

Peter Bell the Third

Percy Bysshe Shelley

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Percy Bysshe Shelley

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PETER BELL THE THIRD.

BY MICHING MALLECHO, ESQ.

Is it a party in a parlour,
Crammed just as they on earth were crammed,
Some sipping punch—some sipping tea;
But, as you by their faces see,
All silent, and all—damned!
"Peter Bell", by W. WORDSWORTH.

OPHELIA.—What means this, my lord?

HAMLET.—Marry, this is Miching Mallecho; it means mischief.

SHAKESPEARE.

DEDICATION.

TO THOMAS BROWN, ESQ., THE YOUNGER, H.F.

DEAR TOM—Allow me to request you to introduce Mr. Peter Bell to the respectable family of the Fudges. Although he may fall short of those very considerable personages in the more active properties which characterize the Rat and the Apostate, I suspect that even you, their historian, will confess that he surpasses them in the more peculiarly legitimate qualification of intolerable dullness.

You know Mr. Examiner Hunt; well—it was he who presented me to two of the Mr. Bells. My intimacy with the younger Mr. Bell naturally sprung from this introduction to his brothers. And in presenting him to you, I have the satisfaction of being able to assure you that he is considerably the dullest of the three.

There is this particular advantage in an acquaintance with any one of the Peter Bells, that if you know one Peter Bell, you know three Peter Bells; they are not one, but three; not three, but one. An awful mystery, which, after having caused torrents of blood, and having been hymned by groans enough to deafen the music of the spheres, is at length illustrated to the satisfaction of all parties in the theological world, by the nature of Mr. Peter Bell.

Peter is a polyhedric Peter, or a Peter with many sides. He changes colours like a chameleon, and his coat like a snake. He is a Proteus of a Peter. He was at first sublime, pathetic, impressive, profound; then dull; then prosy and dull; and now dull—oh so very dull! it is an ultra-legitimate dullness.

You will perceive that it is not necessary to consider Hell and the Devil as supernatural machinery. The whole scene of my epic is in 'this world which is'—so Peter informed us before his conversion to "White Obi"—

'The world of all of us, AND WHERE
WE FIND OUR HAPPINESS, OR NOT AT ALL.'

Let me observe that I have spent six or seven days in composing this sublime piece; the orb of my moonlike genius has made the fourth part of its revolution round the dull earth which you inhabit, driving you mad, while it has retained its calmness and its splendour, and I have been fitting this its last phase 'to occupy a permanent station in the literature of my country.'

Your works, indeed, dear Tom, sell better; but mine are far superior. The public is no judge; posterity sets all to rights.

Allow me to observe that so much has been written of Peter Bell, that the present history can be considered only, like the Iliad, as a continuation of that series of cyclic poems, which have already been candidates for bestowing immortality upon, at the same time that they receive it from, his character and adventures. In this point of view I have violated no rule of syntax in beginning my composition with a conjunction; the full stop which closes the poem continued by me being, like the full stops at the end of the Iliad and Odyssey, a full stop of a very qualified import.

Hoping that the immortality which you have given to the Fudges, you will receive from them; and in the firm expectation, that when London shall be an habitation of bitterns; when St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey shall stand, shapeless and nameless ruins, in the midst of an unpeopled marsh; when the piers of Waterloo Bridge shall become the nuclei of islets of reeds and osiers, and cast the jagged shadows of their broken arches on the solitary stream, some transatlantic commentator will be weighing in the scales of some new and now unimagined system of criticism, the respective merits of the Bells and the Fudges, and their historians. I remain, dear Tom, yours sincerely,

MICHING MALLECHO.

December 1, 1819.

P.S.—Pray excuse the date of place; so soon as the profits of the publication come in, I mean to hire lodgings in a more respectable street.

PROLOGUE.

