait, and wait, and wait.

He surely didn't need the grapes. The woods
were still quite full of perishable goods
which could be dried--although he'd lately heard
that nuts and tubers were to be preferred
for winter storage.

Did he owe the Tribe

the verbal "maps" these devils might describe
if he kept listening till midnight? They
were clearly running short of things to say
of relevance.

The night had grown quite black.

Our tribesman thought he should be heading back.

Nocturnal Predators would start to prowl
before too long, and hungry wolves to howl.

He rubbed his eyes and, yawning sleepily,
he cautiously descended from his tree.

One option he considered was, of course,
that he could seize his property by force.

Although he wasn't armed, a Bludgeon could
be found by rummaging around the wood;
then, by approaching in the Way of Spies,
he'd have the full advantage of surprise.

However, he'd had no experience
with weapons like the one in evidence
and wasn't quite convinced he could afford
to trust a club against a flaming sword.

Discretion counts as much as Valor, when
one must contend with well-armed fiends, or men,
and when the prize one hopes thereby to gain
is one a wiser Hero might disdain.

The grapes, he now recalled, seemed not to be
as ripe as he'd assumed, initially.

The sack, if he returned another day,
could probably be found where now it lay.

To steal it from him wouldn't benefit
the fiends--nor had they even noticed it.

Resolving just to drop the issue was
the best decision he could reach, because
although timidity is rare, with apes,
we don't take needless risks for Sour Grapes.

David and the Cyclops

The Tribe had not left Eden's ample fruits
in search of hardships, but of Absolutes.
We'd known we'd get some fat along with lean;
but, so far, gristle was the best we'd seen.
The Quest for which we'd left our home behind
was first deferred, then driven out of mind
as day-to-day emergencies arose:
harsh weather, shortages, and prowling foes.

One spring a scout came back with tidings which
restored our fervor to its former pitch--
the looming snowpacks which were poised before
had not survived the warmth, and were no more.
The threat of avalanches being past,
the Tribe had access to the plain at last
and could, as we originally planned,
pursue the Quest across the western land.
Our scout was also eager to report
a human being of another sort,
who, judging by his bulk, might possibly
be some relation to the Deity;
and if he wasn't God, at least he may
be better able to direct our way
than someone of less godly stature could.
He'd seen this Being striding through the wood

engaged in hunting, or some such pursuit.

On spotting him, our tribesman, keeping mute
and watching from concealment, had discerned
his Godlike size, then prudently returned
to fetch the Tribe. He thought it might be wise
to bring a group of some impressive size.

Not having seen, yet, what our tribesman had,
we all went trooping out there. We were glad
to find some sentient life, besides our band,
from whom to seek advice--who'd understand
the deeper yearning of our tribal soul
and kindly steer us toward our hazy Goal.

We should have known from past experience
that this assumption didn't make much sense.

Of all the "human" species we had met
not one had answered any questions yet.

(The Centaur had, to give him credit, but
his mind was fixed in one peculiar rut.

His effort to "reeducate" our Sage
caused mass confusion, in a later age.)

But Spring, when all Creation is renewed,
imbued us with an optimistic mood.

The snow was melting, and the path was free.

The swollen stream was roaring cheerfully.

Beyond the canyon's mouth a valley spread,
where willows budded by the river bed.

The breeze was moist and warm, the sun was strong,
and birds were filling all the world with song,
as if predicting that a hopeful dawn

would end the dismal Night we'd undergone.

The stranger from a distance we descried.

He sat and rested by the riverside.

In phenotype he was a human being.

Was this God Incarnate we were seeing?

We had heard that that was one disguise

which God assumes, when on this Earth He spies;

and we were not acquainted, at the time,

with all the shapes the "human" race could mime--

we thought those breeds encountered in the wood

had taken every shape one species could.

As we approached him, and naively called,

he suddenly arose.

We were appalled.

He stood approximately five apes high

and in his forehead gleamed a single eye.

Our Sage, however, couldn't be deterred

from wishful thinking he'd so long preferred.

The Tribe was leery; but the Sage, quite calm,

approached this "god" with no apparent qualm:

"My friend, if you'll permit us to intrude

upon your hunting ground, we seek no feud.

Could you advise us where we ought to look

for Something which we read of, in a Book,

and which we've sought on every hill and dale

and mountainside, so far to no avail?

Responding to this Inner Urge we feel,

we're seeking an Intangible Ideal--

or God (another term which some prefer).

We're seeking something--what, we're not quite sure."

The Cyclops offered no reply. Instead,
he swung his club and crushed the Sage's head.

We dashed in all directions, in our flight
to reach the nearest treetops' utmost height
and watch, with lurching stomachs, first to last,
the monstrous Cyclops' cannibal repast.

Our mission unaccomplished, we returned.

This wasn't very bright, we later learned.

We should have kept on going, straight ahead,
to lands that knew no Cyclopean tread.

The giant left, and let us all retreat,
but spread the word that apes were good to eat.

Thereafter, all his relatives and friends
came hunting apes through gullies, gaps and glens.

They liked to hunt in pairs, or groups of three,
uprooting shrubs and shaking every tree,
no more afraid of warriors than cubs.

They came equipped with gunnysacks and clubs,
and sniffed us out, or traced us by our tracks
until they had enough to fill their sacks.

We lived in constant terror, knowing they
at any moment might detour our way.

The pass in which we'd settled came to serve
Cyclopes as a sort of game preserve.

They posted wardens at the canyon's mouth--
a line of guardposts, stretching north and south.

