

Absalom and Achitophel

John Dryden

Table of Contents

<u>Absalom and Achitophel</u>	1
<u>John Dryden</u>	1

Absalom and Achitophel

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In pious times, e'r Priest-craft did begin,
Before Polygamy was made a sin;
When man, on many, multiply'd his kind,
E'r one to one was, cursedly, confind:
When Nature prompted, and no law deny'd
Promiscuous use of Concubine and Bride;
Then, Israel's monarch, after Heaven's own heart,
His vigorous warmth did, variously, impart
To Wives and Slaves; And, wide as his Command,
Scatter'd his Maker's Image through the Land.
Michal, of Royal blood, the Crown did wear,
A Soyl ungratefull to the Tiller's care;
Not so the rest; for several Mothers bore
To Godlike David, several Sons before.
But since like slaves his bed they did ascend,
No True Succession could their seed attend.
Of all this Numerous Progeny was none
So Beautifull, so brave as Absalon:
Whether, inspir'd by some diviner Lust,
His father got him with a greater Gust;
Or that his Conscious destiny made way
By manly beauty to Imperiall sway.
Early in Foreign fields he won Renown,
With Kings and States ally'd to Israel's Crown
In Peace the thoughts of War he could remove,
And seem'd as he were only born for love.
What e'er he did was done with so much ease,
In him alone, 'twas Natural to please.
His motions all accompanied with grace;
And Paradise was open'd in his face.
With secret Joy, indulgent David view'd
His Youthfull Image in his Son renew'd:
To all his wishes Nothing he deny'd,
And made the Charming Annabel his Bride.
What faults he had (for who from faults is free?)
His Father could not, or he would not see.
Some warm excesses, which the Law forbore,
Were constru'd Youth that purg'd by boyling o'r:
And Amnon's Murther, by a specious Name,
Was call'd a Just Revenge for injur'd Fame.

Absalom and Achitophel

Thus Prais'd, and Lov'd, the Noble Youth remain'd,
While David, undisturb'd, in Sion reign'd.
But Life can never be sincerely blest:
Heaven punishes the bad, and proves the best.
The Jews, a Headstrong, Moody, Murmuring race,
As ever try'd th' extent and stretch of grace;
God's pamper'd people whom, debauch'd with ease,
No King could govern, nor no God could please;
(Gods they had tri'd of every shape and size
That Gods—smiths could produce, or Priests devise.)
These Adam—wits too fortunately free,
Began to dream they wanted libertie;
And when no rule, no precedent was found
Of men, by Laws less circumscrib'd and bound,
They led their wild desires to Woods and Caves,
And thought that all but Savages were Slaves.
They who when Saul was dead, without a blow,
Made foolish Ishbosheth the Crown forgo;
Who banisht David did from Hebron bring,
And with a Generall Shout, proclaim'd him King:
Those very Jewes, who, at their very best,
Their Humour more than Loyalty exprest,
Now wondred why, so long, they had obey'd
An Idoll Monarch which their hands had made:
Thought they might ruine him they could create;
Or melt him to that Golden Calf, a State,
But these were randome bolts: No form'd Design,
Nor Interest made the Factious Croud to joyn:
The sober part of Israel, free from stain,
Well knew the value of a peacefull reign:
And, looking backward with a wise afright,
Saw Seames of wounds, dishonest to the sight;
In contemplation of whose ugly Scars,
They Curst the memory of Civil Wars.
The moderate sort of Men, thus qualifi'd,
Inclin'd the Ballance to the better side:
And David's mildness manag'd it so well,
The Bad found no occasion to Reb ell.
But, when to Sin our byast Nature leans,
The carefull Devil is still at hand with means;
And providently Pimps for ill desires:
The Good old Cause reviv'd, a Plot requires.
Plots, true or false, are necessary things,
To raise up Common—wealths, and ruin Kings.

Th' inhabitants of old Jerusalem
Were Jebusites: the Town so call'd from them;
And theirs' the Native right
But when the chosen people grew more strong,
The rightfull cause at length became the wrong:
And every loss the men of Jebus bore,

Absalom and Achitophel

They still were thought God's enemies the more.
Thus, worn and weaken'd, well or ill content,
Submit they must to David's Government:
Impoverist, and depriv'd of all Command,
Their Taxes doubled as they lost their Land,
And what was harder yet to flesh and blood,
Their Gods disgrac'd, and burnt like common wood.
This set the Heathen Priesthood in a flame;
For Priests of all Religions are the same:
Of whatsoever descent their Godhead be,
Stock, Stone, or other homely pedigree,
In his defence his Servants are as bold
As if he had been born of beaten gold.
The Jewish Rabbins tho their Enemies,
In this conclude them honest men and wise;
For 'twas their duty, all the Learned think,
T' espouse his Cause by whom they eat and drink.
From hence began that Plot, the Nation's Curse,
Bad in it self, but represented worse,
Rais'd in extremes, and in extremes decry'd;
With Oaths affirm'd, with dying Vows deny'd,
Not weigh'd, or winnow'd by the Multitude;
But swallow'd in the Mass, unchew'd and Crude.
Some Truth there was, but dash'd and brew'd with Lyes;
To please the Fools, and puzzle all the Wise.
Succeeding times did equal folly call,
Believing nothing, or believing all.
Th' Egyptian Rites the Jebusites imbrac'd;
Where Gods were recommended by their Tast.
Such savory Deities must needs be good,
As serv'd t once for Worship and for Food.
By force they could not Introduce these Gods,
For Ten to One, in former days was odds.
So Fraud was us'd, (the Scrificers trade,)
Fools are more hard to Conquer than Perswade.
Their busie Teachers mingled with the Jews;
And rak'd, for Converts, even the Court and Stews;
Which Hebrew Priests the more unkindly took,
Because the Fleece accompanies the Flock.
Some thought they God's anointed meant to Slay
By Guns, invented since full many a day:
Our Authour swears it not; but who can know
How far the Devil and Jebusites may go?
This Plot, which fail'd for want of common Sense,
Had yet a deep and dangerous Consequence:
For, as when raging Fevers boyl the Blood,
The standing Lake soon floats into a Flood;
And every hostile Humour, which before
Slept quiet in its Channels, bubbles o'er:
So, several Factions from this first Ferment,
Work up to Foam, and threat the Government.