Peter Bells, one, two and three,
O'er the wide world wandering be.—
First, the antenatal Peter,
Wrapped in weeds of the same metre,
The so-long-predestined raiment
Clothed in which to walk his way meant
The second Peter; whose ambition
Is to link the proposition,
As the mean of two extremes—
(This was learned from Aldric's themes)
Shielding from the guilt of schism
The orthodoxal syllogism;
The First Peter—he who was
Like the shadow in the glass
Of the second, yet unripe,
His substantial antitype.—

Then came Peter Bell the Second,
Who henceforward must be reckoned
The body of a double soul,
And that portion of the whole
Without which the rest would seem
Ends of a disjointed dream.—
And the Third is he who has
O'er the grave been forced to pass
To the other side, which is,—
Go and try else,—just like this.

Peter Bell the First was Peter
Smugger, milder, softer, neater,
Like the soul before it is
Born from THAT world into THIS.
The next Peter Bell was he,
Predevote, like you and me,
To good or evil as may come;
His was the severer doom,—
For he was an evil Cotter,
And a polygamic Potter.
And the last is Peter Bell,
Damned since our first parents fell,
Damned eternally to Hell—
Surely he deserves it well!

PART 1. DEATH.

1.

And Peter Bell, when he had been
With fresh—imported Hell—fire warmed,
Grew serious—from his dress and mien
'Twas very plainly to be seen
Peter was quite reformed.

2.

His eyes turned up, his mouth turned down;
His accent caught a nasal twang;
He oiled his hair; there might be heard
The grace of God in every word
Which Peter said or sang.

3.

But Peter now grew old, and had
An ill no doctor could unravel:
His torments almost drove him mad;—
Some said it was a fever bad—
Some swore it was the gravel.

4.

His holy friends then came about,
And with long preaching and persuasion
Convinced the patient that, without
The smallest shadow of a doubt,
He was predestined to damnation.

5.

They said—'Thy name is Peter Bell;
Thy skin is of a brimstone hue;
Alive or dead—ay, sick or well—
The one God made to rhyme with hell;
The other, I think, rhymes with you.

6.

Then Peter set up such a yell!—
The nurse, who with some water gruel
Was climbing up the stairs, as well
As her old legs could climb them—fell,
And broke them both—the fall was cruel.

7.

The Parson from the casement lept
Into the lake of Windermere—
And many an eel—though no adept

In God's right reason for it—kept
Gnawing his kidneys half a year.

8.

And all the rest rushed through the door
And tumbled over one another,
And broke their skulls.—Upon the floor
Meanwhile sat Peter Bell, and swore,
And cursed his father and his mother;

9.

And raved of God, and sin, and death,
Blaspheming like an infidel;
And said, that with his clenched teeth
He'd seize the earth from underneath,
And drag it with him down to hell.

10.

As he was speaking came a spasm,
And wrenched his gnashing teeth asunder;
Like one who sees a strange phantasm
He lay,—there was a silent chasm
Between his upper jaw and under.

11.

And yellow death lay on his face;
And a fixed smile that was not human
Told, as I understand the case,
That he was gone to the wrong place:—
I heard all this from the old woman.

12.

Then there came down from Langdale Pike
A cloud, with lightning, wind and hail;
It swept over the mountains like
An ocean,—and I heard it strike
The woods and crags of Grasmere vale.

13.

And I saw the black storm come
Nearer, minute after minute;
Its thunder made the cataracts dumb;
With hiss, and clash, and hollow hum,
It neared as if the Devil was in it.

14.

The Devil WAS in it—he had bought
Peter for half-a-crown; and when
The storm which bore him vanished, nought
That in the house that storm had caught
Was ever seen again.

15.

The gaping neighbours came next day—
They found all vanished from the shore:
The Bible, whence he used to pray,
Half scorched under a hen-coop lay;
Smashed glass—and nothing more!

PART 2. THE DEVIL.

1.

The Devil, I safely can aver,
Has neither hoof, nor tail, nor sting;
Nor is he, as some sages swear,
A spirit, neither here nor there,
In nothing—yet in everything.

2.

He is—what we are; for sometimes
The Devil is a gentleman;
At others a bard bartering rhymes
For sack; a statesman spinning crimes;
A swindler, living as he can;

3.

