A Song to David

David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His Word was in my tongue."  
— 2 Samuel 23.1,2

1. O Thou, that sit'st upon a throne,  
With harp of high majestic tone,  
To praise the King of kings;  
And voice of heaven-ascending swell,  
Which, while its deeper notes excel,  
Clear, as a clarion, rings:  

2. To bless each valley, grove and coast,  
And charm the cherubs to the post  
Of gratitude in throngs;  
To keep the days on Zion’s mount,  
And send the year to his account,  
With dances and with songs:  

3. O Servant of God’s holiest charge,  
The minister of praise at large,  
Which thou may’st now receive;  
From thy blessed mansion hail and hear,  
From topmost eminence appear  
To this the wreath I weave.  

4. Great, valiant, pious, good, and clean,  
Sublime, contemplative, serene,  
Strong, constant, pleasant, wise!  
Bright effluence of exceeding grace;  
Best man!—the swiftness and the race,  
The peril, and the prize!  

5. Great—from the luster of his crown,  
From Samuel’s horn and God’s renown,  
Which is the people’s voice;  

1. For the first edition of the poem, Smart supplied a summary of the argument, here reprinted as a running series of marginal glosses.  
2. David, a king among mortals, and now an angel in heaven, serves the King of kings by praising Him with music, which keeps the world below in tune; Smart, in turn, sings the praises of David, the poet’s intermediary with God.  
3. "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16.13).
For all the host from rear to van,
   Applauded and embraced the man—
      The man of God's own choice.

6
Valiant—the word, and up he rose—
   The fight—he triumphed o'er the foes,
      Whom God's just laws abhor;
   And armed in gallant faith he took
      Against the boaster,4 from the brook,
         The weapons of the war.

7
Pious—magnificent and grand;
   'Twas he the famous temple planned:
      (The seraph in his soul)5
   Foremost to give the Lord his dues,
   Foremost to bless the welcome news,
   And foremost to condole.

8
Good—from Jehudah's genuine vein,
   From God's best nature good in grain,6
   His aspect and his heart;
   To pity, to forgive, to save,
      Witness En-gedi's conscious cave,
         And Shimei's blunted dart.7

9
Clean—if perpetual prayer be pure,
   And love, which could itself inure
      To fasting and to fear—
   Clean in his gestures, hands, and feet,
      To smite the lyre, the dance complete,
         To play the sword and spear.

10
Sublime—invention ever young,
   Of vast conception, towering tongue,
      To God the eternal theme;
   Notes from yon exaltations caught,
      Unrivaled royalty of thought,
         O'er meaner strains supreme.

11
Contemplative—on God to fix
   His musings, and above the six
      The sabbath-day he blessed;
   'Twas then his thoughts self-conquest pruned,

4. Goliath, whom David slew with a stone from the brook.
5. According to 1 Chronicles 28, David's plan for the Temple in Jerusalem was directly inspired by the Lord's "seraph" within him.
6. In background and substance; Judah, David's tribe, was the tribe of kings.
7. In a cave in En-gedi, David spared Saul, who had wanted to kill him (1 Samuel 24); though Shimei threw stones and curses at him, David later refused to take his life (2 Samuel 16, 19).
And heavenly melancholy tuned,  
To bless and bear the rest.

Serene—to sow the seeds of peace,  
Remembering, when he watched the fleece,  
How sweetly Kidron purled—

To further knowledge, silence vice,  
And plant perpetual paradise  
When God had calmed the world.

Strong—in the Lord, who could defy  
Satan, and all his powers that lie  
In sempiternal night;  
And hell, and horror, and despair  
Were as the lion and the bear  
To his undaunted might.

Constant—in love to God The Truth,  
Age, manhood, infancy, and youth—  
To Jonathan his friend  
Constant, beyond the verge of death;  
And Ziba, and Mephibosheth,  
His endless fame attend.