Absalom and Achitophel

Some by their Friends, more by themselves thought wise,
Oppos'd the Power, to which they could not rise.
Some had in Courts been Great, and thrown from thence,
Like Feinds, were harden'd in Impenitence.
Some by their Monarch's fatal mercy grown,
From Pardon'd Rebels, Kinsmen to the Throne;
Were rais'd in Power and publick Office high:
Strong Bands, if Bands ungratefull men could tye.

Of these the false Achitophel was first:
A Name to all succeeding Ages Curst.
For close Designs, and crooked Counsels fit;
Sagacious, Bold, and Turbulent of wit:
Restless, unfixt in Principles and Place;
In Power unpleas'd, impatient of Disgrace.
A fiery Soul, which working out its way,
Fretted the Pigmy Body to decay:
And o'r inform'd the Tenement of Clay.
A daring Pilot in extremity;
Pleas'd with the Danger, when the Waves went high
He sought the Storms; but for a Calm unfit
Would Steer too night the Sands, to boast his Wit.
Great Wits are sure to Madness near ally'd;
And thin Partitions do their Bounds divide;
Else, why should he, with Wealth and Honour blest,
Refuse his Age the needful hours of Rest?
Punish a Body which he could not please;
Bankrupt of Life, yet Prodigal of Ease?
And all to leave, what with his Toyl he won,
To that unfeather'd, two Leg'd thing, a Son;
Got, while his Sould did hudled Notions try;
And born a shapeless Lump, like Anarchy.
In Friendship False, Implacable in Hate:
Resolv'd to Ruine or to Rule the State.
To Compass this the Triple Bond he broke;
The Pillars of the publick Safety shok;
And fitted Israel for a foreign Yoke.
Then, seiz'd with Fear, yet still affecting Fame,
Usurp'd a Patriott's All-attoning Name.
So easie still it proves in Factious Times,
With publick Zeal to cancel private Crimes.
How safe is Treason, and how sacred ill,
Where none can sin against the Peoples Will:
Where Crouds can wink; and no offence be known,
Since in anothers guilt they find their own.
Yet, Fame deserv'd, no Enemy can grudge;
The Statesman we abhor, but praise the Judge.
In Israels Courts ne'r sat an Abbethdin
With more discerning Eyes, or Hands more clean;
Unbrib'd, unsought, the Wretched to redress;
Swift of Dispatch, and easie of Access.

Absalom and Achitophel

Oh, had he been content to serve the Crown,
With vertues only proper to the Gown;
Or, had the rankness of the Soyl been freed
From Cockle, that opprest the Noble seed;
David, for him his tunefull Harp had strung,
And Heaven had wanted one immortal song.
But wide Ambition loves to slide, not stand;
And Fortunes Ice prefers to Vertues Land:
Achitophel, grown weary to possess
A lawfull Fame, and lazy Happiness;
Disdain'd the Golden fruit to gather free,
And lent the Croud his Arm to shake the Tree.
Now, manifest of Crimes, contriv'd long since,
He stood at bold Defiance with his Prince;
Held up the Buckler of the Peoples Cause,
Against the Crown; and skulk'd behind the Laws.
The wish'd occasion of the Plot he takes,
Some Circumstances finds, but more he makes.
By buzzing Emissaries, fills the ears
Of listning Crowds, with Jealousies and Fears
Of Arbitrary COunsels brought to light,
And proves the King himself a Jebusite.
Weak Arguments! which yet he knew fulwell,
Were strong with People easie to Rebell.
For, govern'd by the Moon, the giddy Jews
Tread the same track when she the Prime renews:
And once in twenty Years, their Scribes Record,
By natural Instinct they change their Lord.
Achitophel still wants a Chief, and none
Was found so fit as Warlike Absalon:
Not that he wished his Greatness to create,
(For Politicians neither love nor hate:)
Bur, for he knew, his Title not allow'd,
Would keep him still depending on the Croud:
That Kingly power, thus ebbing out, might be
Drawn to the dregs of a Democracy.
Him he attempts, with studied Arts to please,
And sheds his Venome, in such words as these.

Auspicious Prince! at whose Nativity
Some Royal Planet rul'd the Southern sky;
Thy longing Countries Darling and Desire;
Their cloudy Pillar, and their guardian Fire:
Their Second Moses, whose extended Wand
Divides the Seas, and shews the promis'd Land:
Whose dawning Day, in every distant age,
Has exercis'd the Sacred Prophets rage:
The Peoples Prayer, the glad Diviners Theam,
The Young-mens Vision, and the Old mens Dream!
Thee, Saviour, Thee, the Nations Vows confess;
And, never satisfi'd with seeing, bless:

