

PLYMOUTH BROTHER

Roy Daniells

I WAS BORN IN A SMALL semi-detached brick house in south London, on the borders of Kent.* As I came into the world, my father and grandfather were on their knees in the next room, praying for me and for my mother. And I grew up in this house where prayers and hymns were the wings that carried life forward and upward.

“When I shall wake in that fair morn of morns / After whose dawning never night returns / And in whose glory day eternal burns / I shall be satisfied, be satisfied.” That is what they sang of a Sunday evening, after the gospel meeting, friends coming in for coffee and cakes, my mother at the piano. “When I shall gaze upon the face of Him / Who died for me with eye no longer dim / And praise Him in the everlasting hymn / I shall be satisfied, be satisfied.”

Then I would go to bed upstairs, where my grandparents lived, look out the window across the London-Brighton railway line to the Crystal Palace to see if there were any fireworks. “Now I lay me down to sleep I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. . . .”

My grandfather might come in when the gas was turned out and pop a peppermint into my mouth. One night, as the bag became empty, he said, “The last of the Mohicans.” After that I called peppermints Monekies. I had a certain knack of getting things wrong. My attempt at reciting the 23rd Psalm began, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want Him.”

My parents and grandparents were Plymouth Brethren, a group that actually originated in Ireland but had one of its earliest and largest English congregations in Plymouth. We called ourselves Christians gathered in the name of the Lord, avoiding any denominational name; we spoke of each local gathering as an assembly. We had no head, Christ in heaven being the head of the church; we needed no priest, for were we not all made “kings and priests unto God” (*Revelation* 1:6). (We were the descendants of those middle-class Independents who were so useful to Cromwell in his cavalry regiments and for whose liberty of worship Cromwell pleaded so eloquently to a Presbyterian-dominated Parliament.)

We had no confession, no prayer-book, no creed, no formal theology — nothing but the open Bible, the King James Version, the word of God. Each of us

*This essay was among Roy Daniells' papers when he died in 1979. In a slightly different form, it was broadcast in 1979 over CBC radio. ED.

read it for himself and hardly needed an interpreter, for the Holy Ghost, as Jesus had promised, would lead us into all truth. Brethren literally wore out Bibles by daily reading. There were occasional odd stories about Bibles. A soldier carrying one in his haversack might be struck by a bullet which embedded itself as far as a last unbroken page where some portentous text was found: "He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways" — the 91st Psalm.

We read the Bible continuously, so as to remember every word of it; we memorized whole Psalms and whole chapters of the New Testament. We were not critical — who could be of God's Word? — and if we compared one text with another it was never to see whether they agreed; we found prophecies in the Old Testament that were fulfilled in the New Testament. "Out of Egypt have I called my son" in the Old Testament was a prophecy fulfilled when Joseph, Mary and the child Jesus took refuge from Herod in Egypt and later returned home. The Bible was a seamless web; there were no loose ends or contradictions or statements without a profound spiritual meaning.

Occasionally, as a child, I opened the Bible quite at random, seeking enlightenment. (*Sortes Virgilianae* the Classics people call this.) I tried it once in bed and read "Thou shalt not get down from the bed whereon thou art gone up but shalt surely die." I hopped out instantly and hit the floor, before the words could take effect.

Accepting the Bible as the word of God, we really had no problems of any kind. We did not worry about the state of the world for we were merely passing through it to a much better and eternal world. The Bible kept asserting its own authority and this we accepted without question. Problems of authentic texts, of contradictions, of bloody massacres and murders in the Old Testament, or prophecies, miracles and wonders: well, no question arose. We knew that the whale swallowed Jonah and kept him in its belly for three days, for was not this a type of the death and resurrection of Christ? We knew that Noah had at least two of each kind of creature in the ark and to question the sanitary conditions in the ark, after nearly a year, never even occurred to us. When Christ said to his disciples, "I will make you fishers of men!" this seemed to us a very beautiful image; that fishermen kill all they catch — well, again, it never occurred to us. Once the Bible is felt to be the word of God, all questions cease. Reason retires behind the curtains; faith takes the centre of the stage. Faith does not ask for evidence or scrutinize testimony or sift out proofs. As Saint Paul said: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (*Hebrews 11:1*). Having the English Bible, we needed no Latin, Greek or Hebrew but we would have agreed with Tertullian, that early Father of the Church, "*Certum est quia impossibile est.*" If you have faith you believe the rationally impossible.