A thief, who cometh in the night,
With whole boots and net pantaloons,
Like some one whom it were not right
To mention;—or the luckless wight
From whom he steals nine silver spoons.

4.

But in this case he did appear
Like a slop—merchant from Wapping,
And with smug face, and eye severe,
On every side did perk and peer
Till he saw Peter dead or napping.

5.

He had on an upper Benjamin
(For he was of the driving schism)
In the which he wrapped his skin
From the storm he travelled in,
For fear of rheumatism.

6.

He called the ghost out of the corse;—
It was exceedingly like Peter,—
Only its voice was hollow and hoarse—
It had a queerish look of course—
Its dress too was a little neater.

7.

The Devil knew not his name and lot;
Peter knew not that he was Bell:
Each had an upper stream of thought,

Which made all seem as it was not;
Fitting itself to all things well.

8.
Peter thought he had parents dear,
Brothers, sisters, cousins, cronies,
In the fens of Lincolnshire;
He perhaps had found them there
Had he gone and boldly shown his

9.
Solemn phiz in his own village;
Where he thought oft when a boy
He'd clomb the orchard walls to pillage
The produce of his neighbour's tillage,
With marvellous pride and joy.

10.
And the Devil thought he had,
'Mid the misery and confusion
Of an unjust war, just made
A fortune by the gainful trade
Of giving soldiers rations bad—
The world is full of strange delusion—

11.
That he had a mansion planned
In a square like Grosvenor Square,
That he was aping fashion, and
That he now came to Westmoreland
To see what was romantic there.

12.
And all this, though quite ideal,—
Ready at a breath to vanish,—
Was a state not more unreal
Than the peace he could not feel,
Or the care he could not banish.

13.
After a little conversation,
The Devil told Peter, if he chose,
He'd bring him to the world of fashion
By giving him a situation
In his own service—and new clothes.

14.
And Peter bowed, quite pleased and proud,
And after waiting some few days
For a new livery—dirty yellow
Turned up with black—the wretched fellow

Peter Bell the Third

Was bowled to Hell in the Devil's chaise.

PART 3. HELL.

1.

Hell is a city much like London—
A populous and a smoky city;
There are all sorts of people undone,
And there is little or no fun done;
Small justice shown, and still less pity.

2.

There is a Castles, and a Canning,
A Cobbett, and a Castlereagh;
All sorts of caitiff corpses planning
All sorts of cozening for trepanning
Corpses less corrupt than they.

3.

There is a ***, who has lost
His wits, or sold them, none knows which;
He walks about a double ghost,
And though as thin as Fraud almost—
Ever grows more grim and rich.

4.

There is a Chancery Court; a King;
A manufacturing mob; a set
Of thieves who by themselves are sent
Similar thieves to represent;
An army; and a public debt.

5.

Which last is a scheme of paper money,
And means—being interpreted—
'Bees, keep your wax—give us the honey,
And we will plant, while skies are sunny,
Flowers, which in winter serve instead.'

6.

There is a great talk of revolution—
And a great chance of despotism—
German soldiers—camps—confusion—
Tumults—lotteries—rage—delusion—
Gin—suicide—and methodism;

7.

Taxes too, on wine and bread,
And meat, and beer, and tea, and cheese,
From which those patriots pure are fed,

Who gorge before they reel to bed
The tenfold essence of all these.

8.
There are mincing women, mewing,
(Like cats, who amant misere,)
Of their own virtue, and pursuing
Their gentler sisters to that ruin,
Without which—what were chastity?

9.
Lawyers—judges—old hobnobbers
Are there—bailiffs—chancellors—
Bishops—great and little robbers—
Rhymesters—pamphleteers—stock-jobbers—
Men of glory in the wars,—

10.
Things whose trade is, over ladies
To lean, and flirt, and stare, and simper,
Till all that is divine in woman
Grows cruel, courteous, smooth, inhuman,
Crucified 'twixt a smile and whimper.

11.
Thrusting, toiling, wailing, moiling,
Frowning, preaching—such a riot!
Each with never-ceasing labour,
Whilst he thinks he cheats his neighbour,
Cheating his own heart of quiet.