Absalom and Achitophel

Swift, undespoken Poms, they steps proclaim,
And stemmerring Babes are taught to lisp thy Name.
How long wilt thou the general Joy detain;
Starve, and defraud the People of thy Reign?
Content ingloriously to pass they days
Like one of Vertues Fools that feeds on Praise;
Till thy fresh Glories, which now shine so bright,
Grow Stale and Tarnish with our daily sight.
Believe me, Royal Youth, thy Fruit must be,
Or gather'd Ripe, or rot upon the Tree.
Heav'n has to all alloted, soon or late,
Some lucky Revolution of their Fate;
Whose Motions, if we watch and guide with Skill,
(For humane Good depends on humane Will.)
Our Fortune rolls, as from a smooth Descent,
And, from the first Impression, takes the Bent;
But, if unseiz'd, she glides away like wind;
And leaves repenting Folly far behind.
Now, now she meets you, with a glorious prize,
And spreads her Locks before her as she flies.
Had thus Old David, from whose Loyns you spring,
Not dar'd, when Fortune call'd him, to be King,
At Gath an Exile he might still remain,
And heavens Anointing Oyle had been in vain.
Let his successfull Youth your hopes engage,
But shun th' example of Declining Age:
Behold him setting in his Western Skies,
The Shadows lengthening as the Vapours rise.
He is not now, as when on Jordan's Sand
The Joyfull People throng'd to see him Land,
Cov'ring all the Beach, and blackning all the Strand;
But, like the Prince of Angels from his height,
Comes tumbling downward with diminsh'd light;
Betray'd by one poor Plot to publick Scorn,
(Our only blessing since his Curst Return:)
Those heaps of People which one Sheaf did bind,
Blown off and scatter'd by a Puff of WInd.
What strength can he to y0our Designs oppose,
Naked of Friends, and round beset with Foes?
If Pharoah's doubtfull Succour he shoud use,
A Foreign Aid would more incense the Jews.
Proud Egypt would dissembled Friendship bring;
Foment the War, but not support the King:
Nor would the Royal Party e'r unite
With Pharoah's Arms, t' assist the Jebusite;
Or if they shoud, their Interest soon woud break,
And with such odious Aid make David weak.
All sorts of men by my successfull Arts,
Abhorring Kings, estrange their alter'd Hearts
From David's Rule: And 'tis the general Cry,
Religion, Common-wealth, and Liberty.

Absalom and Achitophel

If you as Champion of the publique Good,
Add to their Arms a Chief of Royal BLOOD;
What may not Israel hope, and what Applause
Might such a General gain by such a Cause?
Not barren Praise alone, that Gaudy Flower,
Fair only to the sight, but solid Power:
And Nobler is a limited Command,
Giv'n by the Love of all your Native Land,
Than a Successive Title, Long, and Dark,
Drawn from the Mouldy rolls of Noah's Ark.

What cannot Praise effect in Mighty Minds,
When Flattery Soothes, and when Ambition Blinds!
Desire of Power, on Earth a Vitious Weed,
Yet, sprung from High, is of Celestial Seed:
In God 'tis Glory: And when men Aspire,
'Tis but a Spark too much of Heavenly Fire.
Th'Ambitious Youth, too covetous of Fame,
Too full of Angells Metal in his Frame,
Unwarily was led from Vertues ways;
Made Drunk with Honour, and Debauch'd with Praise.
Half loath, and half consenting to the Ill,
(For Loyal Blood within him struggled still)
He thus reply'd And what Pretence have I
To take up Arms for Publick Liberty?
My Father Governs with unquestion'd Right;
The Faiths Defender, and Mankinds Delight:
Good, Gracious, Just, observant of the Laws;
And Heav'n by Wonders has Espous'd his Cause.
Whom has he Wrong'd in all his Peaceful Reign?
Who sues for Justice to his Throne in Vain?
What Millions has he Pardon'd of his Foes,
Whom Just Revenge did to his Wrath expose?
Mild, Easy, Humble, Studious of our Good;
Enclin'd to Mercy, and averse from Blood.
If Mildness Ill with Stubborn Israel Suite,
His Crime is God's beloved Attribute.
What could he gain, his People to Betray,
Or change his Right, for Arbitrary Sway?
Let Haughty Pharoah Curse with such a Reign,
His Fruitfull Nile, and Yoak a Servile Train.
If David'd Rule Jerusalem Displease,
The Dog-star heats their Brains to this Disease.
Why then should I, Encouraging the Bad,
Turn Rebell, and run Popularly Mad?
Were he a Tyrant who, by Lawless Might,
Opprest the Jews, and Rais'd the Jebusite,
Well might I Mourn; but Natures Holy Bands
Would Curb my Spirits, and Restrain my Hands:
The People might assert their Liberty;
But what was Right in them, were Crime in me.

Absalom and Achitophel

His Favour leaves me nothing to require;
Prevents my Wishes, and outruns Desire.
What more can I expect while David lives,
All but his Kingly Diadem he gives;
And that: But there he Paus'd; then Sighing, said,
Is Justly Destin'd for a Worthier Head.
For when my Father from his Toyls shall Rest,
And late Augment the Number of the Blest:
His Lawfull Issue shall the Throne ascend,
Or the Collateral Line where that shall end.
His Brother, though Opprest with Vulgar Spright,
Yet Dauntless and Secure of Native Right,
Of every Royal Vertue stands possest;
Still Dear to all the Bravest, and the Best.
His Courage Foes, his Friends his Truth Proclaim;
His Loyalty the King, the World his Fame.
His Mercy even th'Offending Crowd will find,
For sure he comes of a Forgiving Kind.
Why should I then Repine at Heavens Decree;
Which gives me no Pretence to Royalty?
Yet oh that Fate Propitiously Enclind,
Had rais'd my Birth, or had debas'd my Mind;
To my large Soul, not all her Treasure lent,
And then Betray'd it to a mean Descent.
I find, I find my mounting Spirits Bold,
And David's Part disdains my Mothers Mold.
Why am I Scanted by a Niggard Birth,,
My Soul Disclaims the Kindred of her Earth:
And made for Empire, Whispers me within;
Desire of Greatness is a Godlike Sin.