The English Bible! Most of us had the firm impression that God spoke English and had said at the beginning, "LET THERE BE LIGHT!" He could not have said

it in any other language. The English were, in any case, God's chosen people and Christ was very English: "And did those feet in ancient time / Walk upon England's mountains green / And was the holy Lamb of God / In England's pleasant pastures seen!" These lines of William Blake used to be sung at the great political gatherings of the Labour Party. The English were chosen to spread the gospel to all the world; the Brethren were unstinting in their support of missionaries, and stories of Livingstone and his like were on every child's bookshelf. "What though the spicy breezes / Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle / Where every prospect pleases / And only man is vile" (we sang this in Sunday School). "In vain with loving kindness / The gifts of God are strown; The heathen in their blindness / Bow down to wood and stone." (So much for the inhabitants of Sri Lanka.)

Having no creed, no priesthood, no sacred edifices or holy days, no Book of Common Prayer or Order of the Mass, we were committed to the Bible, those square black letters bitten into the white page. We knew it by heart; from between its lines we rose directly toward heaven where Christ sat at the right hand of God, our Redeemer and Advocate, our Lord and Saviour, who would soon come again; the words were more firm and immediate in our minds than our own names and addresses: "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: And so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 *Thessalonians* 4: 16-17).

WHAT I HAVE BEEN GIVING YOU is a recollection of my childhood in England. But now we came to Canada.

My father was a carpenter, who had risen to become an independent builder, but Lloyd George brought in a system of taxation that made it increasingly hard to raise risk capital and my father remembered that as a very young man he had worked in Canada, in the mining towns of British Columbia and in Victoria. So to Victoria we came and joined the Plymouth Brethren there, in a hall on Pandora Street, soon moving to Blanshard Street, to an old rickety wooden hall next to a nice brick synagogue.

I got a long letter from my grandfather in England, in his careful bent script, wishing me well in Canada, telling me he would pray for me and hoping I would grow up to be a man of God. But here in Canada my life changed drastically. At home things were the same; the same kindness and love prevailed. At South Park School it was rather uncomfortable; it was full of recent Scottish and Irish emigrants who did not much esteem us softer English. And in the assembly of the Brethren on Blanshard Street the changes were terrifying.

As I have said, the Brethren needed neither priesthood nor clergy. But we did have so-called "ministering brethren" who moved from assembly to assembly for shorter or longer series of meetings, particularly gospel meetings and expositions of the scriptures. Men with names like McGrath and McClure, who hailed from Scotland or Ulster, in whose veins ran the blood of Covenanters, Recusants, Calvinists and such, who in past centuries had been persecuted and had in turn persecuted. "Will you take the Test? If not, Make ready, present, fire, and there lay the Recusant." They were passionate men, intent on preaching Christ, denouncing the world and warning sinners. They loved to dwell on the imminence of judgment and the end of the world; they told us of the rich man and Lazarus. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (*Luke* 13:3). We sat under them as they thundered from the platform, night after night.

I felt myself now to be a sinner who might at any moment be irremediably lost. Instant and everlasting destruction hung over me like the sword of Damocles. Christ might come at any instant and take the saved, leaving me for judgment. I knew the very words that Jesus said: "Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left" (*Matthew* 24:40). I have come home from school, opened the kitchen door and found no one in the house, called "Mother! Mother!" No answer. I would search the house and through the garden, full of fear. Nobody there. Then I've reeled against the doorpost with the conviction, Christ has come; they're all gone; I'm left for judgment. Later my mother would come back from a visit to a neighbour and find me white and trembling, hardly able to speak. This happened many times, for the terror of the second coming was thrust into our vitals at every turn. From this ultimate terror, this fear of eternal fire and torment, one never recovers. It is the extreme and final terror to which the mind and body, the heart and soul, the whole crushed and dismembered personality of a child can be subjected.