12.
And all these meet at levees;—
Dinners convivial and political;—
Suppers of epic poets;—teas,
Where small talk dies in agonies;—
Breakfasts professional and critical;

13.
Lunches and snacks so aldermanic
That one would furnish forth ten dinners,
Where reigns a Cretan-tongued panic,
Lest news Russ, Dutch, or Alemannic
Should make some losers, and some winners—

45.
At conversazioni—balls—
Conventicles—and drawing-rooms—
Courts of law—committees—calls
Of a morning—clubs—book-stalls—
Churches—masquerades—and tombs.

15.

And this is Hell—and in this smother
All are damnable and damned;
Each one damning, damns the other;
They are damned by one another,
By none other are they damned.

16.

'Tis a lie to say, 'God damns'!
Where was Heaven's Attorney General
When they first gave out such flams?
Let there be an end of shams,
They are mines of poisonous mineral.

17.

Statesmen damn themselves to be
Cursed; and lawyers damn their souls
To the auction of a fee;
Churchmen damn themselves to see
God's sweet love in burning coals.

18.

The rich are damned, beyond all cure,
To taunt, and starve, and trample on
The weak and wretched; and the poor
Damn their broken hearts to endure
Stripe on stripe, with groan on groan.

19.

Sometimes the poor are damned indeed
To take,—not means for being blessed,—
But Cobbett's snuff, revenge; that weed
From which the worms that it doth feed
Squeeze less than they before possessed.

20.

And some few, like we know who,
Damned—but God alone knows why—
To believe their minds are given
To make this ugly Hell a Heaven;
In which faith they live and die.

21.

Thus, as in a town, plague-stricken,
Each man be he sound or no
Must indifferently sicken;
As when day begins to thicken,
None knows a pigeon from a crow,—

22.

So good and bad, sane and mad,
The oppressor and the oppressed;
Those who weep to see what others
Smile to inflict upon their brothers;
Lovers, haters, worst and best;

23.

All are damned—they breathe an air,
Thick, infected, joy-dispelling:
Each pursues what seems most fair,
Mining like moles, through mind, and there
Scoop palace—caverns vast, where Care
In throned state is ever dwelling.

PART 4. SIN.

1.

Lo. Peter in Hell's Grosvenor Square,
A footman in the Devil's service!
And the misjudging world would swear
That every man in service there
To virtue would prefer vice.

2.

But Peter, though now damned, was not
What Peter was before damnation.
Men oftentimes prepare a lot
Which ere it finds them, is not what
Suits with their genuine station.

3.

All things that Peter saw and felt
Had a peculiar aspect to him;
And when they came within the belt
Of his own nature, seemed to melt,
Like cloud to cloud, into him.

4.

And so the outward world uniting
To that within him, he became
Considerably uninviting
To those who, meditation slighting,
Were moulded in a different frame.

5.

And he scorned them, and they scorned him;
And he scorned all they did; and they
Did all that men of their own trim
Are wont to do to please their whim,
Drinking, lying, swearing, play.

6.

Such were his fellow-servants; thus
His virtue, like our own, was built
Too much on that indignant fuss
Hypocrite Pride stirs up in us
To bully one another's guilt.

7.

He had a mind which was somehow
At once circumference and centre
Of all he might or feel or know;

Nothing went ever out, although
Something did ever enter.

8.

He had as much imagination
As a pint-pot;—he never could
Fancy another situation,
From which to dart his contemplation,
Than that wherein he stood.

9.

Yet his was individual mind,
And new created all he saw
In a new manner, and refined
Those new creations, and combined
Them, by a master-spirit's law.

10.

Thus—though unimaginative—
An apprehension clear, intense,
Of his mind's work, had made alive
The things it wrought on; I believe
Wakening a sort of thought in sense.

11.

But from the first 'twas Peter's drift
To be a kind of moral eunuch,
He touched the hem of Nature's shift,
Felt faint—and never dared uplift
The closest, all-concealing tunic.

12.