Pleasant—and various as the year;  
Man, soul, and angel, without peer,  
Priest, champion, sage and boy;  
In armor, or in ephod clad,  
His pomp, his piety was glad;  
Majestic was his joy.

Wise—in recovery from his fall,  
Whence rose his eminence o’er all,  
Of all the most reviled;  
The light of Israel in his ways,  
Wise are his precepts, prayer and praise,  
And counsel to his child.

His muse, bright angel of his verse,  
Gives balm for all the thorns that pierce,  
For all the pangs that rage;  
[He consecrates his genius for consolation and edification]  
Blessed light, still gaining on the gloom,

8. As a young man, David kept his father’s sheep near Kidron, a brook that borders the district of Jerusalem; later, fleeing his own son Absalom, he crossed Kidron into the wilderness.
9. As a shepherd, David slew a lion and a bear with the help of the Lord, as later he slew Goliath (1 Samuel 17).
1. Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth was restored to Saul’s land by David and was attended by Saul’s servant Ziba.
2. Vestment of a Hebrew priest.
3. The Proverbs and Psalms were supposed to be intended by David for his son Solomon.
The more than Michal of his bloom,
   The Abishag of his age.  

18

He sung of God—the mighty source
   Of all things—the stupendous force
   On which all strength depends;
From whose right arm, beneath whose eyes,
All period, power, and enterprise
   Commences, reigns, and ends.

19

Angels—their ministry and meed,
   Which to and fro with blessings speed,
   Or with their citterns wait;
Where Michael with his millions\(^\text{5}\) bows,
Where dwells the seraph and his spouse,
   The cherub and her mate.

20

Of man—the semblance and effect
   Of God and Love—the Saint elect
   For infinite applause—
To rule the land, and briny broad,
To be laborious in his laud,
   And heroes in his cause.

21

The world—the clustering spheres he made,
   The glorious light, the soothing shade,
   Dale, champaign, grove, and hill;
The multitudinous abyss,
Where secrecy remains in bliss,
   And wisdom hides her skill.

22

Trees, plants, and flowers—of virtuous root;
Gem\(^\text{6}\) yielding blossom, yielding fruit,
   Choice gums and precious balm;
Bless ye the nosegay in the vale,
And with the sweeteners of the gale
   Enrich the thankful psalm.

23

Of fowl—e’en every beak and wing
   Which cheer the winter, hail the spring,
   That live in peace or prey;
They that make music, or that mock,
The quail, the brave domestic cock,
   The raven, swan, and jay.

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4. More than Michal, his first wife, or Abishag, who ministered to him in old age, David’s consolation is his muse, which gives balm for his sorrow as the Holy Spirit for Christ’s.
5. God’s legions, commanded by the archangel Michael. “Citterns”: guitars.
24 Of fishes—every size and shape,
Which nature frames of light escape,
Devouring man to shun:
The shells are in the wealthy deep,
The shoals\(^7\) upon the surface leap,
And love the glancing sun.

25 Of beasts—the beaver plods his task;
While the sleek tigers roll and bask,
Nor yet the shades arouse;
Her cave the mining coney\(^8\) scoops;
Where o’er the mead the mountain stoops,
The kids exult and browse.

26 Of gems—their virtue and their price,
Which hid in earth from man’s device,
Their darts of luster sheathe;
The jasper of the master’s stamp,\(^9\)
The topaz blazing like a lamp
Among the mines beneath.

27 Blessed was the tenderness he felt
When to his graceful harp he knelt,
And did for audience call;
When Satan with his hand he quelled,
And in serene suspense he held
The frantic throes of Saul.\(^1\)

28 His furious foes no more maligned
As he such melody divined,
And sense and soul detained;
Now striking strong, now soothing soft,
He sent the godly sounds aloft,
Or in delight refrained.