Him Staggering so when Hells dire Agent found,
While fainting Vertue scarce maintain'd her Ground,
He pours fresh Forces in, and thus Replies:

Th'Eternal God Supreamly Good and Wise,
Imparts not these Prodigiuos Gifts in vain;
What Wonders are Reserv'd to bless your Reign?
Against your will your Arguments have shown,
Such Vertue's only given to guide a Throne.
Not that your Father's Mildness I contemn;
But Manly Force becomes the Diadem.
'Tis true, he grants the People all they crave;
And more perhaps than Subjects ought to have:
For Lavish grants suppose a Monarch tame,
And more his Goodness than his Wit proclaim.
But when shoud People strive their Bonds to break,
If not when Kings are Negligent or Weak?
Let him give on till he can give no more,
The Thrifty Sanhedrin shall keep him poor:
And every Sheckle which he can receive,

Absalom and Achitophel

Shall cost a Limb of his Prerogative.
To ply him wiht new Plots, shall be my care,
Or plunge him deep in some Expensive War;
Which when his Treasure can no more Supply,
He must, with the Remains of Kingship, buy.
His faithful Friends, our Jealousies and Fears,
Call Jebusites; and Pharaoh's Pentioners:
Whom, when our Fury from his Aid has torn,
He shall be Naked left to publick Scorn.
The next Successor, whom I fear and hate,
My Arts have made Obnoxious to the State;
Turn'd all his Vertues to his Overthrow,
And gain'd our Elders to pronouce a Foe.
His Right, for Sums of necessary Gold,
Shall first be Pawn'd, and afterwards be Sold:
Till time shall Ever-wanting David draw,
To pass your doubtfull Title into Law:
If not; the People have a Right Supreme
To make their Kings; for Kings are made for them.
All Empire is no more than Pow'r in Trust,
Which when resum'd, can be no longer Just.
Succession, for the general Good design'd,
In its own wrong a Nation cannot bind:
If alternating that, the People can relieve,
Better one Suffer, than a Nation grieve.
The Jews well know their power: e'r Saul they Chose,
God was their King, and God they durst Depose.
Urge now your Piety, your Filial Name,
A Father's Right, and fear of future Fame;
The publick Good, that Universal Call,
To which even Heav'n Submitted, answers all.
Nor let his Love Enchant your generous Mind;
'Tis Natures trick to Propogate her Kind.
Our fond Begetters, who would never dye,
Love but themselves in their Posterity.
Or let his Kindness by th'Effects by try'd,
Or let him lay his vain Pretence aside.
God said he lov'd your Father; coud he bring
A better Proof, than to Anoint him King?
It surely shew'd he lov'd the Shepherd well,
Who gave so fair a flock as Israel.
Would David have you thought his Darling Son?
What means he then, to Alienate the Crown?
The name of Godly he may blush to hear:
'Tis after God's own heart to Cheat his Heir.
He to his Brother gives Supreme Command;
To you a Legacy of Barren Land:
Perhaps th'old Harp, on which he thrums his Layes:
Or some dull Hebrew Ballad in your Praise.
Then the next Heir, a Prince, Severe and Wise,
Already looks on you with Jealous Eyes;

Absalom and Achitophel

Sees through the thin Disguises of your Arts,
And markes your Progress in the Peoples Hearts.
Though now his mighty Soul its Grief contains;
He meditates Revenge who least Complains.
And like a Lyon, Slumbring in the way,
Or Sleep–dissembling, while he waits his Prey,
His fearless Foes within his Distance draws;
Constrains his Roaring, and Contracts his Paws;
Till at the last, his time for Fury found,
He shoots with suddain Vengeance from the Ground:
The Prostrate Vulgar, passes o'r, and Spares;
But with a Lordly Rage, his Hunters teares.
Your Case no tame Expedients will afford;
Resolve on Death, or Conquest by the Sword,
Which for no less a Stake than Life, you Draw;
And Self–defence is Natures Eldest Law.
Leave the warm People no Considering time;
For then Rebellion may be thought a Crime.
Prevail your self of what Occasion gives,
But try your Title while your Father lives;
And that your Arms may have a fair Pretence,
Proclaim, you take them in the King's Defence:
Whose Sacred Life each minute woud Expose,
To Plots, from seeming Friends, and secret Foes.
And who can sound the depth of David's Soul?
Perhaps his fear, his kindness may Controul.
He fears his Brother, though he loves his Son,
For plighted Vows too late to be undone.
If so, by Force he wishes to be gain'd,
Like womens Leachery, to seem Constrain'd:
Doubt not, but when he most affects the Frown,
Commit a pleasing Rape upon the Crown.
Secure his Person to secure your Cause;
They who possess the Prince, possess the Laws.

(Continued)

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P.C. Home Page . Recent Additions

Poets: A B . C D . E F . G H . I J . K L . M N . O P . Q R . S T . U V . W X . Y Z

Absalom and Achitophel

by John Dryden

Absalom and Achitophel

(Continued)

He said, And this Advice above the rest,
With Absalom's Mild nature suited best;
Unblam'd of Life (Ambition set aside,)
Not stain'd with Cruelty, nor puft with Pride;
How happy had he been, if Destiny
Had higher plac'd his Birth, or not so high!
His Kingly vertues might have claim'd a Throne,
And blest all other Countries but his own:
But charming Greatness, since so few refuse;
'Tis Juster to Lament him, than Accuse.
Strong were his hopes a Rival to remove,
With blandishment to gain the publick Love;
To Head the Faction while their Zeal was hot,
And Popularly prosecute the Plot.
To farther this Achithphel Unites
The Malecontents of all the Israelites;
Whose differing Parties he could wisely Joyn,
For several Ends, to serve the same Design.
The Best, and of the Princes some were such,
Who thought the power of Monarchy too much:
Mistaken Men, and Patriots in their Hearts;
Not Wicked, but Seduc'd by Impious Arts.
By these the Springs of Property were bent,
And wound so high, they Crack'd the Government.
The next for Interest sought t'embroil the State,
TO sell their Duty at a dearer rate;
And make their Jewish Markets of the Throne,
Pretending plick Good, to serve their own.
Others thought Kings an useless heavy Load,
Who Cost too much, and did too little Good.
These were for laying Honest David by,
On Principles of pure good Husbandry.
With them Joyn'd all th' Haranguers of the Throng,
That thought to get Preferment by the Tongue.
Who follows next, a double Danger bring,
Not only hating David, but the King,
The Solyman Rout; well Verst of old,
In Godly Faction, and in Treason bold;
Cowering and Quaking at a Conqueror's Sword,
But Lofty to a Lawfull Prince Restor'd;
Saw with Disdain an Ethnick Plot begun,
And Scorn'd by Jebusites to be Out-done.
Hot Levites Headed these; who pul'd before
From the Ark, which in the Judges days they bore,
Resum'd their Cant, and with a Zealous Cry,
Pursu'd their old belov'd Theocracy.
Where Sanhedrin and Priest inslav'd the Nation,
And justifi'd their Spoils by Inspiration;
For who so fit for Reign as Aarons's race,