The ministering brethren, leaning over the lectern that held their outspread Bible, would also threaten us with the sin against the Holy Ghost. This was a mysterious and terrible possibility. By some act or other, perhaps scarcely voluntary, we might offend the Holy Ghost and He would depart from us, never to return. Or we might allow some blasphemous thought to lodge for a moment in our minds, which would seal our fate at the last judgment. The terrible texts poured, many of them uttered by Christ himself. We were told, of course, that none of these horrors need overwhelm us. We had only to repent and believe the gospel to be forever safe. To people like my father this had been simple. He told me once about his own conversion: "When I saw what Christ had done and suffered for me," he said, "I came to Him with all my heart."

I longed to follow his example but there was one enormous, insuperable difficulty — the nature of belief. We knew that to believe the facts of the gospel

story was not enough: "The devils also believe and tremble" (*James* 2:19). One had to believe in some special way; one must trust in Christ and believe that His sacrifice had taken away one's sins. Christ only received those who believe that He received them. In order to obtain salvation, one had to believe one had obtained it. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (*Hebrews* 11:1). The proof of your salvation is the belief that you have it, apparently.

Here was for me the dilemma, the catch-22, the revolving door that seemed to take one into the kingdom but always delivered one back outside again. Many times, over decades rather than years, I came to Christ and committed myself into His hands; always with the same result, a complete blank; I never had any sense of His presence as my saviour. The Holy Ghost, the scriptures said, would enter my heart and fill me with comfort and joy and lead me into all truth. It didn't happen.

"Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" (*Matthew* 11:28). Why did I fail — so utterly and repeatedly — to realize this promise?

You are a Catholic? You will perhaps tell me that I failed to advantage myself of the powers given by Christ to Peter, powers transmitted by the laying on of hands to the priest of today — "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom" (*Matthew* 16:19). You are a High Anglican? You will perhaps say something similar, with a slight check at Henry VIII. Both of you will probably add that I failed to perceive in the bread and wine of the sacrament the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ. "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in Me and I in him" (*John* 6:56). Or perhaps you are a Calvinist and will hazard that I was not one of the elect, was never predestined to salvation. "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom he called them He also justified" (*Romans* 8:30).

You are a rationalist? And will remind me that if we believe absurdities we shall suffer penalties. You are a psychologist? And will recall that pulsation in either cranial hemisphere may give a sensation of extreme fear, of ultimate terror? You are a medical practitioner? You may remind me that feelings of sinking into the abyss may come from simple aortic stenosis.

And the good lady distributing gospel tracts outside Eaton's store on Granville Street had her own answer. Christ, she told me, had cured her of cancer; as for me, "You did not go all the way," she said, "You did not go all the way." (Actually I had always believed that the Good Shepherd went all the way to find the lost sheep and not vice versa.)

I have good friends in the United Church of Canada and they will say very gently that I should have avoided introspection and tried to do some good, something Christlike, in the community. My excuse is that, if you find yourself in a

burning building, in suffocating smoke, with dynamite in the attic, you have to get out yourself and breathe some fresh air before you can save anyone else. I could never seem to get out.

When I was about fifteen, out of a kind of desperate desire to get on the right road, I made a profession of faith, was baptized and was brought into fellowship. Baptism took place in a galvanized iron tank under the platform and was by total immersion. One came up gasping out of the water as the assembly sang with fervor and conviction, "Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph o'er His foes." One was experiencing Christ's triumph over death but unfortunately I felt no sense of triumph; I simply felt wet. If you are a Baptist, you may tell me I totally failed to understand the nature of baptism. As Peter says, "Baptism doth also now save us . . . by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21).