29 When up to heaven his thoughts he piled,
From fervent lips fair Michal smiled,
As blush to blush she stood;
And chose herself the queen, and gave
Her utmost from her heart, “so brave,
And plays his hymns so good.”\(^2\)

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7. Schools of fish.
8. Rabbit.
9. Jasper is used to make seals or signets of authority; hid in earth, it signifies no authority but God’s.
1. When Saul was oppressed by an evil spirit, David cured him by playing on the harp (1 Samuel 16).
2. Though intended by her father Saul to be a “snare” to David, Michal fell in love with him, as her speech (invented by Smart) indicates.
30. The pillars of the Lord are seven,
Which stand from earth to topmost heaven;
His wisdom drew the plan;
His Word accomplished the design,
From brightest gem to deepest mine,
From Christ enthroned to man.  

31. Alpha, the cause of causes, first
In station, fountain, whence the burst
Of light, and blaze of day;  
Whence bold attempt, and brave advance,
Have motion, life, and ordinance,
And heaven itself its stay.

32. Gamma supports the glorious arch
On which angelic legions march,
And is with sapphires paved;
Thence the fleet clouds are sent adrift,
And thence the painted folds, that lift
The crimson veil, are waved.

33. Eta with living sculpture breathes,
With verdant carvings, flowery wreathes
Of never-wasting bloom:
In strong relief his goodly base
All instruments of labor grace,
The trowel, spade, and loom.

34. Next Theta stands to the Supreme—
Who formed, in number, sign, and scheme,
The illustrious lights that are;
And one addressed his saffron robe,
And one, clad in a silver globe,
Held rule with every star.

35. Iota's tuned to choral hymns
Of those that fly, while he that swims
In thankful safety lurks;
And foot, and chapitre, and niche,

3. The seven pillars of the house of wisdom, referred to in Proverbs, are associated by the Masons with the building of the first Temple, erected by Solomon in Jerusalem according to divine order. Smart believed that both Proverbs and the Temple had been planned by David. In the following seven stanzas, each pillar is conflated with one of the days of Creation and with a Greek letter that represents one of the names of God. The implicit suggestion is that David, the greatest of poets and leaders, resembles the Creator, who called the universe into being with a Word.

4. On the first day God called forth light.

5. Support.

6. The firmament, created on the second day, is compared to the oracle of the Temple, which holds the Ark of the Covenant.

7. Constellation.

8. Put on.

9. The sun, with the moon and stars, was created on the fourth day.

1. Capital of a pillar. The abundance of fish and fowl, created on the fifth day, is compared to the rich decorations of the Temple (1 Kings 7).
The various histories enrich
Of God’s recorded works.

36
Sigma presents the social droves,
With him that solitary roves,
And man of all the chief;
Fair on whose face, and stately frame,
Did God impress his hallowed name,
For ocular belief.

37
OMEGA! GREATEST and the BEST,
Stands sacred to the day of rest,
For gratitude and thought;
Which blessed the world upon his pole,
And gave the universe his goal,
And closed the infernal draught.2

38
O DAVID, scholar of the Lord!
Such is thy science, whence reward
And infinite degree;3
O strength, O sweetness, lasting ripe!
God’s harp thy symbol, and thy type4
The lion and the bee!

There is but one who ne’er rebelled,
But One by passion unimpelled,
By pleasure unenticed;
He from himself his semblance sent,
Grand object of his own content,
And saw the God in CHRIST.

40
“Tell them, I am,” JEHOVA said
To Moses; while earth heard in dread,
And smitten to the heart,
At once above, beneath, around,
All Nature, without voice or sound,
Replied, “O Lord, THOU ART.”

41
Thou art—to give and to confirm,
For each his talent and his term;
All flesh thy bounties share:
Thou shalt not call thy brother fool;

2. The completed structure of the house of God (the world) shuts out the currents of hell.
3. Elevation, rank.
4. Emblem. Theologically, a type is something in the Old Testament that prefigures some Christian truth. The lion and the bee, emblemizing the union of strength with sweetness (Judges 14), prefigure David, and David himself prefigures Christ, although, as the next stanza explains, no one can equal Him, because God is His own type. Stanzas 38 and 49 frame a ten-string “harp,” the center of the poem, in which each of the Ten Commandments is interpreted according to the new Law of Christ’s teachings.
245 The porches\(^5\) of the Christian school
   Are meekness, peace, and prayer.