She laughed the while, with an arch smile,
And kissed him with a sister's kiss,
And said—My best Diogenes,
I love you well—but, if you please,
Tempt not again my deepest bliss.

13.

"Tis you are cold—for I, not coy,
Yield love for love, frank, warm, and true;
And Burns, a Scottish peasant boy—
His errors prove it—knew my joy
More, learned friend, than you.

14.

'Boeca bacciata non perde ventura,
Anzi rinnuova come fa la luna:—
So thought Boccaccio, whose sweet words might cure a a
Male prude, like you, from what you now endure, a
Low-tide in soul, like a stagnant laguna.

15.

Then Peter rubbed his eyes severe.
And smoothed his spacious forehead down
With his broad palm;—'twixt love and fear,
He looked, as he no doubt felt, queer,
And in his dream sate down.

16.

The Devil was no uncommon creature;
A leaden-witted thief—just huddled
Out of the dross and scum of nature;
A toad-like lump of limb and feature,
With mind, and heart, and fancy muddled.

17.

He was that heavy, dull, cold thing,
The spirit of evil well may be:
A drone too base to have a sting;
Who gluts, and grimes his lazy wing,
And calls lust, luxury.

18.

Now he was quite the kind of wight
Round whom collect, at a fixed aera,
Venison, turtle, hock, and claret,—
Good cheer—and those who come to share it—
And best East Indian madeira!

19.

It was his fancy to invite
Men of science, wit, and learning,
Who came to lend each other light;
He proudly thought that his gold's might
Had set those spirits burning.

20.

And men of learning, science, wit,
Considered him as you and I
Think of some rotten tree, and sit
Lounging and dining under it,
Exposed to the wide sky.

21.

And all the while with loose fat smile,
The willing wretch sat winking there,
Believing 'twas his power that made
That jovial scene—and that all paid
Homage to his unnoticed chair.

22.

Peter Bell the Third

Though to be sure this place was Hell;
He was the Devil—and all they—
What though the claret circled well,
And wit, like ocean, rose and fell?—
Were damned eternally.

PART 5. GRACE.

1.

Among the guests who often stayed
Till the Devil's petits-soupers,
A man there came, fair as a maid,
And Peter noted what he said,
Standing behind his master's chair.

2.

He was a mighty poet—and
A subtle-souled psychologist;
All things he seemed to understand,
Of old or new—of sea or land—
But his own mind—which was a mist.

3.

This was a man who might have turned
Hell into Heaven—and so in gladness
A Heaven unto himself have earned;
But he in shadows undiscerned
Trusted.—and damned himself to madness.

4.

He spoke of poetry, and how
'Divine it was—a light—a love—
A spirit which like wind doth blow
As it listeth, to and fro;
A dew rained down from God above;

5.

'A power which comes and goes like dream,
And which none can ever trace—
Heaven's light on earth—Truth's brightest beam.'
And when he ceased there lay the gleam
Of those words upon his face.

6.

Now Peter, when he heard such talk,
Would, heedless of a broken pate,
Stand like a man asleep, or balk
Some wishing guest of knife or fork,
Or drop and break his master's plate.

7.

At night he oft would start and wake
Like a lover, and began
In a wild measure songs to make

On moor, and glen, and rocky lake,
And on the heart of man—

8.
And on the universal sky—
And the wide earth's bosom green,—
And the sweet, strange mystery
Of what beyond these things may lie,
And yet remain unseen.

9.
For in his thought he visited
The spots in which, ere dead and damned,
He his wayward life had led;
Yet knew not whence the thoughts were fed
Which thus his fancy crammed.

10.
And these obscure remembrances
Stirred such harmony in Peter,
That, whensoever he should please,
He could speak of rocks and trees
In poetic metre.

11.
For though it was without a sense
Of memory, yet he remembered well
Many a ditch and quick-set fence;
Of lakes he had intelligence,
He knew something of heath and fell.

12.
He had also dim recollections
Of pedlars tramping on their rounds;
Milk-pans and pails; and odd collections
Of saws, and proverbs; and reflections
Old parsons make in burying-grounds.

