ROBERT SOUTHEY

From Joan of Arc: An Epic Poem

“These are the Daemons that pervert the power Of Love,” said Theodore. “The time was once
When LOVE and HAPPINESS went hand in hand,
In that blest era of the infant world
Ere man had learnt to bow the knee to man.
Was there a youth whom warm affection fill’d,
He spake his honest heart; the earliest fruits
His toil produced, the sweetest flowers that deck’d
The sunny bank, he gather’d for the maid,
Nor she disdain’d the gift—for VICE not yet
Had burst the dungeons of her hell, and rear’d
Those artificial boundaries that divide
Man from his species. State of blessedness!
Till that ill-omen’d hour when Cain’s stern son
Delved in the bowels of the earth for gold,
Accursed bane of virtue! of such force
As poets feign dwelt in the Gorgon’s locks,
Which whoso saw, felt instant the life-blood
Cold curdle in his veins, the creeping flesh
Grew stiff with horror, and the heart forgot
To beat. Accursed hour! for man no more
To JUSTICE paid his homage, but forsook
Her altars, and bow’d down before the shrine
Of WEALTH and POWER, the Idols he had made.
Then HELL enlarg’d herself, her gates flew wide,
Her legion fiends rush’d forth. OPPRESSION came
Whose frown is desolation, and whose breath
Blasts like the Pestilence; and POVERTY,
A meager monster, who with withering touch
Makes barren all the better part of man,
MOTHER OF MISERIES; then the goodly earth
Which God had framed for happiness, became
One theatre of woe, and all that God
Had given to bless free men, these tyrant fiends
His bitterest curses made. Yet for the best
Hath he ordained all things, the ALL-WISE!
For by experience rous’d shall man at length
Dash down his Moloch-gods, Samson-like
And burst his fetters—only strong whilst strong
Believed; then in the bottomless abyss
OPPRESSION shall be chain’d, and POVERTY
Die, and with her, her Brood of Miseries;
And VIRTUE and EQUALITY preserve
The reign of LOVE, and Earth shall once again
Be Paradise, whilst Wisdom shall secure
The state of bliss which Ignorance betrayed.”

870 “Oh age of happiness!” the Maid exclaim’d,
“Roll fast thy current, Time, till that blest age
Arrive! and happy thou my Theodore,
Permitted thus to see the sacred depths
Of wisdom!”