Absalom and Achitophel

If once Dominion they could found in Grace?
These led the Pack; tho not of surest scent,
Yet deepest mouth'd against the Government.
A numerous Host of dreaming Saints succeed;
Of the true old Enthusiastick breed;
'Gainst Form and Order they their Power employ;
Nothing to Build and all things to Destroy.
But far more numerous was the herd of such,
Who think too little, and who talk too much.
These, out of meer instinct, they knew not why,
Ador'd their fathers God, and Property:
And, by the same blind benefit of Fate,
The Devil and the Jebusite did hate:
Born to be sav'd, even in their own despight;
Because they could not help believing right.
Such were the tools; but a whole Hydra more
Remains, of sprouting heads too long, to score.

Some of their Chiefs were Princes of the Land;
In the first Rank of these did Zimri stand:
A man so various, that he seem'd to be
Not one, but all Mankinds Epitome.
Stiff in Opinions, always in the wrong;
Was every thing by starts, and nothing long:
But in the course of one revolving Moon,
Was Chymist, Fidler, States-Man, and Buffoon:
Then all for Women, Painting, Rhiming, Drinking;
Besides ten thousand freaks that dy'd in thinking.
Blest Madman, who could every hour employ,
With something New to wish, or to enjoy!
Rayling and praising were his usual Theams;
And both (to shew his Judgment) in Exreams:
So over Violent, or over Civil,
That every man, with him, was God or Devil.
In squandring Wealth was his peculiar Art:
Nothing went unrewarded, but Desert.
Begger'd by Fools, whom still he found too late:
He had his Jest, and they had his Estate.
He laught himself from Court, then sought Releif
By forming Parties, but could ne're be Chief.
For, spight of him, the weight of Business fell
On Absalom and Achitophel:
Thus, wicked but in will, of means bereft,
He left not Faction, but of that was left.

Titles and Names 'twere tedious to Reherse
Of Lords, below the Dignity of Verse.
Wits warriors Common-wealthsmen, were the best:
Kind Husbands and meer Nobles all the rest.
And, therefore in the name of Dulness, be
The well hung Balaam and cold Caleb free.

Absalom and Achitophel

And canting Nadab let Oblivion damn,
Who made new porridge for the Paschal Lamb.
Let Friendships holy band some Names assure:
Some their own Worth, and some let Scorn secure.
Nor shall the Rascall Rabble here have Place,
Whom Kings no Titles gave, and God no Grace:
Not Bull-fac'd Jonas, who could Statues draw
To mean Rebellion, and make Treason Law.
But he, thos bad, is follow'd by a worse,
The wretch, who Heavens Anointed dar'd to Curse.
Shimei, whose Youth did early Promise bring
Of Zeal to God, and Hatred to his King;
Did wisely from Expensive Sins refrain,
And never broke the Sabbath, but for Gain:
Nor ever was he known an Oath to vent,
Or Curse unless against the Government.
Thus, heaping Wealth, by the most ready way
Among the Jews, which was to Cheat and Pray;
The City, to reward his pious Hate
Against his Master, chose him Magistrate;
His Hand a Vane of Justice did uphold;
His Neck was loaded with Chain of Gold.
During his Office, Treason was no Crime.
The Sons of Belial had a glorious Time:
For Shimei, though not prodigal of pelf,
Yet lov'd his wicked Neighbour as himself:
When two or three were gather'd to declaim
Against the Monarch of Jerusalem,
Shimei was always in the midst of them.
And, if they Curst the King when he was by,
Would rather Curse, than break good Company.
If any durst his Factious Friends accuse,
He pact a Jury of dissenting Jews:
Whose fellow-feeling, in the godly Cause,
Would free the sufferin Saint from Humane Laws.
For Laws are only made to Punish those,
Who serve the King, and to protect his Foes.
If any leisure time he had from Power,
(Because 'tis Sin to misemploy an hour;)
His business was, by Writing, to Persuade,
That Kings were Useless, and a Clog to Trade:
And, that his noble Stile he might refine,
No Rechabite more shund the fumes of Wine.
Chaste were his Cellars, and his Shrieval Board
The Grossness of a City Feast abhor'd:
His Cooks, with long disuse, their Trade forgot;
Cool was his Kitchen, tho his Brains were hot.
Such frugal Vertue Malice may accuse,
But sure 'twas necessary to the Jews;
For towns once burnt, such Magistrates require
As dare not tempt Gods Providence by fire.

Absalom and Achitophel

With Spiritual food he fed his Servants well,
But free from flesh, that made the Jews Rebel:
And Mose's Laws he held in more account,
For forty days of Fasting in the Mount.