13.
But Peter's verse was clear, and came
Announcing from the frozen hearth
Of a cold age, that none might tame
The soul of that diviner flame
It augured to the Earth:

14.
Like gentle rains, on the dry plains,
Making that green which late was gray,
Or like the sudden moon, that stains
Some gloomy chamber's window-panes
With a broad light like day.

15.

For language was in Peter's hand
Like clay while he was yet a potter;
And he made songs for all the land,
Sweet both to feel and understand,
As pipkins late to mountain Cotter.

16.

And Mr. —, the bookseller,
Gave twenty pounds for some;—then scorning
A footman's yellow coat to wear,
Peter, too proud of heart, I fear,
Instantly gave the Devil warning.

17.

Whereat the Devil took offence,
And swore in his soul a great oath then,
'That for his damned impertinence
He'd bring him to a proper sense
Of what was due to gentlemen!'

PART 6. DAMNATION.

1.

'O that mine enemy had written
A book!'—cried Job:—a fearful curse,
If to the Arab, as the Briton,
'Twas galling to be critic—bitten:—
The Devil to Peter wished no worse.

2.

When Peter's next new book found vent,
The Devil to all the first Reviews
A copy of it slyly sent,
With five—pound note as compliment,
And this short notice—'Pray abuse.'

3.

Then seriatim, month and quarter,
Appeared such mad tirades.—One said—
'Peter seduced Mrs. Foy's daughter,
Then drowned the mother in Ullswater,
The last thing as he went to bed.'

4.

Another—'Let him shave his head!
Where's Dr. Willis?—Or is he joking?
What does the rascal mean or hope,
No longer imitating Pope,
In that barbarian Shakespeare poking?'

5.

One more, 'Is incest not enough?
And must there be adultery too?
Grace after meat? Miscreant and Liar!
Thief! Blackguard! Scoundrel! Fool! hell—fire
Is twenty times too good for you.

6.

'By that last book of yours WE think
You've double damned yourself to scorn;
We warned you whilst yet on the brink
You stood. From your black name will shrink
The babe that is unborn.'

7.

All these Reviews the Devil made
Up in a parcel, which he had
Safely to Peter's house conveyed.

For carriage, tenpence Peter paid—
Untied them—read them—went half mad.

8.

'What!' cried he, 'this is my reward
For nights of thought, and days, of toil?
Do poets, but to be abhorred
By men of whom they never heard,
Consume their spirits' oil?

9.

'What have I done to them?—and who
IS Mrs. Foy? 'Tis very cruel
To speak of me and Betty so!
Adultery! God defend me! Oh!
I've half a mind to fight a duel.

10.

'Or,' cried he, a grave look collecting,
'Is it my genius, like the moon,
Sets those who stand her face inspecting,
That face within their brain reflecting,
Like a crazed bell—chime, out of tune?'

11.

For Peter did not know the town,
But thought, as country readers do,
For half a guinea or a crown,
He bought oblivion or renown
From God's own voice in a review.

12.

All Peter did on this occasion
Was, writing some sad stuff in prose.
It is a dangerous invasion
When poets criticize; their station
Is to delight, not pose.

13.

The Devil then sent to Leipsic fair
For Born's translation of Kant's book;
A world of words, tail foremost, where
Right—wrong—false—true—and foul—and fair
As in a lottery—wheel are shook.

14.

Five thousand crammed octavo pages
Of German psychologies,—he
Who his furor verborum assuages
Thereon, deserves just seven months' wages
More than will e'er be due to me.

15.

I looked on them nine several days,
And then I saw that they were bad;
A friend, too, spoke in their dispraise,—
He never read them;—with amaze
I found Sir William Drummond had.

16.

When the book came, the Devil sent
It to P. Verbovale, Esquire,
With a brief note of compliment,
By that night's Carlisle mail. It went,
And set his soul on fire.

17.

Fire, which ex luce praebens fumum,
Made him beyond the bottom see
Of truth's clear well—when I and you, Ma'am,
Go, as we shall do, subter humum,
We may know more than he.

18.

