

The Temple of King Solomon

Isaac Newton (1642 - 1725)

Gaunt, alone, near nothing, stands
Woolstrophe Manor where was born,
after his father died,
A solitary boy, selfishly abandoned
By remarriage of his mother.
He fought within himself
To master learning,
To struggle as a servant in the college halls,
To battle with intolerant religion,
Circumstance of regal rule,
Contemporaneous adversaries,
And bewildering, disjointed Nature's law.
Alone, for ever alone, he lived and worked and died;
But to his mind, populous more than any foggy fenland town,
From biblical antiquity stirred rousing savants
To hoop his hidden scaffold-building alchemy.

The temple of King Solomon,
Built to a holy plan, on blood-stained ground
Already sacred to these warring tribes
Before records began,
Gave plans both pivotal and unctuous.

There, at the heart of its most secret chamber,
Glowed a flame eternal,
Central to the mystic host, fed for sacrifice,
A faith-proclaiming symbol of their everlasting, unseen god,
God both of birth and battle,
Of salvation, hope and death,
Of wealth given, and sacrifice taken and expected.

Next, cradled round, the stone-cold chamber
Of fawning priests and acolytes
Circumferencing the sanctum,
Restrained by awe, yet central drawn to this one sacred flame.
Peripheral to all, to chambers, courts and wall,
The common man, distant
Yet eternal,
An unchanging constancy, buttressed by the brief span
Of each quiescing life.

Thus he dissipates his hours until, upon the dying day,
He sits sequestered in a darkened room
Refining Ezekiel's vision of the long-dead prophet,
Solomon - in Newton's eyes the wisest of the wise -
Perfecting sketches of a temple built
Three thousand years before.
Each word and line vivid as a cut in stone,
Bright as blazing light flashed through a window slat,
Imaged firm within his head where here the prophet lives.
Each stone, real and granite cold,

Traced with mental fingers through the mason's cracks,
Cut crystal sharp and hard.

And from this studied alchemy grows out
A stronger vision to supplant the ancient paradigm:
Of fiery sun's eternal flame, and planets held
In courtly dance around a hallowed central fire,
Drawn ever in, as apples are earth-drawn,
Yet constantly flung out through space
By their innate momentum.

Two thoughts threading through the life of man,
Two diverse homilies in one eternal plan:
Motion in the heavens, described by Kepler's law,
And motion here on earth, which Galileo saw,
Each one held in lone community,
Now merge in Newton to a marvellous unity.
He saw repeated order in both galaxy and sun;
The movement of a distant star within a marble's run.

In Kensington, at Mary Abbot's church,
Where once he worshipped when success had come,
How apt the homily in stained glass held,
Plucked from the Book of Kings as epitaph.
For "Let the shadow return backwards" says
More of alchemy than rational science;
And bridging worlds irrational and wild
With order tamed and factually displayed
Shall stand as epitaph, this King of science crowned,
Who dared to dream - and dreaming, dared to sing.

(c) John Marr