To speak the rest, who better are forgot,
Would tyre a well-breath'd Witness of the Plot:
Yet, Corah, thou shalt from Oblivion pass;
Erect thy self thou Monumental Brass:
High as the Serpent of thy mettall made,
While Nations stand secure beneath thy shade.
What tho his Birth were base, yet Comets rise
From Earthy Vapours ere they shine in Skies.
Prodigious Actions may as well be done
By Weavers issue, as by Princes Son.
This Arch-Attestor for the Publick Good,
By that one Deed Enobles all his Bloud.
Who ever ask'd the Witnesses high race,
Whose Oath with Martyrdom did Stephen grace?
Ours was a Levite, and as times went then,
His Tribe were Godalmighty's Gentlemen.
Sunk were his Eyes, his Voyce was harsh and loud,
Sure signs he neither Cholerick was, nor Proud:
His long Chin prov'd his Wit, his Saintlike Grace
A Church Vermilion, and a Moses's face;
His Memory, miraculously great,
Could Plots, exceeding mans belief, repeat;
Which, therefore cannot be accounted Lies,
For human Wit could never such devise.
Some future Truths are mingled in his Book;
But, where the witness faild, the Prophet Spoke:
Some things like Visionary flights appear;
The Spirit caught him, up, the Lord knows where:
And gave him his Rabinical degree
Unknown to Foreign University.
His Judgment yet his Memory did excel;
Which piec'd his wonderous Evidence so well:
And suited to the temper of the times;
Then groaning under Jebusitick Crimes.
Let Israels foes suspect his heav'nly call,
And rashly judge his Writ Apocryphal;
Our Laws for such affronts have forfeits made:
He takes his life, who takes away his trade.
Were I my self in witness Corahs place,
The wretch who did me such a dire disgrace,
Should whet my memory, though once forgot,
To make him an Appendix of my Plot.
His Zeal to heav'n, made him his Prince despise,
And load his person with indignities:
But Zeal peculiar priviledge affords;
Indulging latitude to deeds and words.

Absalom and Achitophel

And Corah might for Agag's murther call,
In terms as course as Samuel used to Saul.
What others in his Evidence did Joyn,
(The best that could be had for love or coyn,)
In Corah's own predicament will fall:
For witness is a Common Name to all.

Surrounded thus with Friends of every sort,
Deluded Absalom, forsakes the Court:
Impatient of high hopes, urg'd with renown,
And Fir'd with near possession of a Crown,
Th' admiring Croud are dazled with surprize,
And on his goodly person feed their eyes:
His joy conceal'd, he sets himself to show;
On each side bowing popularly low:
His looks, his gestures, and his words he frames,
And with familiar ease repeats their Names.
Thus, form'd by Nature, furnish'd out with Arts,
He glides unfelt into their secret hearts:
Then with a kind compassionating look,
And sighs, bespeaking pity ere he spoak:
Few words he said; but easy those and fit:
More slow than Hybla drops, and far more sweet.

I mourn, my Countrymen, your lost Estate;
Tho far unable to prevent your fate:
Behold a Banisht man, for your dear cause
Expos'd a prey to Arbitrary laws!
Yet oh! that I alone cou'd be undone,
Cut off from Empire, and no more a Son!
Now all your liberties a spoil are made:
@gypt and Tyrus intercept your trade,
And Jebusites your Sacred Rites invade.
My Father, whom with reverence yet I name,
Charm'd into Ease, is careless of his Fame:
And, brib'd with petty summs of Forreign Gold,
Is grown in Bathsheba's Embraces old.
Exalts his Enemies, his Friends destroys:
And all his pow'r against himself employs.
He gives, and let him give my right away:
But why should he his own, and yours betray?
He only, he can make the Nation bleed,
And he alone from my revenge is freed.
Take then my tears (with that he wip'd his Eyes)
'Tis all the Aid my present power supplies:
No Court Informer can these Arms accuse,
These Arms may Sons against their Fathers use,
And, tis my wish, the next Successors Reign
May make no other Israelite complain.

Youth, Beauty, Graceful Action, seldom fail:

Absalom and Achitophel

But Common Interest always will prevail:
And pity never Ceases to be shown
To him, who makes the peoples wrongs his own.
The Croud, (that still believes their Kings oppress)
With lifted hands their young Messiah bless:
Who now begins his Progress to ordain;
With Chariots, Horsmen, and a numerous train:
From East to West his Glories he displaies:
And, like the Sun, the promis'd land survays.
Fame runs before him, as the morning Star;
And shouts of Joy salute him from afar:
Each house receives him as a Guardian God;
And Consecrates the Place of his aboad:
But hospitable treats did most commend
Wise Issachar, his wealthy western friend.
This moving Court, that caught the peoples Eyes,
And seem'd but Pomp, did other ends disguise:
Achitophel had form'd it, with intent
To sound the depths, and fathom where it went:
The Peoples hearts, distinguish Friends from Foes;
And try their strength, before they came to blows:
Yet all was colour'd with a smooth pretence
Of specious love, and duty to their Prince.
Religion, and Redress of Grievances,
Two names, that always cheat and always please,
Are often urg'd; and good King David's life
Indanger'd by a Brother and a Wife.
Thus, in a Pageant Show, a Plot is made;
And Peace it self is War in Masquerade.
Oh foolish Israel! never warn'd by ill,
Still the same baite, and circumvented still!
Did ever men forsake their present ease,
In midst of health Imagine a desease;
Take pains Contingent mischiefs to foresee,
Make Heirs for Monarks, and for God decree?
What shall we think! can People give away
Both for themselves and Sons, their Native sway?
Then they are left Defensless, to the Sword
Of each unbounded Arbitrary Lord:
And Laws are vain, by which we Rights enjoy,
If Kings unquestiond can those laws destroy.
Yet, if the Crowd be Judge of fit and Just,
And Kings are onely Officers in trust,
Then this resuming Cov'nant was declar'd
When Kings were made, or is for ever bard:
If those who give the Scepter, could not tye
By their own deed their own Posterity,
How then coud Adam bind his future Race?
How coud his forfeit on mankind take place?
Or how coud heavnly Justice damn us all,
Who nere consented to our Fathers fall?

Absalom and Achitophel

Then Kings are slaves to those whom they Command,
And Tenants to their Peoples pleasure stand.
Add, that the Pow'r for Property allowd,
Is mischeivously seated in the Crowd:
For who can be secure of private Right,
If Sovereign sway may be dissolv'd by might?
Nor is the Peoples Judgment always true:
The most may err as grosly as the few.
And faultless Kings run down, by Common Cry,
For Vice, Oppression, and Tyranny.
What Standard is there in a fickle rout,
Which, flowing to the mark, runs faster out?
Nor only Crowds, but Sanherins may be
Infected with the publick Lunacy:
And Share the madness of Rebellious times,
To Murder Monarchs for Imagin'd crimes.
If they may Give and Take when e'r they please,
Not Kings alone, (the Godheads Images,)
But Government it self at length must fall
To Natures state; where all have Right to all.
Yet, grant our Lords the People Kings can make,
What Prudent men a setled Throne would shake?
For whatsoe'r their Sufferings were before,
That Change they Covet makes them suffer more.
All other Errors but disturb a State,
But Innovation is the Blow of Fate.
If ancient Fabricks nod, and threat to fall,
To Patch the Flows, and Buttress up the Wall,
Thus far 'tis Duty; but here fix the Mark:
For all beyond it is to touch our Ark.
To change Foundations, cast the Frame anew,
Is work for Rebels who base Ends pursue:
At once Divine and Humane Laws controul;
And mend the Parts by ruine of the Whole.
The Tampering World is subject to this Curse,
To Physick their Disease into a worse.

Now what Relief can Righteous David bring?
How Fatall 'tis to be too good a King!
Friends he has few, so high the Madness grows;
Who dare be such, must be the Peoples Foes:
Yet some there were, ev'n in the worst of days;
Some let me name, and Naming is to praise.

In this short File Barzillai first appears;
Barzillai crown'd with Honour and with Years:
Long since, the rising Rebels he withstood
In Regions Waste, beyond the Jordans Flood:
Unfortunately Brave to buoy the State;
But sinking underneath his Masters Fate:
In Exile with his Godlike Prince he Mourn'd;

Absalom and Achitophel

For him he Suffer'd, and with him Return'd.
The Court he practis'd, not the Courtier's art:
Large was his Wealth, but larger was his Heart:
Which, well the Noblest Objects know to choose,
The Fighting Warriour, and Recording Muse.
His Bed coud once a Fruitfull Issue boast:
Now more than half a Father's Name is lost.
His Eldest Hope, with every Grace adorn'd,
By me (so Heav'n will have it) always Mourn'd,
And always honour'd, snatcht in Manhoods prime
By unequal Fates, and Providences crime:
Yet not before the Goal of Honour won,
All parts fulfill'd of Subject and of Son;
Swift was the Race, but short the Time to run.
Oh Narrow Circle, but of Pow'r Divine,
Scanted in Space, but perfect in thy Line!
By Sea, by Land, thy Matchless Worth was known;
Arms thy Delight, and War was all thy Own:
Thy force, Infus'd, the fainting Tyrians prop'd:
And Haughty Pharoah found his Fortune stop'd.
Oh Ancient Honour, Oh Unconquer'd Hand,
Whom Foes unpunish'd never coud withstand!
But Israel was unworthy of thy Name:
Short is the date of all Immoderate Fame.
It looks as Heaven our Ruine had design'd,
And durst not trust thy Fortune and thy Mind.
Now, free from Earth, thy disencumbred Soul
Mounts up, and leaves behind the Clouds and Starry Pole:
From thence thy kindred legions mayst thou bring
To aid the guardian Angel of thy King.
Here stop my Muse, here cease thy painfull flight;
No Pinions can pursue Immortal height:
Tell good Barzillai thou canst sing no more,
And tell thy Soul she should have fled before;
Or fled she with his life, and left this Verse
To hang on her departed Patron's Herse?
Now take thy steepy flight from heaven, and see
If thou canst find on earth another He,
Another he would be too hard to find,
See then whom thou canst see not far behind.
Zadock the Priest, whom, shunning Power and Place,
His lowly mind advanc'd to David's Grace:
With him the Sagan of Jerusalem,
Of hospitable Soul and noble Stem;
Him of the Western dome, whose weighty sense
Flows in fit words and heavenly eloquence.
The Prophets Sons by such example led,
To learning and to Loyalty were bred:
For Colleges on bounteous Kings depend,
And never Rebell was to Arts a friend.
To these succeed the Pillars of the Laws,

Absalom and Achitophel

Who best cou'd plead and best can judge a Cause.
Next them a train of Loyal Peers ascend:
Sharp judging Adriel the Muses friend,
Himself a Muse In Sanhedrins debate
True to his Prince; but not a Slave of State.
Whom David's love with Honours did adorn,
That from his disobedient Son were torn.
Jotham of piercing wit and pregnant thought,
Indew'd by nature, and by learning taught
To move Assemblies , who but onely try'd
The worse awhile, then chose the better side;
Nor chose alone, but turn'd the balance too;
So much the weight of one brave man can doe.
Hushai the friend of David in distress,
In publick storms of manly stedfastness;
By foreign treaties he inform'd his Youth;
And join'd experience to his native truth.
His frugal care supply'd the wanting Throne,
Frugal for that, but bounteous of his own:
'Tis easy conduct when Exchequers flow,
But hard the task to manage well the low:
For Sovereign power is too deprest or high,
When Kings are forc'd to sell, or Crowds to buy.
Indulge one labour more my weary Muse,
For Amiel, who can Amiel's praise refuse?
Of ancient race by birth, but nobler yet
In his own worth, and without Title great:
The Sanhedrin long time as chief he rul'd,
Their Reason guided and their Passion coold;
So dexterous was he in the Crown's defence,
So form'd to speak a Loyal Nations Sense,
That as their band was Israel's Tribes in small,
So fit was he to represent them all.
Now rasher Charioteers the Seat ascend,
Whose loose Carriers his steady Skill commend:
They like th' unequal Ruler of the Day,
Misguide the Seasons and mistake the Way;
While he withdrawn at their mad Labour smiles,
And safe enjoys the Sabbath of his Toyls.