Now Peter ran to seed in soul
Into a walking paradox;
For he was neither part nor whole,
Nor good, nor bad—nor knave nor fool;
—Among the woods and rocks

19.

Furious he rode, where late he ran,
Lashing and spurring his tame hobby;
Turned to a formal puritan,
A solemn and unsexual man,—
He half believed "White Obi".

20.

This steed in vision he would ride,
High trotting over nine-inch bridges,
With Flibbertigibbet, imp of pride,
Mocking and mowing by his side—
A mad-brained goblin for a guide—
Over corn-fields, gates, and hedges.

21.

After these ghastly rides, he came
Home to his heart, and found from thence
Much stolen of its accustomed flame;
His thoughts grew weak, drowsy, and lame
Of their intelligence.

22.

To Peter's view, all seemed one hue;
He was no Whig, he was no Tory;
No Deist and no Christian he;—
He got so subtle, that to be
Nothing, was all his glory.

23.

One single point in his belief
From his organization sprung,
The heart-enrooted faith, the chief
Ear in his doctrines' blighted sheaf,
That 'Happiness is wrong';

24.

So thought Calvin and Dominic;
So think their fierce successors, who
Even now would neither stint nor stick
Our flesh from off our bones to pick,
If they might 'do their do.'

25.

His morals thus were undermined:—
The old Peter—the hard, old Potter—
Was born anew within his mind;
He grew dull, harsh, sly, unrefined,
As when he tramped beside the Otter.

26.

In the death hues of agony
Lambently flashing from a fish,
Now Peter felt amused to see
Shades like a rainbow's rise and flee,
Mixed with a certain hungry wish.

27.

So in his Country's dying face
He looked—and, lovely as she lay,
Seeking in vain his last embrace,
Wailing her own abandoned case,
With hardened sneer he turned away:

28.

And coolly to his own soul said;—
'Do you not think that we might make
A poem on her when she's dead:—
Or, no—a thought is in my head—
Her shroud for a new sheet I'll take:

29.

'My wife wants one.—Let who will bury

This mangled corpse! And I and you,
My dearest Soul, will then make merry,
As the Prince Regent did with Sherry,—
'Ay—and at last desert me too.'

30.

And so his Soul would not be gay,
But moaned within him; like a fawn
Moaning within a cave, it lay
Wounded and wasting, day by day,
Till all its life of life was gone.

31.

As troubled skies stain waters clear,
The storm in Peter's heart and mind
Now made his verses dark and queer:
They were the ghosts of what they were,
Shaking dim grave—clothes in the wind.

32.

For he now raved enormous folly,
Of Baptisms, Sunday—schools, and Graves,
'Twould make George Colman melancholy
To have heard him, like a male Molly,
Chanting those stupid staves.

33.

Yet the Reviews, who heaped abuse
On Peter while he wrote for freedom,
So soon as in his song they spy
The folly which soothes tyranny,
Praise him, for those who feed 'em.

34.

'He was a man, too great to scan;—
A planet lost in truth's keen rays:—
His virtue, awful and prodigious;—
He was the most sublime, religious,
Pure—minded Poet of these days.'

35.

As soon as he read that, cried Peter,
'Eureka! I have found the way
To make a better thing of metre
Than e'er was made by living creature
Up to this blessed day.'

36.

Then Peter wrote odes to the Devil;—
In one of which he meekly said:
'May Carnage and Slaughter,

Thy niece and thy daughter,
May Rapine and Famine,
Thy gorge ever cramming,
Glut thee with living and dead!

37.

'May Death and Damnation,
And Consternation,
Flit up from Hell with pure intent!
Slash them at Manchester,
Glasgow, Leeds, and Chester;
Drench all with blood from Avon to Trent.

38.

'Let thy body-guard yeomen
Hew down babes and women,
And laugh with bold triumph till Heaven be rent!
When Moloch in Jewry
Munched children with fury,
It was thou, Devil, dining with pure intent.

PART 7. DOUBLE DAMNATION.

1.

The Devil now knew his proper cue.—
Soon as he read the ode, he drove
To his friend Lord MacMurderchouse's,
A man of interest in both houses,
And said:—'For money or for love,

2.