   Open, and naked of offense,
   Man’s made of mercy, soul, and sense;
   God armed the snail and wilk;\(^6\)
250 Be good to him that pulls thy plough;
   Due food and care, due rest, allow
   For her that yields thee milk.

   Rise up before the hoary head,
   And God’s benign commandment dread,
   Which says thou shalt not die;
   “Not as I will, but as thou wilt,’”\(^7\)
255 Prayed He whose conscience knew no guilt;
   With whose blessed pattern vie.

   Use all thy passions!—love is thine,
   And joy, and jealousy\(^8\) divine,
   Thine hope’s eternal fort,
   And care thy leisure to disturb,
   With fear concupiscence to curb,
   And rapture to transport.

   Act simply, as occasion asks;
   Put mellow wine in seasoned casks;
   Till not with ass and bull:
   Remember thy baptismal bond;
   Keep from commixtures foul and fond,
270 Nor work thy flax with wool.

   Distribute: pay the Lord his tithe,
   And make the widow’s heart-strings blithe;
   Resort with those that weep:
   As you from all and each expect,
   For all and each thy love direct,
275 And render as you reap.

   The slander and its bearer spurn,
   And propagating praise sojourn
   To make thy welcome last;
280 Turn from old Adam to the New;\(^9\)

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5. Porticos where ancient philosophers debated.
6. Shellfish (the whelk).
8. Devotion.
9. Christ. As elsewhere in this section, Smart interprets the commandment positively, less as a warning against bearing false witness than as encouragement to bear witness to truth.
By hope futurity pursue;
   Look upwards to the past.

48
Control thine eye, salute success,
Honor the wiser, happier bless,
   And for thy neighbor feel;
Grutch not of mammon and his leaven,¹
Work emulation up to heaven
   By knowledge and by zeal.

49
O DAVID, highest in the list
290 Of worthies, on God’s ways insist,
   The genuine word repeat.²
Vain are the documents of men,
And vain the flourish of the pen
   That keeps the fool’s conceit.

50
Praise above all—for praise prevails;
Heap up the measure, load the scales,
   And good to goodness add:
The generous soul her Savior aids,
But peevish obloquy degrades;
   The Lord is great and glad.

51
For ADORATION all the ranks
Of angels yield eternal thanks,
   And DAVID in the midst;
With God’s good poor, which, last and least
In man’s esteem, thou to thy feast,
   O blessed bride-groom, bidst.

52
For ADORATION seasons change,
And order, truth, and beauty range,
   Adjust, attract, and fill:
The grass the polyanthus checks;³
And polished porphyry reflects,
   By the descending rill.

53
Rich almonds color to the prime
For ADORATION; tendrils climb,
   And fruit-trees pledge their gems;
And Ivis⁴ with her gorgeous vest
Builds for her eggs her cunning nest,
   And bell-flowers bow their stems.

1. Do not begrudge the wealthy man his rise.
2. Psalm 119 [Smart’s note].
3. Checkers.
4. Humming-bird [Smart’s note].
54

With vinous syrup cedars spout;
From rocks pure honey gushing out,
For ADORATION springs:
All scenes of painting crowd the map
Of nature; to the mermaid’s pap
The scalèd infant clings.

55

The spotted ounce and playsome cubs
Run rustling ’mongst the flowering shrubs,
And lizards feed the moss;
For ADORATION beasts embark,
While waves upholding halcyon’s ark
No longer roar and toss.

56

While Israel sits beneath his fig,
With coral root and amber sprig
The weaned adventurer sports;
Where to the palm the jasmin cleaves,
For ADORATION ’mong the leaves
The gale his peace reports.

57

Increasing days their reign exalt,
Nor in the pink and mottled vault
The opposing spirits tilt;
And, by the coasting reader spied,
The silverlings and crusions glide
For ADORATION gilt.