These were the chief, a small but faithful Band
Of Worthies, in the Breach who dar'd to stand,
And tempt th' united Fury of the Land.
With grief they view'd such powerful Engines bent,
To batter down the lawful Government.
A numerous Faction with pretended frights,
In Sanhedrins to plume the Regal Rights.
The true Successour from the Court remov'd:
The Plot, by hireling Witnesses improv'd.
These Ills they saw, and as their Duty bound,
They shew'd the King the danger of the Wound:

Absalom and Achitophel

That no Concessions from the Throne woud please,
But Lenitives fomented the Disease:
That Absalom, ambitious of the Crown,
Was made the Lure to draw the People down:
That false Achitophel's pernicious Hate,
Had turn'd the Plot to Ruine Church and State:
The Councill violent, the Rabble worse
That Shimei taught Jerusalem to Curse.

With all these loads of Injuries opprest,
And long revolving, in his carefull Breast,
Th' event of things, at last his patience tir'd,
Thus from his Royal Throne by Heav'n inspir'd,
The God-like David spoke: with awfull fear
His Train their Maker in their Master hear.

Thus long have I, by native mercy sway'd,
My wrongs dissembl'd, my revenge delay'd:
So willing to forgive th' Offending Age,
So much the Father did the King asswage.
But now so far my Clemency they slight,
Th' Offenders question my Forgiving Right.
That one was made for many, they contend;
But 'tis to Rule, for that's a Monarch's End.
They call my tenderness of Blood, my Fear:
Though Manly tempers can the longest bear.
Yet, since they will divert my Native course,
'Tis time to shew I am not Good by Force.
Those heap'd Affronts that haughty Subjects bring,
Are burthens for a Camel, not a King:
Kings are the publick Pillars of the State,
Born to sustain and prop the Nations weight:
If my Young Samson will pretend a Call
To shake the Column, let him share the Fall:
But oh that yet he woud repent and live!
How easie 'tis for Parents to forgive!
With how few Tears a Pardon might be won
From Nature, pleading for a Darling Son!
Poor pitied Youth, by my Paternal care,
Rais'd up to all the Height his Frame coud bear:
Had God ordain'd his fate for Empire born,
He woud have given his Soul another turn:
Gull'd with a Patriots name, whose Modern sense
Is one that woud by Law supplant his Prince:
The Peoples Brave, the Politicians Tool;
Never was Patriot yet, but was a Fool.
Whence comes it that Religion and the Laws
Should more be Absalom's than David's Cause?
His old Instructor, e're he lost his Place,
Was never thought indu'd with so much Grace.
Good Heav'ns, how Faction can a Patriot Paint!

Absalom and Achitophel

My Rebel ever proves my Peoples Saint:
Would They impose an Heir upon the Throne?
Let Sanhedrins be taught to give their Own.
A King's at least a part of Government,
And mine as requisite as their Consent:
Without my Leave a future King to choose,
Infers a Right the Present to Depose:
True, they Petition me t'approve their Choise,
But Esau's Hands suite ill with Jacob's Voice.
My Pious Subjects for my Safety pray,
Which to Secure they take my Power away.
From Plots and Treasons Heaven preserve my years,
But Save me most from my Petitioners.
Unsatiated as the barren Womb or Grave;
God cannot Grant so much as they can Crave.
What then is left but with a Jealous Eye
To guard the Small remains of Royalty?
The Law shall still direct my peacefull Sway,
And the same Law teach Rebels to Obey:
Votes shall no more Establish'd Pow'r controul,
Such Votes as make a Part exceed the Whole;
No groundless Clamours shall my Friends remove,
Nor Crowds have power to Punish ere they Prove:
For Gods, and Godlike Kings their Care express,
Still to Defend their Servants in distress.
Oh that my Power to Saving were confin'd:
Why am I forc'd, like Heaven, against my mind,
To make Examples of another Kind?
Must I at length the Sword of Justice draw?
Oh curst Effects of necessary Law!
How ill my Fear they by my Mercy scan,
Beware the Fury of a Patient Man.
Law they require, let Law then shew her Face;
They could not be content to look on Grace,
Her hinder parts, but with a daring Eye
To tempt the terror of her Front, and Dye.
To their own arts 'tis Righteously decreed
Those dire Artificers of Death shall bleed.
Against themselves their Witnesses will Swear,
Till Viper-like their Mother Plot they tear:
And suck for Nutriment that bloody gore
Which was their Principle of Life before.
Their Belial with their Belzebub will fight;
Thus on my Foes, my Foes shall do me Right:
Nor doubt th' event; for Factious crowds engage
In their first Onset, all their Brutal Rage;
Then, let 'em take an unresisted Course,
Retire and Traverse, and Delude their Force:
But when they stand all Breathless, urge the fight,
And rise upon 'em with redoubled might:
For Lawfull Pow'r is still Superiour found,

Absalom and Achitophel

When long driven back, at length it stands the ground.

He said. Th' Almighty, nodding, gave Consent;
And Peals of Thunder shook the Firmament.
Henceforth a Series of new time began,
The mighty Years in long Procession ran:
Once more the God-like David was Restor'd,
And willing Nations knew their Lawfull Lord.

John Dryden