'Pray find some cure or sinecure;
To feed from the superfluous taxes
A friend of ours—a poet—fewer
Have fluttered tamer to the lure
Than he.' His lordship stands and racks his

3.

Stupid brains, while one might count
As many beads as he had boroughs,—
At length replies; from his mean front,
Like one who rubs out an account,
Smoothing away the unmeaning furrows:

4.

'It happens fortunately, dear Sir,
I can. I hope I need require
No pledge from you, that he will stir
In our affairs;—like Oliver.
That he'll be worthy of his hire.'

5.

These words exchanged, the news sent off
To Peter, home the Devil hied,—
Took to his bed; he had no cough,
No doctor,—meat and drink enough.—
Yet that same night he died.

6.

The Devil's corpse was leaded down;
His decent heirs enjoyed his pelf,
Mourning—coaches, many a one,
Followed his hearse along the town:—
Where was the Devil himself?

7.

When Peter heard of his promotion,
His eyes grew like two stars for bliss:
There was a bow of sleek devotion

Engendering in his back; each motion
Seemed a Lord's shoe to kiss.

8.
He hired a house, bought plate, and made
A genteel drive up to his door,
With sifted gravel neatly laid,—
As if defying all who said,
Peter was ever poor.

9.
But a disease soon struck into
The very life and soul of Peter—
He walked about—slept—had the hue
Of health upon his cheeks—and few
Dug better—none a heartier eater.

10.
And yet a strange and horrid curse
Clung upon Peter, night and day;
Month after month the thing grew worse,
And deadlier than in this my verse
I can find strength to say.

11.
Peter was dull—he was at first
Dull—oh, so dull—so very dull!
Whether he talked, wrote, or rehearsed—
Still with this dulness was he cursed—
Dull—beyond all conception—dull.

12.
No one could read his books—no mortal,
But a few natural friends, would hear him;
The parson came not near his portal;
His state was like that of the immortal
Described by Swift—no man could bear him.

13.
His sister, wife, and children yawned,
With a long, slow, and drear ennui,
All human patience far beyond;
Their hopes of Heaven each would have pawned,
Anywhere else to be.

14.
But in his verse, and in his prose,
The essence of his dulness was
Concentred and compressed so close,
'Twould have made Guatimozin doze
On his red gridiron of brass.

15.

A printer's boy, folding those pages,
Fell slumbrously upon one side;
Like those famed Seven who slept three ages.
To wakeful frenzy's vigil—rages,
As opiates, were the same applied.

16.

Even the Reviewers who were hired
To do the work of his reviewing,
With adamantine nerves, grew tired;—
Gaping and torpid they retired,
To dream of what they should be doing.

17.

And worse and worse, the drowsy curse
Yawned in him, till it grew a pest—
A wide contagious atmosphere,
Creeping like cold through all things near;
A power to infect and to infest.

18.

His servant—maids and dogs grew dull;
His kitten, late a sportive elf;
The woods and lakes, so beautiful,
Of dim stupidity were full.
All grew dull as Peter's self.

19.

The earth under his feet—the springs,
Which lived within it a quick life,
The air, the winds of many wings,
That fan it with new murmurings,
Were dead to their harmonious strife.

20.

The birds and beasts within the wood,
The insects, and each creeping thing,
Were now a silent multitude;
Love's work was left unwrought—no brood
Near Peter's house took wing.

21.

And every neighbouring cottager
Stupidly yawned upon the other:
No jackass brayed; no little cur
Cocked up his ears;—no man would stir
To save a dying mother.

22.

Yet all from that charmed district went
But some half-idiot and half-knave,
Who rather than pay any rent,
Would live with marvellous content,
Over his father's grave.

23.

No bailiff dared within that space,
For fear of the dull charm, to enter;
A man would bear upon his face,
For fifteen months in any case,
The yawn of such a venture.

24.

Seven miles above—below—around—
This pest of dulness holds its sway;
A ghastly life without a sound;
To Peter's soul the spell is bound—
How should it ever pass away?