I sat with the assembly, partook of the elements as they were passed from hand to hand, even, on occasion, gave thanks for the bread and broke it, gave thanks for the wine and poured it. I ascended the platform with my father and we preached "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son" (John 3:16). And I have stood at the corner of Government and Johnson Streets in Victoria, where we formed a circle, sang hymns and heard one of our number cry out the word of the gospel to all who passed and to any drunks who would lean against the brick wall and seem to listen. Much like the Salvation Army in its palmy days.

You will say I was a damned hypocrite, lacking in moral decency and intellectual honesty. *Mea culpa*. It is true: I had neither courage nor independence; they had been drained out of me. And remember, I was trapped in that revolving door, between a willingness to believe and the certainty of believing, that door that never stopped long enough to deliver me into the kingdom of God.

I shall never forget Victoria Hall, on Blanshard Street. It was a big, old frame building, rotten with decay and due to fall. The ceiling was high and stained. There was neither carpet, nor flowers, nor altar, nor pictures, nor amenities of any kind. Only a platform with a table and its old green tablecloth with drooping fringes, a woodburning stove and, I may add, absolutely deplorable wash-room facilities. The walls were hung with blue texts on yellow paper, printed in Kilmarnock and framed in picture railing. There were a great many chairs, all of them hard on the spine. All this signalled that the world was a very temporary and passing affair and our minds ought to be elsewhere.

The effect of all the Bible reading, the preaching and the prayer meetings was simple, cumulative, undeviating, and finally overwhelming. It was a polarity. Heaven shone above; hell gaped beneath. Heaven meant the presence of God, His holiness, wisdom, mercy and loving kindness, God the Father, with Christ at His right hand and the Holy Ghost one with them both. Hell meant eternal

torment, prepared for the Devil and his angels. Two thieves were crucified with Christ; one went up and the other down.

Now if you wind a wire round a piece of soft iron and pass a powerful electric current through it, you have a magnet that points north and south. The same thing happened to the mind of a young person wound round by the Brethren's doctrines and subjected to the current of their preaching. Heaven and hell were the only realities and this world simply did not count as permanent.

I SHOULD, OF COURSE, have walked out of Victoria Hall and slammed the door behind me. But I couldn't do it. It was many years before I could leave the Brethren and even pull the door to behind me. Even then, I closed it slowly and quietly and waited for the latch to click. I am not sure that it ever did quite click.

The burden of the Brethren's doctrines finally became too heavy to permit a normal way of life. I left school in the middle of my last term. I worked in the Bank of Toronto as a junior; I worked on D'Arcy Island, the leper station, and carried packets of meat and rice to the lepers every morning; I worked on dairy farms in Duncan; I picked fruit in the Okanagan and in Oregon; I harvested on the prairie. During all these years I kept up my connection with the Brethren.

In Duncan we met in the drawing room of General Rice, who had served in India and was so old he remembered the Indian Mutiny. After the breaking of bread service, he would burn what remained in the fire; he did so, he told me one Sunday, because of what God commanded in Leviticus concerning the offering made by the priests. His military sons and their children in turn were all handsome, aristocratic in manner, and devoted Christians, as though one had crossed officers out of Kipling with archangels. One never knows what an assembly of the Brethren may bring forth. The kingdom of heaven is a strange place and full of surprises.

During these years, I met people for whom, though their doctrinal beliefs did little for me, I felt a warm affection and deep admiration. Their paths intertwined with mine rather than coinciding, yet I felt a sense of lasting fellowship with them. You might say that all our faces were turned toward the light.

One such was Claude Butcher, whom I worked beside in Duncan. He was a small Englishman who had come to Canada and for whom everything seemed to go wrong. He worked unceasingly but in the depth of the mid-20's depression he could scarcely keep his wife, her old aunt and himself. He started a small grocery store in Duncan, which failed dismally. A child was born to the Butchers, so small and weak that its life expectancy proved very brief. One would guess he would be in despair. But not so. His faith in God soared triumphant over all his

troubles. He was always cheerful and greatly esteemed. He would walk miles on a country road to take a message to someone that might get the fellow a job. He has long gone to his reward. But the image of Claude Butcher is still with me; he was one whose faith burned in an unwavering flame.