58

For ADORATION ripening canes
And cocoa’s purest milk detains
The western pilgrim’s staff;
Where rain in clasping boughs inclosed,
And vines with oranges disposed,
Embower the social laugh.

59

Now labor his reward receives,
For ADORATION counts his sheaves
To peace, her bounteous prince;
The nectarine his strong tint imbibes,
And apples of ten thousand tribes,
And quick peculiar quince.

6. There is a large quadruped that preys upon fish, and provides himself with a piece of timber for that purpose, with which he is very handy [Smart’s note].
7. The kingfisher’s nest was supposed to calm the sea by floating on it.
8. According to Micah 4.4, “they shall sit every man under his vine and his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid.” As spring turns into summer, so mankind shall mature into peace.
1. Clouds clash together.
3. Coconut’s.
4. Pungent.
The wealthy crops of whitening rice,
'Mongst thyine\(^5\) woods and groves of spice,
   For ADORATION grow;
And, marshalled in the fenced land,
The peaches and pomegranates stand,
   Where wild carnations blow.

The laurels with the winter strive;
The crocus burnishes alive
   Upon the snow-clad earth:
For ADORATION myrtles stay
To keep the garden from dismay,
   And bless the sight from dearth.

The pheasant shows his pompous neck;
And ermine, jealous of a speck\(^6\)
   With fear eludes offense:
The sable, with his glossy pride,
For ADORATION is described,
   Where frosts the wave condense.

The cheerful holly, pensive yew,
And holy thorn,\(^7\) their trim renew;
The squirrel hoards his nuts:
All creatures batten o’er their stores,
And careful nature all her doors
   For ADORATION shuts.

For ADORATION, DAVID’s psalms
Lift up the heart to deeds of alms;
   And he, who kneels and chants,
Prevails his passions to control,
Finds meat and medicine to the soul,
   Which for translation\(^8\) pants.

For ADORATION, beyond match,
The scholar\(^9\) bullfinch aims to catch
   The soft flute’s ivory touch;
And careless on the hazel spray,
The daring redbreast keeps at bay
   The damsel’s greedy clutch.

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5. A precious wood mentioned in Revelation.
8. Transference to heaven.
9. Imitative (the bullfinch can learn a tune).
For ADORATION, in the skies,
The Lord’s philosopher espies
The Dog, the Ram, and Rose;
The planet’s ring, Orion’s sword;
Nor is his greatness less adored
In the vile worm that glows.

For ADORATION on the strings¹
The western breezes work their wings,
The captive ear to soothe—
Hark! ’tis a voice—how still, and small²—
That makes the cataracts to fall,
Or bids the sea be smooth.

For ADORATION, incense comes
From bezoar, and Arabian gums;
And from the civet’s⁴ fur.
But as for prayer, or ere it faints,
Far better is the breath of saints
Than galbanum and myrrh.⁴

For ADORATION from the down
Of damasins to the anana’s crown,⁵
God sends to tempt the taste;
And while the luscious zest invites
The sense, that in the scene delights,
Commands desire be chaste.

For ADORATION, all the paths
Of grace are open, all the baths
Of purity refresh;
And all the rays of glory beam
To deck the man of God’s esteem,
Who triumphs o’er the flesh.

For ADORATION, in the dome
Of Christ the sparrows find an home,
And on his olives perch:
The swallow also dwells with thee,
O man of God’s humility,
Within his Savior CHURCH.

Sweet is the dew that falls betimes,
And drops upon the leafy limes;

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¹. Aeolian harp [Smart’s note]. It is played by the wind.
². In 1 Kings 19.11–12, the Lord does not speak in the wind but in “a still small voice.”
³. Civet cat’s. “Bezoar”: a medicinal lump that forms in the stomachs of some animals.
⁴. Gum resins used in incense.
Sweet Hermon’s fragrant air:  

430 Sweet is the lily’s silver bell,  
And sweet the wakeful tapers smell  
That watch for early prayer.

73  
Sweet the young nurse with love intense,  
Which smiles o’er sleeping innocence;

435 Sweet when the lost arrive:  
Sweet the musician’s ardor beats,  
While his vague mind’s in quest of sweets,  
The choicest flowers to hive.