On looking out across the flat at night
we saw them standing watch by campfire light.
Two giants manned each post. One warden kept
his eye on us, while his companion slept.
The route by which we'd entered from the east
was choked with ice the thaws had not decreased;
and those who tried to reach the eastern side
were either driven back, or else they died.
The glacier-crossers saw the chasms yawn
beneath their feet, and suddenly were gone.
And no historian has yet explained
why such a glacier formed, and then remained
all year around, to block the eastern gate.
Was this the work of conscious, hostile Fate?

Although they wouldn't let us leave the pass
where we were cornered--least of all en masse--
we never dared approach the Cyclops tribe
in war, in friendship, nor with any bribe.
We kept avoiding them as best we could
by scattering our campsites through the wood.
We couldn't camp as one community
in one location with impunity.
We stuck together till our nesting ground
among the woods' best sleeping trees was found
by Cyclops hunters--who began to roam
quite regularly through the Tribe's "new home,"
disrupting family life, and snatching cubs,
and shaking trees by whacking them with clubs.

Thereafter we divided into clans
comprised of ten to twenty pithecans,
who changed their campsites often, and whose braves
competed with the gnomes for cliffside caves.

By day we had to forage where we might
find cover, if a Cyclops came in sight.

We lived like fugitives, or quarry. We
had reached the Nadir of our history.

When we have reached the Bottom Point, we know
that Up must be the only way to go.

With passing centuries, our hopes revived
for liberty of which we were deprived.

Our Sage was dead, and no one else was wise
enough to organize an enterprise
of any sort--much less a project vast
enough to break encirclement.

At last

a Chief* arose, to argue down our fears:

"We've been immobilized a thousand years!

*Again anonymous. Again the blame
for losing yet another famous name
from Eden's history devolves upon
some careless scribe--who is himself "Anon."

Is skulking in ignoble slavery
an index to our tribal bravery?
We shall renew the Quest our forebears sought

but first the Tribe's oppressors must be fought!"

The word was spread among the scattered clans
and won adherents to his martial plans.

The Tribe became united, as before,
and Eden's braves prepared for Holy War.

Our leader led us westward, hundreds strong,
resolved to right this old, unrighted wrong.

Our sheephorns blared a brave cacophony
to taunt the Cyclopean company.

We could quite likely have accomplished more
by less heroic means than open war.

Morale was splendid; but it's seldom wise
to pit morale against colossal size.

But History cannot be changed. Our band
on open country boldly took its stand,
as tribal drums and trumpets raised a din
to mask the second thoughts we felt within.

The only way that Eden could have scored
a seeming victory, was if we'd poured
our total force against the border guard
who had the exit from the canyon barred.

Sheer numbers might have overwhelmed the Foe,
who numbered but a score or less--although
the Tribe, through underconfidence, preferred
to wait, and make our warlike clamor heard
--perhaps expecting them to lose their heart
before the fighting had a chance to start.

But merely acting brave was not enough.

They knew their strength--and ours--and called our bluff.

Until their might was fully evidenced
we hadn't known what we were up against.
We'd met them in the woods, but never more
that two or three at once, or, rarely, four.
They now came flocking from their caves and farms,
in answer to their border guards' alarms--
more total bulk of their gigantic race
than we had thought could occupy one place:
for though their numbers weren't a tenth as great
as ours, they had us dwarfed in total weight.
The braves of Eden, struck with dumb surprise,
surveyed the rank that loomed against the skies
A single one of those enormous shapes
was worth a whole platoon or more of apes.
They took their time, discussing strategies,
while Eden's troops were melting at the knees,
procrastinating noisily. At last
our chance to scatter to the hills had passed.
No brave had wished to be the first to run;
and now the real battle had begun.
Our foes approached us, confident and blithe,
like mowers getting set to ply the scythe.

Cyclopes ambled through our ranks that day
with careless ease, as farmers harvest hay.
The Tribe's retreat would soon have been a rout--
except the giants left us no way out;
they moved to cut us off on every side.
We found our javelins couldn't pierce their hide.

Our clubs and axes were our last resort,
which, for the purpose, were a trifle short.
As certain tribal strategists have said,
to brain a foe, one first must reach his head;
and very few among us had the strength
to wield a tomahawk five times our length.
The only places we could reach our foes
--if we were lucky--were the shins and toes;
and someone coming near a Cyclops' leg
got hammered through the topsoil like a peg.

It looked like Massacre, for Eden's flock. . .
till some young cub, who'd found a fist-sized rock,
approached the giants' chief, with youthful pluck.
His stone described a graceful arc

and Struck.

Rebounding with a hollow, bony Thud,
it traced a shorter arc, and hit the mud.
The Cyclops clutched his whirling head, and found
himself outstretched, supine, upon the ground,
not knowing what the trouble was. To him
the world was spinning, and the light was dim.
He tried to rise, but didn't make it, quite.
A galaxy of stars obscured his sight.
He groaned, and tried again--

and then he guessed.

A grinning ape was standing on his chest
with battle axe aloft, as he came to.
The axe descended. That was all he knew.

One field in which we Killer Apes are quick
is picking up an advantageous trick
upon a moment's notice. Toward the last
the Tribe was pegging missiles thick and fast.
The sky was darkened with our fusillade.
No ray of sunlight pierced that flying shade.
Besieged cyclopes, never quick of wit,
could not imagine what to make of it.
They'd all fought Cyclops-style, until that day,
and hadn't known our brats fought wars this way.
A horde of giants fell to our assault
If some escaped, it wasn't Eden's fault.
We routed them, and then, with keen delight,
pursued them all that day and half the night,
until they dropped, and in Exhaustion lay
and passively accepted Come What May.