Then there were Sidney Burdge and his wife. Farming in Alberta and by some miracle retrieving half a crop in a dry and barren land. I helped him harvest it. He was no longer young and he was in pain most of the time. But you would not know it. His wife and counterpart was withered like some brown and beautiful autumnal leaf, after forty years of prairie hardship. She can never have known rest. My last encounter with them was years later, in Victoria. With the aid of a stick, he could make it up a flight of steps, one at a time. The last thing he said to me was, "He still loves us."

I still meet such people. One is a man who, after years of disinterested labour as chairman of a key committee in my own university, was relieved of his post as administrators changed. One would have supposed it a heavy blow, a sad frustration. Yet, over lunch, he was cheerful and equable as ever. He said simply, "I took it to the Lord." He showed no trace of disappointment, only a willingness to serve wherever he was permitted.

One of my memorable encounters was very brief. Passing through an airport, I saw a man in a clerical collar sitting on a suitcase. On impulse, I bent over and said, "Do you believe all Christians will meet in heaven?" He looked up with the countenance of one of Botticelli's angels and said, "I believe all people will meet in heaven." I went on and boarded my plane. But I've never forgotten him.

As I slowly departed from the Brethren, my father was hurt by my defection, though he never reproached me or even showed his disappointment. But he was wholly devoted to the image of Christ the Brethren showed him and he could not imagine any other way of life than that of Bunyan's Pilgrim. I have seen him put a ten-dollar bill into the collection bag, at a time when that was a great sum for a working man, and noticed that the purple of the bill was the same colour as an unhealed saw cut on his arm. He was in a sense giving his blood to the cause of Christ, to missions, for example. When he was very old he had some fears about his own salvation and my mother had to comfort and reassure him. She did not, I am sure, regret my leaving the Brethren. In fact, as time went on, she ceased to attend meetings. She said they made her nervous. Her faith was a matter of reading the Bible with the memory of her father and of her younger brother who had passed away and was in heaven — with these memories and thoughts of England always with her. She understood better than my father the complexities of faith and the inner life; she would not have subscribed to Paul's brash assertion to the jailer at Philippi, "Thou shalt be saved and thy house" (*Acts* 16:31). She knew that each generation must in some sense find its own way.

As the years went by, the biological urge to survive, the social urge to function in the community, the economic urge to earn more than \$30 a month and the intellectual urge to do something other than labouring jobs — these led me to go back to my books at the age of twenty-three. I secured a very humble post, teaching in a small private school, and by slow stages arrived at university teaching, first in Toronto, then in Winnipeg, then in Vancouver. And now I began to make many friends.

My main interest was in the poetry of Milton. I was lucky, for here was a bridge between the Brethren's doctrines and the world of humane studies. The familiar beliefs were now clothed in poetry of surpassing eloquence and adorned with a rich border of classical and historical reference. I was now listening, not to the ministering brethren but to magnificent archangels, Raphael and Michael, who expound everything to Adam and Eve.

One small ingredient of *Paradise Lost* I particularly enjoyed was Milton's sense of humour. Humour, I hope you will agree, is a great lubricant in systematic thinking; it prevents the great facts from grinding too heavily on one another. Milton offers very little humour but the quality is excellent. Raphael the archangel is in the midst of warning Adam, as yet unfallen, against being too passionate in his love for his delightful Eve, when Adam suddenly asks about love in heaven: is there a sexual relation between angels? Raphael answers with "a smile that glows Celestial rosy red"; in other words, he blushes. He makes Adam an extremely hasty answer to the effect that they have every joy in heaven that Adam and Eve have on earth; he looks at the sinking sun (with the effect of looking at his digital wrist watch) and says, in effect, It's getting late; I must go.