74  
Sweeter in all the strains of love,  
The language of thy turtle dove,  
Paired to thy swelling chord;  
Sweeter with every grace endued,  
The glory of thy gratitude,  
Respired unto the Lord.

75  
Strong is the horse upon his speed;  
Strong in pursuit the rapid glede,  
Which makes at once his game:

440 Strong the tall ostrich on the ground;  
Strong through the turbulent profound  
Shoots xiphias to his aim.

76  
Strong is the lion—like a coal  
His eyeball—like a bastion’s mole  
His chest against the foes:

445 Strong the gier-eagle on his sail,  
Strong against tide, the enormous whale  
Emerges, as he goes.

77  
But stronger still, in earth and air,  
And in the sea, the man of prayer;  
And far beneath the tide;

450 And in the seat to faith assigned,  
Where ask is have, where seek is find,  
Where knock is open wide.

78  
Beauteous the fleet before the gale;  
Beauteous the multitudes in mail,  
Ranked arms and crested heads:

455 Beauteous the garden’s umbrage mild,

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6. The dew of Hermon, a mountain in Syria, is associated with Zion’s dew in Psalm 133.  
7. Wandering.  
8. Hawk.  
9. The swordfish [Smart’s note].  
Walk, water, meditated wild,²
And all the bloomy beds.

79
Beauteous the moon full on the lawn;
And beauteous, when the veil's withdrawn,
The virgin to her spouse:
Beauteous the temple decked and filled,
When to the heaven of heavens they build
Their heart-directed vows.

80
Beauteous, yea beauteous more than these,
The shepherd king upon his knees,
For his momentous trust;
With wish of infinite conceit,
For man, beast, mute,³ the small and great,
And prostrate dust to dust.

81
Precious the bounteous widow's mite;
And precious, for extreme delight,
The largess from the churl:⁴
Precious the ruby's blushing blaze,
And alba's⁵ blest imperial rays,
And pure cerulean pearl.

82
Precious the penitential tear;
And precious is the sigh sincere,
Acceptable to God:
And precious are the winning flowers,
In gladsome Israel's feast of bowers,⁶
Bound on the hallowed sod.

83
More precious that diviner part
Of David, even the Lord's own heart,
Great, beautiful, and new:
In all things where it was intent,
In all extremes, in each event,
Proof⁷ —answering true to true.

84
Glorious the sun in mid career;
Glorious the assembled fires appear;
Glorious the comet's train:
Glorious the trumpet and alarm;
Glorious the almighty stretched-out arm;
Glorious the enraptured main:

2. Artificial wild place within a garden or park.
3. Fish. “Conceit”: conception.
4. Samuel 25:18 [Smart’s note]. Against the will of Nabal, a churlish rich man, his wife, Abigail, gave largess to David.
5. Revelation 2:17 [Smart’s note]. A white stone, given to the church triumphant.
6. The Feast of Tabernacles, or Sukkoth, celebrated in arbors (see Leviticus 23.39–43).
7. Meeting the test.
505 Glorious the northern lights astream;
Glorious the song, when God's the theme;
   Glorious the thunder's roar:
Glorious hosanna from the den;
Glorious the catholic amen;
   Glorious the martyr's gore:

510 Glorious—more glorious is the crown
Of Him, that brought salvation down
   By meekness, called thy Son;
Thou that stupendous truth believed,
And now the matchless deed's achieved,
   DETERMINED, DARED, and DONE.

[which is wrought up to this conclusion,
   That the best poet which ever lived was thought worthy of the highest honor which possibly can be conceived, as the Savior of the World was ascribed to his house, and called his son in the body.]