

# JOHN MILTON PARADISE LOST AND PARADISE REGAINED

Notes by David Masson



*Introduction by Frederic B. Tromly*

*Complete and Unabridged*

JOHN MILTON

PARADISE LOST  
and  
PARADISE REGAINED

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# JOHN MILTON PARADISE LOST



## and PARADISE REGAINED



### INTRODUCTION

One of the best ways to approach John Milton's remarkable poetry is through a consideration of a few salient aspects of his equally remarkable life. Milton was born in 1608, the son of a prosperous scrivener (scriveners drew up wills and other legal documents) who was also an outstanding musician. The combination of his father's money and his own diligence provided for young Milton the best education available in seventeenth-century England. After spending a number of years at a private preparatory school in London, he was admitted to Cambridge University, where he received his B.A. in 1629 and his M.A. in 1632. Then, as now, a good education required far more than simply attending good schools; Milton's academic success was due to his great talent and his unflagging energy. His remark that after the age of twelve he scarcely ever quit studying before midnight indicates his thirst for knowledge (and, incidentally, also helps to explain why he went almost totally blind at the age of forty-four).

One of the reasons why Milton was so diligent a schoolboy was that, even at an early age, he began to prepare himself for the vocation of poetry. The Poet was frequently accorded an exalted position in the Renaissance; if, as it was widely believed, man differs from the animals because of his unique capacity for rational discourse, then it follows that the Poet, the molders of speech, is a leader

and teacher of men. In the terms of Horace's well-known dictum, poetry should teach by pleasing. This conception placed responsibility upon the Poet's shoulders for he had to be (so it was felt) a master of all knowledge.

Milton was perhaps the last of the great Renaissance Humanists in England. Humanism can be characterized as an intellectual movement of the Renaissance which sought to rediscover and revitalize the literature of Greece and Rome. No mere antiquarian, Milton delighted in the heritage of the ancient world and did everything he could to make it his own. One Humanist doctrine which especially influenced his writing was the idea of *literary imitation*. Just as Virgil had imitated many aspects of Homer's epics, so it was felt that modern poets could profitably pattern their poems after Classical models. Almost every line of Milton's verse evidences his wide reading and capacious memory; he is the most learned of English poets. Echoes of the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*, and especially the *Aeneid* permeate his two epics. It should be remarked, however, that his imitation of Virgil, Homer, and many others is neither servile nor gratuitous. Milton wished to call these poets to the reader's mind so that his own poems would gain resonance and depth; his use of his predecessors' work is, in short, creative and artistic.

But to speak of Milton only as a Humanist is seriously to distort his mind and his poetry. Although he treasured the pagan literature of Greece and Rome, his deepest commitment was to Christianity. Like many other Renaissance Humanists, Milton was able to reconcile the apparently conflicting voices of Athens and Jerusalem. His literary imagination was nurtured by the Bible as well as the ancient poets, and his two epics represent his attempt to write epics in the Classical fashion about what is essentially Biblical history.

The greatest historical event in England during Milton's lifetime was the Puritan Revolution, which split the nation into two warring camps—the Church of England and the King on one side against religious dissenters and the Parliament on the other. Milton had long opposed what he felt were the empty ceremonies and hypocrisy of the Church of England, and throughout his life he was a passionate advocate of religious and political liberty. Naturally, when the crisis came he cast his lot with the revolutionary forces. The Puritan leaders recognized

Milton's talents and contracted him to write a number of polemical treatises against opponents of the revolution (mainly 1641-1649). In 1649 he was appointed Secretary of Foreign Tongues to the Council of State, an important position which involved composing the government's Latin correspondence with foreign courts. During these middle years of his life, the pressure of his official duties kept Milton from writing very ambitious poetry (he metaphorically spoke of being able to write only with his left hand at the time). During the final twenty years of his life the house of Stuart re-established itself on the English throne, his own political activities ceased, and he finally found the time to write his two great epics—*Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1671).

Although the twofold basis of Milton's epics—Christian theology and Humanist learning—is being forgotten at an alarming rate in modern society, his epics are not therefore “monuments to dead ideas.” Of course, we will never respond to, say, Classical mythology with the same enthusiasm which Milton showed, nor do most of us literally believe in the creation of the world as it is set forth in *Genesis* and in Book Seven of *Paradise Lost*. But these changes in the climate of belief do not make Milton's epics obsolete. Unlike washing machines and automobiles, poems are not superceded by newer models; unlike the quantitative sciences, there is no such thing as progress in art. Milton's epics are not, after all, theological or philosophical treatises which can be refuted—they are poems.

A critical reader, however, must exercise his mind as well as his imagination. One cannot accurately read Milton's epics without knowing some of the ideas which are their conceptual framework. As their titles indicate, the first epic is about the loss of Paradise, the second about its being regained. By eating the fatal apple Adam destroyed Paradise and brought Sin and Death into the world; by dying upon the cross Christ (the “one greater Man” mentioned at the beginning of *Paradise Lost*) redeemed the sin of our first father and regained Paradise. God the Father represents Justice, while the Son of God represents Mercy. The Son of God atones for the sin of man by sacrificing His own life so that the justice of His Father can be fulfilled.

This brings us to a second important idea, what Adam's

sin was. To answer the question we must first begin with Milton's conception of the universe. He saw the world as being hierarchically ordered. That is, the order and goodness of the universe depends upon creatures being in their proper places in a gradated ladder which stretches from God the Creator at the top to brute animals at the bottom. Man's place on this ladder is important, for it is between the angels immediately above and the animals immediately below. Since man was created in the image of God, he has a rational mind; but he also is subject to animalistic and irrational passions. Man, then, is a kind of battleground for these opposing forces. Depending on whether his reason or passions gets the upper hand, man will be either godlike or bestial.

Given this hierarchical view of the universe, obedience becomes one of the greatest human virtues. To be obedient to God is to uphold His perfect order; disobedience brings about chaos and destruction. Disobedience and pride are closely related for Milton. If a person disobeys God, then he is assuming a position which is not his own, and hence he is proud and ambitious. As every Renaissance schoolboy knew, Adam and Eve fell because of pride. Milton, however, was careful to distinguish the fall of Adam from that of Eve.

Eve makes her own fall possible by willfully separating herself from Adam in the Garden (an action which is in itself a violation of God's hierarchy since Man was created superior to Woman). Satan, who has taken the form of a snake to avoid detection, does not physically overpower Eve, but rather insinuates ideas into her mind which cause her to eat the apple of her own free will. The main technique he uses is flattery, which appeals to Eve's greatest weakness—personal vanity. He speaks, for instance, of her "Celestial Beauty" and says she is pretty enough to be "A Goddess among Gods." When her pride finally leads her to eat the Forbidden Fruit, she violates the only commandment God has given her, and she purchases knowledge of Good and Evil only at the expense of her own life.

Adam's motives for eating the apple are quite different from Eve's. As soon as she tells him what she has done, he is terrified. But he immediately decides to share her crime with her. Adam's sin is almost heroic, for we are moved by his devotion to Eve: "from thy State / Mine never

shall be parted, bliss or woe." But his love for Eve does not exonerate him from the guilt of having disobeyed God. As the Son of God pointedly asks him, "Was she thy God?" In other words, Adam owed his primary allegiance to his Creator and not to Eve.

Adam and Eve immediately show the effects of their sin, for they burn with lust and then hatefully blame each other for the guilt which they share. Their sin affects nature as well as themselves; the earth shudders, and animals which used to play together now prey on one another. After a period of intense despair, Adam and Eve accept the responsibility for their sin (the first step on the way to penance) and vow to support each other in the harsh world beyond the green walls of Paradise. The last four lines of the poem indicate a degree of ambiguity about the fortunes of our first parents. Although they are weeping as they leave Paradise, they quickly wipe their tears away. Although they have been forever exiled from the joys of Paradise, yet "the world was all before them." If they are being exiled from the old, then, they are also seeking out the new. The archangel Michael tells them as they leave the Garden that, if they practise the Christian virtues, they will have a "Paradise within" themselves and will even be "happier far" than they were in Eden. God's infinite goodness has even brought good out of man's sin; Milton has effectively "justified the ways of God to man."

One of the most interesting characters in *Paradise Lost* is Satan. We should remember, however, that, although Milton made him interesting, Satan is not necessarily the "epic hero" of the poem. From the first time we see him in Book One, Satan undergoes a progressive deterioration in the poem. He does indeed have traces of heroic grandeur in the beginning: he lies on the sea of burning marl as huge as Leviathan. His shield is as vast as the moon, and his towering spear would make a ship's mast look like a fairy's wand. But as the poem progresses, his light becomes dimmer, his size more diminutive, and his nature more base. For example, in Book Four Milton likens Satan to a prowling wolf, a common burglar, a comorant, and finally he is discovered "squat like a toad" at the ear of sleeping Eve. This series of Satanic metamorphoses ends when he adopts the form of a serpent, an animal whose sliminess and cunning equal his own. God ironically punishes Satan



in Book Ten, when He transforms him and the rest of the fallen angels into serpents.

*Paradise Regained* is in many ways different from *Paradise Lost*. It is only about one-third as long as Milton's earlier epic, and it also lacks most of the complexity and drama of *Paradise Lost*. The cast of characters in *Paradise Regained* has been narrowed down to two—the Son of God and Satan. The two epics dramatize the dual nature of the Son of God; we see His divine aspect in *Paradise Lost* and His human aspect in the later epic. The central concern of Milton's epic is again temptation. In *Paradise Lost* Satan tempts Adam and succeeds (although God turns this success to His own purpose), but in the second epic the Son of God resists Satan's guiles.

When the Son of God is wandering in the wilderness, Satan unsuccessfully tempts him on three occasions (the closest Biblical account to Milton's poem is in Luke 4: 1–12). Satan's three temptations are as follows: first, he asks the hungry Son of God to turn a stone into bread; second, he offers Him the kingdoms of the world; and last, he tries to talk the Son of God into throwing Himself off a pinnacle to see if His Father will save Him. Of course, the Son of God resists all these temptations, and, ironically, at the end of the poem it is Satan who falls from the pinnacle.

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#### SUGGESTED READING

*Genesis* and *Luke* (They contain most of the Biblical history in Milton's epics.)

Marjorie Nicolson, *John Milton: A Reader's Guide to His Poetry* (New York, 1963). (This paperback is the best introduction to Milton's verse.)

C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'* (London, 1942). (Another good introduction to Milton, also available in paperback edition.)

Merritt Y. Hughes, ed., *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose* (New York, 1957). (This is the best one volume edition of Milton's works; it contains very full notes and helpful bibliographies.)

## *Paradise Lost*

### THE VERSE OF "PARADISE LOST"

"The measure is English Heroic Verse without Rime, as that of Homer in Greek, and of Virgil in Latin; Rime being no necessary Adjunct or true Ornament of Poem or good Verse, in longer Works especially, but the Invention of a barbarous Age, to set off wretched matter and lame Meeter; grac't indeed since by the use of some famous modern Poets, carried away by Custom, but much to thir own vexation, hindrance, and constraint, to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse than else they would have exprest them. Not without cause, therefore, some both Italian and Spanish Poets of prime note, have rejected Rime both in longer and shorter Works, as have also, long since, our best English Tragedies, as a thing of itself, to all judicious eares, triveal and of no true musical delight; which consists only in apt Numbers, fit quantity of Syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another, not in the jingling sound of like endings, a fault avoyded by the learned Ancients both in Poetry and all good Oratory. This neglect then of Rime, so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it rather is to be esteem'd an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recover'd to Heroic Poem from the troublesom and modern bondage of Rimeing."

From Milton's own Edition, 1669.

## BOOK I

## THE ARGUMENT

This First Book proposes, first in brief, the whole subject, Man's disobedience, and the loss thereupon of Paradise, wherein he was placed. Then touches the prime cause of his fall, the serpent, or rather Satan in the serpent; who, revolting from God, and drawing to his side many legions of Angels, was by the command of God driven out of heaven with all his crew into the great deep. Which action passed over, the Poem hastes into the midst of things, presenting Satan with his Angels now fallen into hell, described here, not in the centre, for heaven and earth may be supposed as yet not made, certainly not yet accursed, but in a place of utter darkness, fitliest called Chaos. Here Satan with his Angels lying on the burning lake, thunderstruck and astonished, after a certain space recovers, as from confusion, calls up him who next in order and dignity lay by him: they confer of their miserable fall. Satan awakens all his legions, who lay till then in the same manner confounded; they rise; their numbers, array of battle, their chief leaders named, according to the idols known afterwards in Canaan and the countries adjoining. To these Satan directs his speech, comforts them with hope yet of regaining heaven, but tells them lastly of a new world and new kind of creature to be created, according to an ancient prophecy or report in heaven; for that Angels were long before this visible creation, was the opinion of many ancient Fathers. To find out the truth of this prophecy, and what to determine thereon, he refers to a full council. What his associates thence attempt. Pandæmonium, the palace of Satan, rises, suddenly built out of the deep: the infernal Peers there sit in council.

Of Man's first disobedience and the fruit  
 Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
 Brought death into the world and all our woe,  
 With loss of Eden, till one greater Man  
 Restore us and regain the blissful seat,  
 Sing heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top  
 Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire  
 That shepherd,<sup>1</sup> who first taught the chosen seed,

<sup>1</sup> Moses.

In the beginning how the heav'ns and earth  
 Rose out of Chaos; or if Sion hill  
 Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook<sup>1</sup> that flow'd  
 Past by the oracle of God; I thence  
 Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous song,  
 That with no middle flight intends to soar  
 Above th' Aonian mount,<sup>2</sup> while it pursues  
 Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.

And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer  
 Before all temples th' upright heart and pure,  
 Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first  
 Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread  
 Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss,<sup>3</sup>  
 And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark  
 Illumine, what is low raise and support;  
 That to the height of this great argument  
 I may assert eternal Providence,  
 And justify the ways of God to men.

Say first, for heav'n hides nothing from thy view,  
 Nor the deep tract of hell—say first, what cause  
 Moved our grand Parents in that happy state,  
 Favour'd of heaven so highly, to fall off  
 From their Creator, and transgress his will  
 For one restraint, lords of the world besides?  
 Who first seduced them to that foul revolt?  
 Th' infernal serpent; he it was, whose guile,  
 Stirr'd up with envy and revenge, deceived  
 The mother of mankind, what time his pride  
 Had cast him out from heav'n, with all his host  
 Of rebel Angels, by whose aid aspiring  
 To set himself in glory above his peers,  
 He trusted to have equall'd the Most High,<sup>4</sup>  
 If he opposed; and with ambitious aim  
 Against the throne and monarchy of God  
 Raised impious war in heav'n, and battle proud,  
 With vain attempt. Him the almighty Power  
 Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' ethereal sky,

<sup>1</sup> A small brook that flowed near the Temple of Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> A mountain in Boeotia. In mythology, the Muses were said to dwell on it.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. i. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah xiv. 13-15.

With hideous ruin and combustion, down  
 To bottomless perdition, there to dwell  
 In adamantine chains and penal fire,  
 Who durst defy th' Omnipotent to arms.  
 Nine times the space that measures day and night  
 To mortal men, he with his horrid crew  
 Lay vanquish'd, rolling in the fiery gulf,  
 Confounded though immortal: but his doom  
 Reserved him to more wrath; for now the thought  
 Both of lost happiness and lasting pain  
 Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes,  
 That witness'd huge affliction and dismay,  
 Mix'd with obdurate pride and stedfast hate.  
 At once, as far as angels ken, he views  
 The dismal situation waste and wild;  
 A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,  
 As one great furnace, flamed; yet from those flames  
 No light, but rather darkness visible  
 Served only to discover sights of woe,  
 Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace  
 And rest can never dwell, hope never comes,<sup>1</sup>  
 That comes to all; but torture without end  
 Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed  
 With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed.  
 Such place eternal justice had prepared  
 For those rebellious; here their prison ordain'd  
 In utter darkness, and their portion set  
 As far removed from God and light of heav'n,  
 As from the centre thrice to th' utmost pole.  
 O how unlike the place from whence they fell!  
 There the companions of his fall, o'erwhelm'd  
 With floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire,  
 He soon discerns, and welt'ring by his side  
 One next himself in power, and next in crime,  
 Long after known in Palestine, and named  
 Beelzebub:<sup>2</sup> To whom th' arch-enemy,

<sup>1</sup>"Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch' intrate," was the inscription placed by Dante over the gates of his "Inferno."

<sup>2</sup>The god of flies, worshipped by the Philistines (2 Kings i. 2). The Jews considered Beelzebub the greatest of the devils. See their accusation of our Lord, St. Matt. xii. 24-27; where it appears that with them Beelzebub and "Satan" were synonymous names. Milton makes them two different fallen angels.

And thence in heav'n call'd Satan,<sup>1</sup> with bold words  
Breaking the horrid silence, thus began.

If thou beest he—But O how fall'n! how changed  
From him, who in the happy realms of light,  
Clothed with transcendent brightness, didst outshine  
Myriads, though bright! If he, whom mutual league,  
United thoughts and counsels, equal hope  
And hazard in the glorious enterprise,  
Join'd with me once, now misery hath join'd  
In equal ruin: into what pit thou seest  
From what height fall'n, so much the stronger proved  
He with his thunder; and till then who knew  
The force of those dire arms? yet not for those,  
Nor what the potent victor in his rage  
Can else inflict, do I repent, or change,  
Though changed in outward lustre, that fix'd mind  
And high disdain from sense of injured merit,  
That with the Mightiest raised me to contend,  
And to the fierce contention brought along  
Innumerable force of Spirits arm'd,  
That durst dislike his reign; and, me preferring,  
His utmost power with adverse power opposed  
In dubious battle on the plains of heav'n,  
And shook his throne. What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost; th' unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate  
And courage never to submit or yield,  
And what is else not to be overcome;  
That glory never shall his wrath or might  
Extort from me: to bow and sue for grace  
With suppliant knee, and deify his power.  
Who from the terror of this arm so late  
Doubted his empire, that were low indeed,  
That were an ignominy and shame beneath  
This downfall; since by fate the strength of Gods  
And this empyreal substance cannot fail;  
Since through experience of this great event,  
In arms not worse, in foresight much advanced,  
We may with more successful hope resolve  
To wage by force or guile eternal war,

<sup>1</sup> Satan is a Hebrew word, signifying "enemy." The enemy both of God and man.

Irreconcilable to our grand foe,  
Who now triumphs, and in th' excess of joy  
Sole reigning holds the tyranny of heav'n.

So spake th' apostate Angel, though in pain,  
Vaunting aloud, but rack'd with deep despair:  
And him thus answer'd soon his bold compeer.

O Prince, O Chief of many thronèd Powers,  
That led th' imbattell'd Seraphim to war  
Under thy conduct, and, in dreadful deeds  
Fearless, endanger'd heav'n's perpetual King,  
And put to proof his high supremacy;  
Whether upheld by strength, or chance, or fate,  
Too well I see and rue the dire event,  
That with sad overthrow and foul defeat  
Hath lost us heav'n, and all this mighty host  
In horrible destruction laid thus low,  
As far as Gods and heavenly essences  
Can perish: for the mind and spirit remains  
Invincible, and vigor soon returns,  
Though all our glory extinct, and happy state  
Here swallow'd up in endless misery.  
But what if he our conqueror, whom I now  
Of force believe almighty, since no less  
Than such could have o'erpower'd such force as ours,  
Has left us this our spirit and strength entire,  
Strongly to suffer and support our pains,  
That we may so suffice his vengeful ire,  
Or do him mightier service, as his thralls  
By right of war, whate'er his business be,  
Here in the heart of hell to work in fire,  
Or do his errands in the gloomy deep:  
What can it then avail, though yet we feel  
Strength undiminish'd, or eternal being  
To undergo eternal punishment?

Whereto with speedy words th' Arch-fiend replied.

Fall'n Cherub, to be weak is miserable,  
Doing or suffering: but of this be sure,  
To do ought good never will be our task,  
But ever to do ill our sole delight;  
As being the contrary to his high will,  
Whom we resist. If then his providence  
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,

Our labor must be to pervert that end,  
And out of good still to find means of evil;  
Which oft-times may succeed, so as perhaps  
Shall grieve him, if I fail not, and disturb  
His inmost counsels from their destined aim.  
But see! the angry victor hath recall'd  
His ministers of vengeance and pursuit  
Back to the gates of heav'n: the sulphurous hail,  
Shot after us in storm, o'erblown hath laid  
The fiery surge, that from the precipice  
Of heav'n received us falling, and the thunder,  
Wing'd with red lightning and impetuous rage,  
Perhaps hath spent his shafts, and ceases now  
To bellow through the vast and boundless deep.  
Let us not slip th' occasion, whether scorn  
Or satiate fury yield it from our foe.  
Seest thou yon dreary plain, forlorn and wild,  
The seat of desolation, void of light,  
Save what the glimmering of these livid flames  
Casts pale and dreadful? thither let us tend  
From off the tossing of these fiery waves,  
There rest, if any rest can harbor there,  
And, reassembling our afflicted powers,  
Consult how we may henceforth most offend  
Our enemy, our own loss how repair,  
How overcome this dire calamity,  
What reinforcement we may gain from hope,  
If not, what resolution from despair.

Thus Satan talking to his nearest mate,  
With head up-lift above the wave, and eyes  
That sparkling blazed; his other parts besides  
Prone on the flood, extended long and large,  
Lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge  
As whom the fables name of monstrous size,  
Titanian, or Earth-born, that warred on Jove,<sup>1</sup>  
Briareus, or Typhon, whom the den  
By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea-beast  
Leviathan, which God of all his works

<sup>1</sup>The Titans were monstrous giants, said to have made war against the gods. Briareus had a hundred hands. Typhon was the same as Typhoeus, who was imprisoned by Jupiter in a cave near Tarsus, in Cilicia.



Created hugest that swim th' ocean stream;  
Him haply slumbering on the Norway foam  
The pilot of some small night-founder'd skiff  
Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,  
With fixèd anchor in his scaly rind  
Moors by his side under the lee, while night  
Invests the sea, and wishèd morn delays<sup>1</sup>  
So stretched out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay,  
Chain'd on the burning lake, nor ever thence  
Had risen or heaved his head, but that the will  
And high permission of all-ruling heaven  
Left him at large to his own dark designs;  
That with reiterated crimes he might  
Heap on himself damnation, while he sought  
Evil to others, and enraged might see  
How all his malice served but to bring forth.  
Infinite goodness, grace, and mercy shown  
On man by him seduced; but on himself  
Treble confusion, wrath, and vengeance pour'd.  
Forthwith upright he rears from off the pool  
His mighty stature; on each hand the flames  
Driven backward slope their pointing spires, and roll'd  
In billows leave i' th' midst a horrid vale.  
Then with expanded wings he steers his flight  
Aloft, incumbent on the dusky air,  
That felt unusual weight, till on dry land  
He lights, if it were land that ever burn'd  
With solid, as the lake with liquid, fire;  
And such appear'd in hue, as when the force  
Of subterranean wind transports a hill  
Torn from Pelorus,<sup>2</sup> or the shatter'd side  
Of thund'ring Ætna, whose combustible  
And fuel'd entrails thence conceiving fire,  
Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds,  
And leave a singèd bottom, all involved  
With stench and smoke: such resting found the sole  
Of unblest'd feet. Him follow'd his next mate,  
Both glorying to have 'scaped the Stygian flood,  
As Gods, and by their own recover'd strength,

<sup>1</sup> The whale is evidently here intended.

<sup>2</sup> Capo di Faro, in Sicily.