My intense pleasure over this brief passage may seem rather odd. But, after twenty-odd years of gospel preaching and prayer meetings, not to mention Sunday school, years in which no subject could be viewed except in black and white terms, either as pointing to the will of God or away from it — after two decades and more of that sort of suppression of one's sense of humour, Book VIII of *Paradise Lost* came to me like a flower flung to me by angelic fingers.

Reading and attempting to lecture upon Milton, I could stay in the Biblical framework but find it transformed into something of great beauty and harmony. I felt I could learn from Milton as Adam learned from the archangel and, to some infinitesimal degree, offer the same kind of liberation to my own students. I might wear the chains of Milton's doctrines but they were golden, not the iron ball-and-chain with which the Brethren had tied me down.

As time went on, keys with which to open prison gates fell into my lap from unexpected sources. Furthermore, some of the walls turned out to be only plywood painted to look like blocks from the Rock of Ages. I was sorting books one day and accidentally came across that Old Testament passage which excludes from the congregation of Israel any man who — perhaps in an accident or in

battle — has lost what is politely called his virile member. The terrible tribalism of Old Testament writers became, as in a lightening flash, completely apparent. I threw the book on the floor. Then I began to find in the English devotional writers their belief that the joy of the redeemed in heaven will be heightened as they look over the battlements and view their friends in hell. Could I take these atrocious people seriously? In Rome, I looked long and hard at Michaelangelo's ceiling and end wall of the Sistine Chapel and perceived that he was in as much trouble as I had been. His God the Father takes his creative hand away from Adam, the innocent first man, palpably indifferent, clearly leaving him to his fate and knowing what it will be. Can I believe in such a God? On the end wall Christ in judgment is separating the saved from the lost, and such horror is depicted on the faces of those condemned that the whole pictured scene falls apart, as a courtroom might fall apart if suddenly the judge put thumb screws on the prisoner and broke his joints. Could I credit this Christ?

As the prison walls began, in this way, to crumble, there were also doors that swung open into direct sunlight. Certain books were invaluable; so was direct contact with the natural world about me. People were of very little direct help, because we in Canada do not like to talk about ultimate issues or "eternal things," as the Brethren would say.

Books: I found Emily Brontë immensely liberating. Among the luminaries of the English literary tradition she appears like a flash of lightning. In *Wuthering Heights* she accepts wickedness, violence, and suffering as part of the human scene but a spirit of abundant and unquenchable life supervenes. (Heathcliff and Catherine, though they have both died, are seen on the road, walking closely together, never to be parted. This is beyond reason but not beyond experience.) In one of her superb poems, Emily Brontë begins "No coward soul is mine" and goes on to affirm "Vain are the thousand creeds to waken doubt." Doubt in her faith that life triumphs over death.

I found the same thing in Dylan Thomas, the Welsh poet. In his memorable war poem "A Refusal to Mourn the Death by Fire of a Child in London" he sees the dead child as clasped safely in the arms of her mother, the immemorial earth, while the ever-flowing stream of the Thames triumphantly assures the continuity of life.

I felt the bonds of the Brethren loosen and fall away. There was an immediate life to be experienced, even though I had no experience of the "new birth." I no longer felt with the Brethren that "the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 *John* 5: 19).

Better even than books were natural things. Across the road from where I live is a magnificent fir tree whose branches are never still, for we live close to the sea and its varying winds. Do not be offended if I confess that this tree, which is older than I am and will outlive me, in its steady growth, endurance of all wea-

thers and aspiration toward the light — this tree is more to me than the tree of Calvary, with its message that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.

And do not, furthermore, be offended if I say that the pair of swallows, violet-blue, who come and build in the nest I put up for them in April and feed their chirping young ones, fly swiftly out for food and swerve on sunlit wings — if I say that these give me more comfort and hope than any Biblical story of angels descending on Jacob's ladder.

BUT IN CASE YOU THINK I stray from a subject, the Plymouth Brethren, let me admit that I have never completed my escape from them. They say that, in the old days, a released galley-slave could always in a seaport town be recognized because he walked with a straddle, his legs skewed as though still in irons. It is the same with me. As a lapsed Catholic still in the back of his mind resents the abandonment of the Latin Mass, excludes women from his concept of priesthood, keeps somewhere in his memory the image of a compassionate Virgin and watches in imagination for the column of smoke announcing a new Pope — in like manner the Plymouth Brother who is no longer in fellowship is still haunted by thoughts of the moral polarity of the universe, the imminence of final catastrophe, the scene of the Last Judgment. He still feels he may step casually into an abyss, as one might make one casual step off the sidewalk in the path of a ten-ton truck.

If an old Plymouth Brother writes, he returns automatically to the Bible for a subject. "Remember Lot's wife" says the Gospel of Saint Luke and he remembers her, that extraordinary woman with an alcoholic husband, daughters of peculiar sexual habits, and neighbours about whose fate, as she left Sodom, she was naturally concerned. She was turned into a pillar of salt, you remember, but —

Her life was not a field of clover
 For he was often half-seas over
 And what he'd do when in that state
 I will not here elaborate.
 A place in Holy Writ she's got
 But who would envy her her LOT?

And, all considered, where's the fault
 In her? She's surely worth her salt.
 So rudely plucked from home and garden,
 Her backward look we well may pardon,
 As, starting up the rocky way,
 She thought of friends all young and GAY
 And wondered if the falling fire
 Were pyrotechnic or in ire.

Ah, well she knew what lay ahead:
Two girls contending for her bed.

With shining eyes, like votive candles,
The beasts now lie and lick her sandals.
Look on her, reverend sirs, with favour.
Good salt, she has not lost her savour.

Or, as I think of persecutors, of Bruno they burned in Rome, in the Campo dei Fiori, or Servetus, burned slowly with damp wood, in Geneva — as I think of these, I think of Saul of Tarsus who became the Apostle Paul.

As Saul the persecutor rode
Hot in pursuit, the doubled heat
Of midday on Damascus road
Flamed into fire round reason's seat.

He, bright-eyed, bald, black-bearded, fell
And heard a voice from heaven call
(So all the scrolls and frescoes tell)
"Why do you persecute me, Saul?"

We know his subsequent career,
Can reckon up its strange percentiles:
He preached the word both far and near,
Was called the apostle to the Gentiles.

To those believing Paul announced
An ever present great salvation,
And those who did not he denounced
To fiery hell and deep damnation,

And down through all the Middle Age
Scribes turned to Paul and read his verses,
Unfurling scroll or lifting page
To find his wide embracing curses.

Oh, was the judge inclined to grace?
The executioner's hand unsteady?
Some scribe could always find the place;
A text from Paul was always ready.

The moral: Do not fear at all
Goliath huge or Samson hairy,
But oh! look out for men like Paul,
For persecutors never vary.

And so one keeps cheerful, like Balaam's ass, who felt much better when she had had a chance to speak her mind and tell how she saw what others couldn't see, the angel, with a drawn sword, ready to smite false prophets.

When I come to die, I shall rely on “grace alone” — that grace and compassion in the cosmos that I already receive from my family and friends. At the last judgment, which I now see takes place at each successive moment of life, I shall fall into the hands of God, whom the Plymouth Brethren could identify for themselves but not for me. God, who in the last event, identifies Himself — or is it, more likely, herself?

COOK'S GARDENS

E. W. Brewster

Last week in Melbourne I visited Cook's Cottage,
its bricks brought from Yorkshire
and carefully reassembled,
surrounded by an English
eighteenth century garden
of old-fashioned roses,
herbs, vegetables,
no tree that would not grow in England,
perhaps not even an Australian weed.

Now, crossing the Nullarbor Plains,
I see Cook's name again
at a station stop:
a desert town
existing only for the sake of the railway.

We stroll on the station platform,
buy postcards, souvenirs.
There is a hospital with six beds,
a primary school,
a post office,
even a prison
where someone was locked up last year
for disturbing the peace.

Back on the train
in our air-conditioned space
we return to our breakfast coffee,
cards or crossword puzzles,
watch sliding past
Cook's other garden: