

REPRESENTATIVE POETRY ONLINE

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John Dryden (1631-1700)

Absalom and Achitophel

1In pious times, ere priest-craft did begin,
 2Before polygamy was made a sin;
 3When man, on many, multipli'd his kind,
 4Ere one to one was cursedly confin'd:
 5When Nature prompted, and no Law deni'd
 6Promiscuous use of concubine and bride;
 7Then, Israel's monarch, after Heaven's own heart,
 8His vigorous warmth did variously impart
 9To wives and slaves: and, wide as his command,
 10Scatter'd his Maker's image through the land.
 11Michal, of royal blood, the crown did wear;
 12A soil ungrateful to the tiller's care:
 13Not so the rest; for several mothers bore
 14To god-like David, several sons before.
 15But since like slaves his bed they did ascend,
 16No true succession could their seed attend.
 17Of all this numerous progeny was none

18So beautiful, so brave, as Absalom:
 19Whether, inspir'd by some diviner lust,
 20His father got him with a greater gust;
 21Or that his conscious destiny made way,
 22By manly beauty to imperial sway.
 23Early in foreign fields he won renown,
 24With kings and states alli'd to Israel's crown:
 25In peace the thoughts of war he could remove,
 26And seem'd as he were only born for love.
 27Whate'er he did, was done with so much ease,
 28In him alone, 'twas natural to please:
 29His motions all accompani'd with grace;
 30And Paradise was open'd in his face.
 31With secret joy, indulgent David view'd
 32His youthful image in his son renew'd:
 33To all his wishes nothing he deni'd;
 34And made the charming Annabel his bride.
 35What faults he had (for who from faults is free?)
 36His father could not, or he would not see.
 37Some warm excesses, which the Law forbore,
 38Were constru'd youth that purged by boiling o'er:
 39And Amnon's murder, by a specious name,
 40Was call'd a just revenge for injur'd fame.
 41Thus prais'd, and lov'd, the noble youth remain'd,
 42While David, undisturb'd, in Sion reign'd.
 43But life can never be sincerely blest:
 44Heav'n punishes the bad, and proves the best.
 45The Jews, a headstrong, moody, murm'ring race,
 46As ever tri'd th'extent and stretch of grace;
 47God's pamper'd people whom, debauch'd with ease,
 48No king could govern, nor no God could please;
 49(Gods they had tri'd of every shape and size,
 50That god-smiths could produce, or priests devise:)
 51These Adam-wits, too fortunately free,
 52Began to dream they wanted liberty:
 53And when no rule, no precedent, was found
 54Of men, by laws less circumscrib'd and bound,
 55They led their wild desires to woods and caves,
 56And thought that all but savages were slaves.
 57They who, when Saul was dead, without a blow,
 58Made foolish Ishbosheth the crown forego;
 59Who banisht David did from Hebron bring,
 60And, with a general shout, proclaim'd him king:
 61Those very Jews, who, at their very best,
 62Their Humour more than loyalty exprest,
 63Now, wonder'd why, so long, they had obey'd
 64An idol-monarch which their hands had made:
 65Thought they might ruin him they could create;
 66Or melt him to that golden calf, a state.
 67But these were random bolts: no form'd design,
 68Nor interest made the factious crowd to join:
 69The sober part of Israel, free from stain,
 70Well knew the value of a peaceful reign:

71And, looking backward with a wise afright,
 72Saw seams of wounds, dishonest to the sight:
 73In contemplation of whose ugly scars,
 74They curst the memory of civil wars.
 75The moderate sort of men, thus qualifi'd,
 76Inclin'd the balance to the better side:
 77And, David's mildness manag'd it so well,
 78The bad found no occasion to rebel.
 79But, when to sin our bias'd nature leans,
 80The careful Devil is still at hand with means;
 81And providently pimps for ill desires:
 82The good old cause reviv'd, a plot requires.
 83Plots, true or false, are necessary things,
84To raise up common-wealths, and ruin kings.

85 Th' inhabitants of old Jerusalem
 86Were Jebusites: the town so call'd from them;
 87And theirs the native right--
 88But when the chosen people grew more strong,
 89The rightful cause at length became the wrong:
 90And every loss the men of Jebus bore,
 91They still were thought God's enemies the more.
 92Thus, worn and weaken'd, well or ill content,
 93Submit they must to David's government:
 94Impoverish'd and depriv'd of all command,
 95Their taxes doubled as they lost their land;
 96And, what was harder yet to flesh and blood,
 97Their gods disgrac'd, and burnt like common wood.
 98This set the heathen priesthood in a flame;
 99For priests of all religions are the same:
 100Of whatsoe'er descent their godhead be,
 101Stock, stone, or other homely pedigree,
 102In his defence his servants are as bold,
 103As if he had been born of beaten gold.
 104The Jewish Rabbins though their Enemies,
 105In this conclude them honest men and wise:
 106For 'twas their duty, all the learned think,
 107T'espouse his cause by whom they eat and drink.
 108From hence began that plot, the nation's curse,
 109Bad in itself, but represented worse.
 110Rais'd in extremes, and in extremes decrid;
 111With oaths affirm'd, with dying vows deni'd.
 112Not weigh'd, or winnow'd by the multitude;
 113But swallow'd in the mass, unchew'd and crude.
 114Some truth there was, but dash'd and brew'd with lies;
 115To please the fools, and puzzle all the wise.
 116Succeeding times did equal folly call,
 117Believing nothing, or believing all.
 118Th' Egyptian rites the Jebusites embrac'd;
 119Where gods were recommended by their taste.
 120Such sav'ry deities must needs be good,
121As serv'd at once for worship and for food.
 122By force they could not introduce these gods;
 123For ten to one, in former days was odds.

124So fraud was us'd, (the sacrificers' trade,)
 125Fools are more hard to conquer than persuade.
 126Their busy teachers mingled with the Jews;
 127And rak'd, for converts, even the court and stews:
 128Which Hebrew priests the more unkindly took,
 129Because the fleece accompanies the flock.
 130Some thought they God's anointed meant to slay
 131By guns, invented since full many a day:
 132Our author swears it not; but who can know
 133How far the Devil and Jebusites may go?
 134This plot, which fail'd for want of common sense,
 135Had yet a deep and dangerous consequence:
 136For, as when raging fevers boil the blood,
 137The standing lake soon floats into a flood;
 138And ev'ry hostile humour, which before
 139Slept quiet in its channels, bubbles o'er:
 140So, several factions from this first ferment,
 141Work up to foam, and threat the government.
 142Some by their friends, more by themselves thought wise,
 143Oppos'd the pow'r, to which they could not rise.
 144Some had in courts been great, and thrown from thence,
 145Like fiends, were harden'd in impenitence.
 146Some by their monarch's fatal mercy grown,
 147From pardon'd rebels, kinsmen to the throne;
 148Were rais'd in pow'r and public office high;
 149Strong bands, if bands ungrateful men could tie.

150 Of these the false Achitophel was first:
 151A name to all succeeding ages curst.
 152For close designs, and crooked counsels fit;
 153Sagacious, bold and turbulent of wit:
 154Restless, unfixt in principles and place;
 155In pow'r unpleas'd, impatient of disgrace.
 156A fiery soul, which working out its way,
 157Fretted the pigmy-body to decay:
158And o'er inform'd the tenement of clay.
 159A daring pilot in extremity;
 160Pleas'd with the danger, when the waves went high
 161He sought the storms; but for a calm unfit,
 162Would steer too nigh the sands, to boast his wit.
 163Great wits are sure to madness near alli'd;
 164And thin partitions do their bounds divide:
 165Else, why should he, with wealth and honour blest,
 166Refuse his age the needful hours of rest?
 167Punish a body which he could not please;
 168Bankrupt of life, yet prodigal of ease?
 169And all to leave, what with his toil he won
 170To that unfeather'd, two-legg'd thing, a son:
 171Got, while his soul did huddled notions try;
172And born a shapeless lump, like anarchy.
 173In friendship false, implacable in hate:
 174Resolv'd to ruin or to rule the state.
 175To compass this, the triple bond he broke;

176The pillars of the public safety shook:
177And fitted Israel for a foreign yoke.
 178Then, seiz'd with fear, yet still affecting fame,
 179Usurp'd a patriot's all-atoning name.
 180So easy still it proves in factious times,
 181With public zeal to cancel private crimes:
 182How safe is treason, and how sacred ill,
 183Where none can sin against the people's will:
 184Where crowds can wink; and no offence be known,
 185Since in another's guilt they find their own.
 186Yet, fame deserv'd, no enemy can grudge;
187The statesman we abhor, but praise the judge.
 188In Jewish courts ne'er sat an Abbethdin
 189With more discerning eyes, or hands more clean:
 190Unbrib'd, unsought, the wretched to redress;
 191Swift of dispatch, and easy of access.
 192Oh, had he been content to serve the crown,
 193With virtues only proper to the gown;
 194Or, had the rankness of the soil been freed
 195From cockle, that opprest the noble seed:
 196David, for him his tuneful harp had strung,
 197And heav'n had wanted one immortal song.
 198But wild ambition loves to slide, not stand;
 199And fortune's ice prefers to virtue's land:
 200Achitophel, grown weary to possess
 201A lawful fame, and lazy happiness;
 202Disdain'd the golden fruit to gather free,
 203And lent the crowd his arm to shake the tree.
 204Now, manifest of crimes, contriv'd long since,
 205He stood at bold defiance with his prince:
 206Held up the buckler of the people's cause,
 207Against the crown; and skulk'd behind the laws.
 208The wish'd occasion of the plot he takes;
 209Some circumstances finds, but more he makes.
 210By buzzing emissaries, fills the ears
 211Of list'ning crowds, with jealousies and fears
 212Of arbitrary counsels brought to light,
 213And proves the king himself a Jebusite.
 214Weak arguments! which yet he knew full well,
 215Were strong with people easy to rebel.
 216For, govern'd by the moon, the giddy Jews
 217Tread the same track when she the prime renews:
 218And once in twenty years, their scribes record,
 219By natural instinct they change their lord.
 220Achitophel still wants a chief, and none
 221Was found so fit as warlike Absalom:
 222Not, that he wish'd his greatness to create,
 223(For politicians neither love nor hate:)
 224But, for he knew, his title not allow'd,
 225Would keep him still depending on the crowd:
 226That kingly pow'r, thus ebbing out, might be
227Drawn to the dregs of a democracy.
 228Him he attempts, with studied arts to please,

229And sheds his venom, in such words as these.

230 Auspicious Prince! at whose nativity
 231Some royal planet rul'd the southern sky;
 232Thy longing country's darling and desire;
 233Their cloudy pillar, and their guardian fire:
 234Their second Moses, whose extended wand
 235Divides the seas, and shows the promis'd land:
 236Whose dawning day, in very distant age,
 237Has exercis'd the sacred prophet's rage:
 238The people's pray'r, the glad diviner's theme,
 239The young men's vision, and the old men's dream!
 240Thee, Saviour, thee, the nation's vows confess;
 241And, never satisfi'd with seeing, bless:
 242Swift, unbespoken poms, thy steps proclaim,
 243And stammering babes are taught to lisp thy name.
 244How long wilt thou the general joy detain;
 245Starve, and defraud the people of thy reign?
 246Content ingloriously to pass thy days
 247Like one of virtue's fools that feeds on praise;
 248Till thy fresh glories, which now shine so bright,
 249Grow stale and tarnish with our daily sight.
 250Believe me, royal youth, thy fruit must be,
 251Or gather'd ripe, or rot upon the tree.
 252Heav'n has to all allotted, soon or late,
 253Some lucky revolution of their fate:
 254Whose motions if we watch and guide with skill,
 255(For human good depends on human will,)
 256Our fortune rolls, as from a smooth descent,
 257And, from the first impression, takes the bent:
 258But, if unseiz'd, she glides away like wind;
 259And leaves repenting folly far behind.
 260Now, now she meets you, with a glorious prize,
 261And spreads her locks before her as she flies.
 262Had thus Old David, from whose loins you spring,
 263Not dar'd, when fortune call'd him, to be king.
 264At Gath an exile he might still remain;
 265And Heaven's anointing oil had been in vain.
 266Let his successful youth your hopes engage;
 267But shun th'example of declining age:
 268Behold him setting in his western skies,
 269The shadows lengthening as the vapours rise.
 270He is not now, as when on Jordan's sand
 271The joyful people throng'd to see him land,
 272Cov'ring the beach, and black'ning all the strand:
 273But, like the Prince of Angels from his height,
 274Comes tumbling downward with diminish'd light:
 275Betray'd by one poor plot to public scorn:
 276(Our only blessing since his curst return:)
 277Those heaps of people which one sheaf did bind,
 278Blown off, and scatter'd by a puff of wind.
 279What strength can he to your designs oppose,
 280Naked of friends and round beset with foes?
 281If Pharaoh's doubtful succour he should use,

282A foreign aid would more incense the Jews:
 283Proud Egypt would dissembled friendship bring;
 284Foment the war, but not support the king:
 285Nor would the royal party e'er unite
 286With Pharaoh's arms, t'assist the Jebusite;
 287Or if they should, their interest soon would break,
 288And with such odious aid, make David weak.
 289All sorts of men, by my successful arts,
 290Abhorring kings, estrange their alter'd hearts
 291From David's rule: And 'tis the general Cry,
 292Religion, Common-wealth, and Liberty.
 293If, you, as champion of the public good,
 294Add to their arms a chief of royal blood;
 295What may not Israel hope, and what applause
 296Might such a general gain by such a cause?
 297Not barren praise alone, that gaudy flow'r,
 298Fair only to the sight, but solid pow'r:
 299And nobler is a limited command,
 300Giv'n by the love of all your native land,
 301Than a successive title, long, and dark,
 302Drawn from the mouldy rolls of Noah's Ark.

303 What cannot praise effect in mighty minds,
 304When flattery soothes, and when ambition blinds!
 305Desire of pow'r, on earth a vicious weed,
 306Yet, sprung from high, is of celestial seed:
 307In God 'tis glory: And when men aspire,
 308'Tis but a spark too much of heavenly fire.
 309Th' ambitious youth, too covetous of fame,
 310Too full of angel's metal in his frame;
 311Unwarily was led from virtue's ways;
 312Made drunk with honour, and debauch'd with praise.
 313Half loath, and half consenting to the ill,
 314(For loyal blood within him struggled still)
 315He thus repli'd.--And what pretence have I
 316To take up arms for public liberty?
 317My Father governs with unquestion'd right;
 318The Faith's defender, and mankind's delight:
 319Good, gracious, just, observant of the laws;
 320And Heav'n by wonders has espous'd his cause.
 321Whom has he wrong'd in all his peaceful reign?
 322Who sues for justice to his throne in vain?
 323What millions has he pardon'd of his foes,
 324Whom just revenge did to his wrath expose?
 325Mild, easy, humble, studious of our good;
 326Inclin'd to mercy, and averse from blood.
 327If mildness ill with stubborn Israel suit,
 328His crime is God's beloved attribute.
 329What could he gain, his people to betray,
 330Or change his right, for arbitrary sway?
 331Let haughty Pharaoh curse with such a reign,
 332His fruitful Nile, and yoke a servile train.
 333If David's rule Jerusalem displease,
 334The Dog-star heats their brains to this disease.

335Why then should I, encouraging the bad,
 336Turn rebel, and run popularly mad?
 337Were he a tyrant who, by lawless might,
 338Oppress'd the Jews, and rais'd the Jebusite,
 339Well might I mourn; but nature's holy bands
 340Would curb my spirits, and restrain my hands:
 341The people might assert their liberty;
 342But what was right in them, were crime in me.
 343His favour leaves me nothing to require;
344Prevents my wishes, and out-runs desire.
 345What more can I expect while David lives?
 346All but his kingly diadem he gives:
 347And that: but there he paus'd; then sighing, said,
 348Is justly destin'd for a worthier head.
 349For when my father from his toils shall rest,
 350And late augment the number of the blest:
 351His lawful issue shall the throne ascend;
 352Or the collat'ral line where that shall end.
 353His brother, though oppress'd with vulgar spite,
 354Yet dauntless and secure of native right,
 355Of every royal virtue stands possess'd;
 356Still dear to all the bravest, and the best.
357His courage foes, his friends his truth proclaim;
 358His loyalty the king, the world his fame.
 359His mercy ev'n th'offending crowd will find:
 360For sure he comes of a forgiving kind.
 361Why should I then repine at Heaven's decree;
 362Which gives me no pretence to royalty?
 363Yet oh that Fate, propitiously inclin'd,
 364Had rais'd my birth, or had debas'd my mind;
 365To my large soul, not all her treasure lent,
 366And then betray'd it to a mean descent.
 367I find, I find my mounting spirits bold,
 368And David's part disdains my mother's mold.
 369Why am I scanted by a niggard-birth?
 370My soul disclaims the kindred of her earth:
 371And made for empire, whispers me within;
 372Desire of greatness is a god-like sin.

373 Him staggering so when Hell's dire agent found,
 374While fainting virtue scarce maintain'd her ground,
 375He pours fresh forces in, and thus replies:

376 Th'eternal God, supremely good and wise,
 377Imparts not these prodigious gifts in vain;
 378What wonders are reserv'd to bless your reign?
 379Against your will your arguments have shown,
 380Such virtue's only giv'n to guide a throne.
 381Not that your father's mildness I contemn;
 382But manly force becomes the diadem.
 383'Tis true, he grants the people all they crave;
 384And more perhaps than subjects ought to have:
 385For lavish grants suppose a monarch tame,
386And more his goodness than his wit proclaim.

387But when should people strive their bonds to break,
 388If not when kings are negligent or weak?
 389Let him give on till he can give no more,
 390The thrifty Sanhedrin shall keep him poor:
 391And every shekel which he can receive,
 392Shall cost a limb of his prerogative.
 393To ply him with new plots, shall be my care;
 394Or plunge him deep in some expensive war;
 395Which, when his treasure can no more supply,
 396He must, with the remains of kingship, buy.
 397His faithful friends, our jealousies and fears
 398Call Jebusites; and Pharaoh's pensioners:
 399Whom, when our fury from his aid has torn,
 400He shall be naked left to public scorn.
 401The next successor, whom I fear and hate,
 402My arts have made obnoxious to the state;
 403Turn'd all his virtues to his overthrow,
 404And gain'd our elders to pronounce a foe.
 405His right, for sums of necessary gold,
 406Shall first be pawn'd, and afterwards be sold:
 407Till time shall ever-wanting David draw,
 408To pass your doubtful title into law:
 409If not; the people have a right supreme
 410To make their kings; for kings are made for them.
 411All empire is no more than pow'r in trust:
 412Which when resum'd, can be no longer just.
 413Succession, for the general good design'd,
 414In its own wrong a nation cannot bind:
 415If altering that, the people can relieve,
 416Better one suffer, than a nation grieve.
 417The Jews well know their pow'r: ere Saul they chose,
 418God was their king, and God they durst depose.
 419Urge now your piety, your filial name,
 420A father's right, and fear of future fame;
 421The public good, the universal call,
 422To which even Heav'n submitted, answers all.
 423Nor let his love enchant your generous mind;
 424'Tis Nature's trick to propagate her kind.
 425Our fond begetters, who would never die,
 426Love but themselves in their posterity.
 427Or let his kindness by th'effects be tri'd,
 428Or let him lay his vain pretence aside.
 429God said he lov'd your father; could he bring
 430A better proof, than to anoint him king?
 431It surely show'd he lov'd the shepherd well,
 432Who gave so fair a flock as Israel.
 433Would David have you thought his darling son?
 434What means he then, to alienate the crown?
 435The name of godly he may blush to bear:
 436'Tis after God's own heart to cheat his heir.
 437He to his brother gives supreme command;
 438To you a legacy of barren land:
 439Perhaps th'old harp, on which he thrums his lays:
 440Or some dull Hebrew ballad in your praise.

441Then the next heir, a prince, severe and wise
 442Already looks on you with jealous eyes;
 443Sees through the thin disguises of your arts,
 444And marks your progress in the people's hearts.
 445Though now his mighty soul in grief contains,
 446He meditates revenge who least complains;
 447And like a lion, slumb'ring in the way,
 448Or sleep-dissembling, while he waits his prey,
 449His fearless foes within his distance draws;
 450Constrains his roaring and contracts his paws:
 451Till at the last, his time for fury found,
 452He shoots with sudden vengeance from the ground:
 453The prostrate vulgar, passes o'er, and spares;
 454But with a lordly rage, his hunters tears.
 455Your case no tame expedients will afford;
 456Resolve on death, or conquest by the sword,
 457Which for no less a stake than life, you draw;
 458And self-defence is Nature's eldest law.
 459Leave the warm people no considering time;
 460For then rebellion may be thought a crime.
 461Prevail yourself of what occasion gives,
 462But try your title while your father lives:
 463And that your arms may have a fair pretence,
 464Proclaim, you take them in the king's defence:
 465Whose sacred life each minute would expose
 466To plots from seeming friends and secret foes.
 467And who can sound the depth of David's soul?
 468Perhaps his fear, his kindness may control.
 469He fears his brother, though he loves his son,
 470For plighted vows too late to be undone.
 471If so, by force he wishes to be gain'd;
 472Like women's lechery, to seem constrain'd:
 473Doubt not; but when he most affects the frown,
 474Commit a pleasing rape upon the crown.
 475Secure his person to secure your cause;
 476They who possess the prince, possess the laws.

477 He said, and this advice above the rest
 478With Absalom's mild nature suited best;
 479Unblam'd of life, (ambition set aside,)
 480Not stain'd with cruelty, nor puff'd with pride.
 481How happy had he been, if destiny
 482Had higher plac'd his birth, or not so high!
 483His kingly virtues might have claim'd a throne;
 484And blest all other countries but his own:
 485But charming greatness since so few refuse,
 486'Tis juster to lament him, than accuse.
 487Strong were his hopes a rival to remove,
 488With blandishments to gain the public love;
 489To head the faction while their zeal was hot,
 490And popularly prosecute the plot.
 491To farther this Achitophel unites
 492The malcontents of all the Israelites:
 493Whose differing parties he could wisely join,

494For several ends, to serve the same design.
 495The best, and of the princes some were such,
 496Who thought the pow'r of monarchy too much:
 497Mistaken men, and patriots in their hearts;
 498Not wicked, but seduc'd by impious arts.
 499By these the springs of property were bent,
 500And wound so high, they crack'd the government.
 501The next for interest sought t'embroil the state,
 502To sell their duty at a dearer rate;
 503And make their Jewish markets of the throne;
 504Pretending public good, to serve their own.
 505Others thought kings an useless heavy load,
 506Who cost too much, and did too little good.
 507These were for laying honest David by,
 508On principles of pure good husbandry.
 509With them join'd all th'haranguers of the throng,
 510That thought to get preferment by the tongue.
 511Who follow next, a double danger bring,
 512Not only hating David, but the king;
 513The Solymaeen rout; well vers'd of old
 514In godly faction, and in treason bold;
 515Cow'ring and quaking at a conqu'ror's sword,
 516But lofty to a lawful prince restor'd;
 517Saw with disdain an Ethnic plot begun,
 518And scorn'd by Jebusites to be out-done.
 519Hot Levites headed these; who pull'd before
 520From th'Ark, which in the Judges' days they bore,
 521Resum'd their Cant, and with a zealous cry,
 522Pursu'd their old belov'd Theocracy.
 523Where Sanhedrin and Priest enslav'd the nation,
 524And justifi'd their spoils by inspiration:
 525For who so fit for reign as Aaron's race,
 526If once dominion they could found in Grace?
 527These led the pack; though not of surest scent,
 528Yet deepest mouth'd against the government.
 529A numerous host of dreaming saints succeed;
530Of the true old enthusiastic breed:
 531'Gainst form and order they their pow'r employ;
 532Nothing to build, and all things to destroy.
 533But far more numerous was the herd of such,
 534Who think too little, and who talk too much.
 535These, out of mere instinct, they knew not why,
 536Ador'd their father's God, and property:
 537And by the same blind benefit of fate,
 538The Devil and the Jebusite did hate:
 539Born to be saved even in their own despite;
 540Because they could not help believing right.
 541Such were the tools; but a whole Hydra more
 542Remains, of sprouting heads too long, to score.
 543Some of their chiefs were princes of the land:
544In the first rank of these did Zimri stand:
 545A man so various, that he seem'd to be
 546Not one, but all Mankind's Epitome.

547Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;
 548Was everything by starts, and nothing long:
 549But in the course of one revolving moon,
 550Was chemist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon:
 551Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking;
 552Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.
 553Blest madman, who could every hour employ,
 554With something new to wish, or to enjoy!
 555Railing and praising were his usual themes;
 556And both (to show his judgment) in extremes:
 557So over violent, or over civil,
 558That every man, with him, was god or devil.
 559In squandering wealth was his peculiar art:
 560Nothing went unrewarded, but desert.
561Beggar'd by fools, whom still he found too late:
 562He had his jest, and they had his estate.
 563He laugh'd himself from court; then sought relief
 564By forming parties, but could ne'er be chief:
 565For, spite of him, the weight of business fell
 566On Absalom and wise Achitophel:
 567Thus, wicked but in will, of means bereft,
 568He left not faction, but of that was left.

569 Titles and names 'twere tedious to rehearse
 570Of lords, below the dignity of verse.
 571Wits, warriors, commonwealths-men, were the best:
 572Kind husbands and mere nobles all the rest.
 573And, therefore in the name of dullness, be
 574The well-hung Balaam and cold Caleb free.
 575And canting Nadab let oblivion damn,
576Who made new porridge for the Paschal Lamb.
 577Let friendship's holy band some names assure:
 578Some their own worth, and some let scorn secure.
 579Nor shall the rascal rabble here have place,
 580Whom kings no titles gave, and God no grace:
581Not bull-faced Jonas, who could statutes draw
 582To mean rebellion, and make treason law.
 583But he, though bad, is follow'd by a worse,
 584The wretch, who Heav'n's Anointed dar'd to curse.
585Shimei, whose youth did early promise bring
 586Of zeal to God, and hatred to his king;
 587Did wisely from expensive sins refrain,
 588And never broke the Sabbath, but for gain:
 589Nor ever was he known an oath to vent,
 590Or curse, unless against the government.
 591Thus, heaping wealth, by the most ready way
 592Among the Jews, which was to cheat and pray;
 593The city, to reward his pious hate
 594Against his master, chose him magistrate:
595His hand a vare of justice did uphold;
 596His neck was loaded with a chain of gold.
 597During his office, treason was no crime.
 598The sons of Belial had a glorious time:

599For Shimei, though not prodigal of pelf,
 600Yet lov'd his wicked neighbour as himself:
 601When two or three were gather'd to declaim
 602Against the monarch of Jerusalem,
 603Shimei was always in the midst of them.
 604And, if they curst the king when he was by,
 605Would rather curse, than break good company.
 606If any durst his factious friends accuse,
 607He pack'd a jury of dissenting Jews:
 608Whose fellow-feeling, in the godly cause,
 609Would free the suff'ring saint from human laws.
 610For laws are only made to punish those
 611Who serve the king, and to protect his foes.
 612If any leisure time he had from pow'r,
 613(Because 'tis sin to mis-employ an hour;)
 614His bus'ness was, by writing, to persuade,
 615That kings were useless, and a clog to trade:
 616And, that his noble style he might refine,
 617No Rechabite more shunn'd the fumes of wine.
 618Chaste were his cellars; and his shrieval board
 619The grossness of a city feast abhorr'd:
 620His cooks, with long disuse, their trade forgot;
 621Cool was his kitchen, though his brains were hot.
 622Such frugal virtue malice may accuse;
 623But sure 'twas necessary to the Jews:
 624For towns once burnt, such magistrates require
 625As dare not tempt God's providence by fire.
 626With spiritual food he fed his servants well,
 627But free from flesh, that made the Jews rebel:
 628And Moses' laws he held in more account
 629For forty days of fasting in the mount.
 630To speak the rest, who better are forgot,
 631Would tire a well-breath'd witness of the plot:
 632Yet, Corah, thou shalt from oblivion pass;
 633Erect thyself thou monumental brass:
 634High as the serpent of thy metal made,
 635While nations stand secure beneath thy shade.
 636What though his birth were base, yet comets rise
 637From earthy vapours e'er they shine in skies.
 638Prodigious actions may as well be done
 639By weaver's issue, as by prince's son.
 640This arch-attestor, for the public good,
 641By that one deed ennobles all his blood.
 642Who ever ask'd the witnesses' high race,
 643Whose oath with martyrdom did Stephen grace?
 644Ours was a Levite, and as times went then,
 645His tribe were God-almighty's gentlemen.
 646Sunk were his eyes, his voice was harsh and loud,
 647Sure signs he neither choleric was, nor proud:
 648His long chin prov'd his wit; his saint-like grace
 649A church vermilion, and a Moses' face.
 650His memory, miraculously great,
 651Could plots exceeding man's belief, repeat;

652Which therefore cannot be accounted lies,
 653For human wit could never such devise.
 654Some future truths are mingled in his book;
 655But, where the witness fail'd, the Prophet spoke:
 656Some things like visionary flights appear;
 657The spirit caught him up, the Lord knows where:
 658And gave him his rabbinical degree,
659Unknown to foreign university.
 660His judgment yet his mem'ry did excel:
 661Which piec'd his wondrous evidence so well:
 662And suited to the temper of the times;
 663Then groaning under Jebusitic crimes.
 664Let Israel's foes suspect his Heav'nly call,
 665And rashly judge his writ apocryphal;
 666Our laws for such affronts have forfeits made:
 667He takes his life, who takes away his trade.
 668Were I myself in witness Corah's place,
 669The wretch who did me such a dire disgrace,
 670Should whet my memory, though once forgot,
 671To make him an appendix of my plot.
 672His zeal to Heav'n made him his prince despise,
 673And load his person with indignities:
 674But Zeal peculiar privilege affords,
 675Indulging latitude to deeds and words.
676And Corah might for Agag's murther call,
677In terms as coarse as Samuel us'd to Saul.
 678What others in his evidence did join,
 679(The best that could be had for love or coin,)
 680In Corah's own predicament will fall:
 681For Witness is a common name to all.

682 Surrounded thus with friends of every sort,
 683Deluded Absalom forsakes the court:
 684Impatient of high hopes, urg'd with renown,
 685And fir'd with near possession of a crown:
 686Th' admiring crowd are dazzled with surprise,
 687And on his goodly person feed their eyes:
 688His joy conceal'd, he sets himself to show;
 689On each side bowing popularly low:
 690His looks, his gestures, and his words he frames,
 691And with familiar ease repeats their names.
 692Thus, form'd by Nature, furnish'd out with arts,
 693He glides unfelt into their secret hearts:
 694Then, with a kind compassionating look,
 695And sighs, bespeaking pity e'er he spoke:
 696Few words he said; but easy those and fit:
697More slow than Hybla drops, and far more sweet.

698 I mourn, my country-men, your lost estate;
 699Though far unable to prevent your fate:
700Behold a banish'd man, for your dear cause
 701Expos'd a prey to arbitrary laws!
 702Yet oh! that I alone could be undone,

703Cut off from empire, and no more a son!
 704Now all your liberties a spoil are made;
 705Egypt and Tyrus intercept your trade,
 706And Jebusites your sacred rites invade.
 707My father, whom with reverence yet I name,
 708Charm'd into ease, is careless of his fame:
 709And, brib'd with petty sums of foreign gold,
 710Is grown in Bathsheba's embraces old:
 711Exalts his enemies, his friends destroys:
 712And all his pow'r against himself employs.
 713He gives, and let him give my right away:
 714But why should he his own, and yours betray?
 715He, only he can make the nation bleed,
 716And he alone from my revenge is freed.
 717Take then my tears (with that he wip'd his eyes)
 718'Tis all the aid my present pow'r supplies:
 719No court-informer can these arms accuse;
 720These arms may sons against their fathers use;
 721And, 'tis my wish, the next successor's reign
 722May make no other Israelite complain.

723 Youth, beauty, graceful action, seldom fail:
 724But common interest always will prevail:
 725And pity never ceases to be shown
 726To him, who makes the people's wrongs his own.
 727The crowd, (that still believe their kings oppress,)
 728With lifted hands their young Messiah bless:
 729Who now begins his progress to ordain;
730With chariots, horsemen, and a num'rous train:
 731From East to West his glories he displays:
 732And, like the sun, the Promis'd Land surveys.
 733Fame runs before him, as the Morning-Star;
 734And shouts of joy salute him from afar:
 735Each house receives him as a guardian God;
 736And consecrates the place of his abode:
 737But hospitable treats did most commend
 738Wise Issachar, his wealthy western friend.
 739This moving court, that caught the people's eyes,
 740And seem'd but pomp, did other ends disguise:
 741Achitophel had form'd it, with intent
 742To sound the depths, and fathom where it went,
 743The people's hearts; distinguish friends from foes;
 744And try their strength, before they came to blows.
 745Yet all was colour'd with a smooth pretence
 746Of specious love, and duty to their prince.
 747Religion, and redress of grievances,
 748Two names, that always cheat and always please,
 749Are often urg'd; and good King David's life
 750Endanger'd by a brother and a wife.
 751Thus, in a pageant show, a plot is made;
 752And peace itself is war in masquerade.
 753Oh foolish Israel! never warn'd by ill:
 754Still the same bait, and circumvented still!
 755Did ever men forsake their present ease,

756In midst of health imagine a disease;
 757Take pains contingent mischiefs to foresee,
 758Make heirs for monarchs, and for God decree?
 759What shall we think! Can people give away
 760Both for themselves and sons, their native sway?
 761Then they are left defenceless to the sword
 762Of each unbounded arbitrary lord:
 763And laws are vain, by which we right enjoy,
 764If kings unquestion'd can those laws destroy.
 765Yet, if the crowd be judge of fit and just,
 766And kings are only officers in trust,
 767Then this resuming cov'nant was declar'd
 768When Kings were made, or is for ever bar'd:
 769If those who gave the sceptre could not tie
 770By their own deed their own posterity,
 771How then could Adam bind his future race?
 772How could his forfeit on mankind take place?
 773Or how could heavenly justice damn us all,
 774Who ne'er consented to our father's fall?
 775Then kings are slaves to those whom they command,
 776And tenants to their people's pleasure stand.
 777Add, that the pow'r for property allow'd,
 778Is mischievously seated in the crowd:
 779For who can be secure of private right,
 780If sovereign sway may be dissolv'd by might?
 781Nor is the people's judgment always true:
 782The most may err as grossly as the few.
 783And faultless kings run down, by common cry,
 784For vice, oppression and for tyranny.
 785What standard is there in a fickle rout,
 786Which, flowing to the mark, runs faster out?
 787Nor only crowds, but Sanhedrins may be
 788Infected with this public lunacy:
 789And share the madness of rebellious times,
 790To murder monarchs for imagin'd crimes.
 791If they may give and take whene'er they please,
 792Not kings alone, (the godhead's images,)
 793But government itself at length must fall
 794To nature's state, where all have right to all.
 795Yet, grant our lords the people kings can make,
 796What prudent men a settled throne would shake?
 797For whatsoe'er their sufferings were before,
 798That change they covet makes them suffer more.
 799All other errors but disturb a state;
 800But innovation is the blow of fate.
 801If ancient fabrics nod, and threat to fall,
 802To patch the flaws, and buttress up the wall,
 803Thus far 'tis duty; but here fix the mark:
 804For all beyond it is to touch our Ark.
 805To change foundations, cast the frame anew,
 806Is work for rebels who base ends pursue:
 807At once divine and human laws control;
 808And mend the parts by ruin of the whole.
 809The tamp'ring world is subject to this curse,

810 To physic their disease into a worse.

811 Now what relief can righteous David bring?

812 How fatal 'tis to be too good a king!

813 Friends he has few, so high the madness grows;

814 Who dare be such, must be the people's foes:

815 Yet some there were, ev'n in the worst of days;

816 Some let me name, and naming is to praise.

817 In this short file Barzillai first appears;

818 Barzillai crown'd with honour and with years:

819 Long since, the rising rebels he withstood

820 In regions waste, beyond the Jordan's flood:

821 Unfortunately brave to buoy the state;

822 But sinking underneath his master's fate:

823 In exile with his god-like prince he mourn'd:

824 For him he suffer'd, and with him return'd.

825 The court he practis'd, not the courtier's art:

826 Large was his wealth, but larger was his heart:

827 Which well the noblest objects knew to choose,

828 The fighting warrior, and recording Muse.

829 His bed could once a fruitful issue boast:

830 Now more than half a father's name is lost.

831 His eldest hope, with every grace adorn'd,

832 By me (so Heav'n will have it) always mourn'd,

833 And always honour'd, snatch'd in manhood's prime

834 B' unequal Fates, and Providence's crime:

835 Yet not before the goal of honour won,

836 All parts fulfill'd, of subject and of son;

837 Swift was the race, but short the time to run.

838 Oh narrow circle, but of pow'r divine,

839 Scanted in space, but perfect in thy line!

840 By sea, by land, thy matchless worth was known;

841 Arms thy delight, and war was all thy own:

842 Thy force infus'd, the fainting Tyrians propp'd:

843 And haughty Pharaoh found his fortune stopp'd.

844 Oh ancient honour, Oh unconquer'd Hand,

845 Whom foes unpunish'd never could withstand!

846 But Israel was unworthy of thy name:

847 Short is the date of all immoderate fame.

848 It looks as Heav'n our ruin had design'd,

849 And durst not trust thy fortune and thy mind.

850 Now, free from earth, thy disencumber'd Soul

851 Mounts up, and leaves behind the clouds and starry pole:

852 From thence thy kindred legions may'st thou bring,

853 To aid the Guardian Angel of thy king.

854 Here stop my Muse, here cease thy painful flight;

855 No pinions can pursue immortal height:

856 Tell good Barzillai thou canst sing no more,

857 And tell thy soul she should have fled before;

858 Or fled she with his life, and left this verse

859 To hang on her departed patron's hearse?

860 Now take thy steepy flight from Heav'n, and see

861 If thou canst find on earth another he;

862Another he would be too hard to find,
 863See then whom thou canst see not far behind.
 864Zadoc the priest whom, shunning, pow'r and place,
 865His lowly mind advanc'd to David's grace:
866With him the Sagan of Jerusalem,
 867Of hospitable soul and noble stem;
868Him of the western dome, whose weighty sense
 869Flows in fit words and heavenly eloquence.
 870The Prophet's sons by such example led,
 871To learning and to loyalty were bred:
 872For colleges on bounteous kings depend,
 873And never rebel was to arts a friend.
 874To these succeed the pillars of the laws,
 875Who best could plead, and best can judge a cause.
 876Next them a train of loyal peers ascend:
877Sharp judging Adriel, the Muse's friend,
 878Himself a Muse:--in Sanhedrin's debate
 879True to his prince; but not a slave of state.
 880Whom David's love with honours did adorn,
881That from his disobedient son were torn.
882Jotham of piercing wit and pregnant thought,
 883Endow'd by Nature, and by learning taught
 884To move assemblies, who but only tri'd
 885The worse awhile, then chose the better side;
 886Nor chose alone, but turn'd the balance too;
 887So much the weight of one brave man can do.
888Hushai, the friend of David in distress,
 889In public storms of manly steadfastness;
 890By foreign treaties he inform'd his youth;
 891And join'd experience to his native truth.
 892His frugal care suppli'd the wanting throne;
 893Frugal for that, but bounteous of his own:
 894'Tis easy conduct when exchequers flow;
 895But hard the task to manage well the low:
 896For sovereign power is too depress'd or high,
 897When kings are forc'd to sell, or crowds to buy.
 898Indulge one labour more, my weary Muse,
899For Amiel, who can Amiel's praise refuse?
 900Of ancient race by birth, but nobler yet
 901In his own worth, and without title great:
 902The Sanhedrin long time as chief he rul'd,
 903Their reason guided, and their passion cool'd;
 904So dext'rous was he in the crown's defence,
 905So form'd to speak a loyal nation's sense,
 906That as their band was Israel's tribes in small,
 907So fit was he to represent them all.
 908Now rasher charioteers the seat ascend,
 909Whose loose careers his steady skill commend:
 910They, like th' unequal ruler of the day,
 911Misguide the seasons and mistake the way;
 912While he withdrawn at their mad labour smiles,
 913And safe enjoys the sabbath of his toils.

914 These were the chief; a small but faithful band
 915Of worthies, in the breach who dar'd to stand,
 916And tempt th'united fury of the land.
 917With grief they view'd such powerful engines bent,
 918To batter down the lawful government.
 919A numerous faction with pretended frights,
 920In Sanhedrins to plume the regal rights.
 921The true successor from the court remov'd:
 922The plot, by hireling witnesses, improv'd.
 923These ills they saw, and as their duty bound,
 924They show'd the king the danger of the wound:
 925That no concessions from the throne would please;
 926But lenitives fomented the disease:
 927That Absalom, ambitious of the crown,
 928Was made the lure to draw the people down:
 929That false Achitophel's pernicious hate,
 930Had turn'd the plot to ruin church and state:
 931The Council violent, the rabble worse:
 932That Shimei taught Jerusalem to curse.

933 With all these loads of injuries opprest,
 934And long revolving in his careful breast
 935Th'event of things; at last his patience tir'd,
 936Thus from his royal throne, by Heav'n inspir'd,
 937The god-like David spoke; and awful fear
 938His train their Maker in their Master hear.

939 Thus long have I by native mercy sway'd,
 940My wrongs dissembl'd, my revenge delay'd:
 941So willing to forgive th'offending age;
 942So much the father did the king assuage.
 943But now so far my clemency they slight,
 944Th' offenders question my forgiving right.
 945That one was made for many, they contend:
 946But 'tis to rule, for that's a monarch's end.
 947They call my tenderness of blood, my fear:
 948Though manly tempers can the longest bear.
 949Yet, since they will divert my native course,
 950'Tis time to shew I am not good by force.
 951Those heap'd affronts that haughty subjects bring,
 952Are burdens for a camel, not a king:
 953Kings are the public pillars of the state,
 954Born to sustain and prop the nation's weight:
 955If my young Sampson will pretend a call
 956To shake the column, let him share the fall:
 957But oh that yet he would repent and live!
 958How easy 'tis for parents to forgive!
 959With how few tears a pardon might be won
 960From Nature, pleading for a darling son!
 961Poor pitied youth, by my paternal care,
 962Rais'd up to all the heights his frame could bear:
 963Had God ordain'd his fate for empire born,
 964He would have giv'n his soul another turn:
 965Gull'd with a patriot's name, whose modern sense

966Is one that would by law supplant his prince:
967The people's brave, the politician's tool;
 968Never was patriot yet, but was a fool.
 969Whence comes it that religion and the laws
 970Should more be Absalom's than David's cause?
 971His old instructor, e'er he lost his place,
 972Was never thought endued with so much grace.
 973Good heav'ns, how faction can a patriot paint!
 974My rebel ever proves my people's saint;
 975Would **they** impose an heir upon the throne?
 976Let Sanhedrins be taught to give their own.
 977A king's at least a part of government;
 978And mine as requisite as their consent:
 979Without my leave a future king to choose,
 980Infers a right the present to depose;
 981True, they petition me t'approve their choice:
982But Esau's hands suit ill with Jacob's voice.
 983My pious subjects for my safety pray,
 984Which to secure they take my pow'r away.
 985From plots and treasons Heav'n preserve my years
 986But save me most from my petitioners.
 987Unsatiated as the barren womb or grave;
 988God cannot grant so much as they can crave.
 989What then is left but with a jealous eye
 990To guard the small remains of royalty?
 991The law shall still direct my peaceful sway,
 992And the same law teach rebels to obey:
 993Votes shall no more establish'd pow'r control,
 994Such votes as make a part exceed the whole:
 995No groundless clamours shall my friends remove,
 996Nor crowds have pow'r to punish ere they prove:
 997For gods, and god-like kings their care express,
 998Still to defend their servants in distress.
 999Oh that my pow'r to saving were confin'd:
 1000Why am I forc'd, like Heav'n, against my mind,
 1001To make examples of another kind?
 1002Must I at length the sword of justice draw?
 1003Oh curst effects of necessary law!
 1004How ill my fear they by my mercy scan,
 1005Beware the fury of a patient man.
 1006Law they require, let law then show her face;
 1007They could not be content to look on grace,
1008Her hinder parts, but with a daring eye
 1009To tempt the terror of her front, and die.
 1010By their own arts 'tis righteously decreed,
 1011Those dire artificers of death shall bleed.
 1012Against themselves their witnesses will swear,
 1013Till viper-like their mother plot they tear:
 1014And suck for nutriment that bloody gore
 1015Which was their principle of life before.
 1016Their Belial with the Belzebub will fight;
 1017Thus on my foes, my foes shall do me right:

1018Nor doubt th'event: for factious crowds engage
 1019In their first onset, all their brutal rage;
 1020Then, let 'em take an unresisted course:
 1021Retire and traverse, and delude their force:
 1022But when they stand all breathless, urge the fight,
 1023And rise upon 'em with redoubled might:
 1024For lawful pow'r is still superior found,
 1025When long driv'n back, at length it stands the ground.

1026 He said. Th' Almighty, nodding, gave consent;
 1027And peals of thunder shook the firmament.
 1028Henceforth a series of new time began,
 1029The mighty years in long procession ran:
 1030Once more the god-like David was restor'd,
 1031And willing nations knew their lawful lord.

Notes

1] The text is that of the second edition, which appeared in the same year (1681) as the first, but to which Dryden made important additions: the twelve lines on Shaftesbury, beginning "So easy still it proves in factious times" (180-91), and the four on Monmouth, beginning "But oh that yet he would repent and live!" (957-60).

The occasion of the poem was as follows: England in 1678 was suddenly plunged into fearful confusion by the Popish Plot. Titus Oates, the perjurer, warned the administration, and deposed on oath before a London magistrate, Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, that the Roman Catholics were plotting to murder the King and establish the supremacy of their religion by force of foreign arms. Godfrey's murder, a few weeks after Oates's deposition, seemed to confirm the accusations and the country was thrown into a state of panic. The men arraigned by Oates were seized and tried, and fifteen of them were executed. Oates's collection of brazen lies was dashed with just enough truth to make it plausible to a bewildered and frightened people.

The Earl of Shaftesbury, the leader of the Whig party, quickly became Oates's patron. He shrewdly realized that the intense popular feeling roused against the Catholics by Oates's disclosures could be used to force the King to exclude his brother, James, Duke of York, an avowed Catholic, from the succession to the throne. He proposed to replace the Duke of York by the King's illegitimate but personable son, James, Duke of Monmouth. He attempted to secure his aim by introducing into Parliament in 1680 the Exclusion Bill. The Bill easily passed the Commons but was narrowly defeated in the Lords. Its defeat was primarily due to the eloquence of the Earl of Halifax--the Jotham of this poem--who had supported Shaftesbury until the danger of his extreme policy had become obvious. The Court, who knew that at bottom Halifax was an enemy of the Duke of York, was thankful but not grateful to him for his intervention, and Dryden, faithfully reflecting the Court's sentiments, gave him only cursory praise.

The King prorogued, and then dissolved, Parliament in January 1681, in order to save his brother, but he knew that as soon as he summoned a new Parliament, which he must do quickly were he to obtain supplies essential to government, the Exclusion Bill would be introduced again by the Whigs. He could only defend himself against this threatened attack by finding an alternative source of revenue; and, in March 1681, immediately before the meeting of the new Parliament, he concluded a secret agreement with Louis XIV by which he obtained a subsidy in return for his acquiescence in French foreign policy. Shaftesbury prepared for the new Parliament by stirring up popular agitation and even by plotting an armed rising, which, he hoped, would force the King's hand if he still proved recalcitrant. Parliament met at Oxford--a place chosen by the King to prevent Shaftesbury's London mobs from intimidating the members--but after it had sat for a few days, the King, freed from dependence on it by Louis's subsidy, and rightly judging that the Whigs' excesses had alienated every moderate sentiment in the country, dissolved it without warning on March 28.

This dextrous stroke destroyed Shaftesbury's ascendancy. The Whig leader was arrested and sent to the Tower on July 2, and while he lay there waiting trial on a charge of high treason, Dryden, it is said at the King's suggestion, wrote this poem. It appeared on about November 17 and its obvious intention was to prejudice the people against Shaftesbury. It was eagerly read but it did not affect the issue. The bill of indictment against Shaftesbury on a charge of high treason was brought before, and thrown out by, a London jury on November 24, 1681.

Dryden adapts for his poem the biblical story of David and Absalom (II Samuel 13-18), transposing English events and characters into biblical or pseudobiblical ones. The chief transcriptions are indicated in the following key. The use of a biblical Concordance will show the aptness of many of his parallels.

A Key to *Absalom and Achitophel*

- Aaron's Race, The Clergy.
- Abbethdin, Lord Chancellor.
- Absalom, James Scott, Duke of Monmouth and Buccleugh (1649-1685), the natural son of Charles II and Lucy Walters, who took the name of Scott upon his marriage with Annabel.
- Achitophel, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury (1621-1683).
- Adriel, John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave (1648-1721).
- Agag, Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey (1621-1678).
- Amiel, Edward Seymour (1633-1708).
- Annabel, Anne Scott, Countess of Buccleugh in her own right, and wife of Absalom.
- Balaam, Theophilus Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon (1650-1701).
- Barzillai, James Butler, Earl of Ormonde (1610-1688).
- Bathsheba, Louise Renée de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth and Aubigny (1649-1734), Charles II's mistress.
- Caleb, Forde, Lord Grey of Werke (d. 1701).
- Corah, Titus Oates (1649-1705).
- David, Charles II.
- Egypt, France.
- Ethnic Plot, Popish Plot.
- Gath, Brussels.
- Hebrew Priests, Church of England clergy.
- Hebron, Scotland.
- Hushai, Laurence Hyde, Earl of Rochester (1641-1711).
- Ishbosheth, Richard Cromwell (1626-1712).
- Israel, England.
- Issachar, Thomas Thynne of Longleat (1648-1682), known on account of his wealth as "Tom of Ten Thousand."
- Jebusites, Roman Catholics.
- Jerusalem, London.
- Jewish Rabbins, Doctors of the Church of England.
- Jonas, Sir William Jones (1631-1682).
- Jordan, The English seas or, as "Jordan's Flood," the Irish Channel.
- Jotham, George Savile, Marquis of Halifax (1633-1695).
- Levites, The Presbyterian ministers displaced by the Act of Uniformity.
- Michal, Catherine of Braganza (1638-1705), the childless Queen of Charles II.
- Nadab, William, Lord Howard of Escrick (1626?-1694).
- Pharaoh, Louis XIV of France.
- Sagan of Jerusalem, Bishop of London.
- Sanhedrin, Parliament.
- Saul, Oliver Cromwell.
- Shimei, Slingsby Bethel (1617-1697).

- Sion, London.
- Solymean rout, London mob.
- Tyre, Holland.
- Zadoc, William Sancroft (1617-1693), Archbishop of Canterbury.
- Zimri, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham (1628-1687).

24] Monmouth had commanded the British troops serving under the French against the Dutch in 1672-73, and under the Dutch against the French in 1678. He gained distinction in both campaigns.

40] This may be a reference to the attack made on Sir John Coventry (d. 1682) in 1670 at the instigation of Monmouth. Coventry reflected on the King's affairs with actresses in a debate in the Commons, and was later waylaid and had his nose slit to the bone with a penknife.

50] A reference to the proliferation of religious sects.

59] Charles II was crowned King in Scotland in 1651 but not in England until 1661: therefore, although he entered England in 1660 from the Continent, Dryden can say that his people brought him from Scotland.

84] "Commonwealth" is here used, of course, with memories of Cromwell's rule.

121] A gibing reference to the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation.

158] Shaftesbury was a man of poor physique and sickly constitution. "Inform'd" is used here in the Aristotelian sense.

172] Shaftesbury's son, the second Earl, was entirely without character or ability.

177] Shaftesbury was a signatory to the second Treaty with France in 1670 which ended the Triple Alliance of 1667 between England, Sweden, and Holland, directed against France. He was ignorant of the first Treaty with France of 1670 by which Charles II pledged himself to re-establish Roman Catholicism in England.

187] Shaftesbury was Lord Chancellor in 1672-73 but was dismissed from office.

227] "Democracy" is used here, as usually before the modern period, to mean mob rule.

344] "Prevent" is used in its early sense of "anticipate."

357] The courage of James, Duke of York (later James II), and his success as a naval commander had been celebrated by Dryden in *Annus Mirabilis* (1667).

386] "Wit," in its general sense of intelligence.

530] "Enthusiastic" is usually in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a derogatory term, denoting one with a delusory sense of being divinely inspired.

544] The Duke of Buckingham, poet, wit, and politician, was a man of brilliant gifts but of unstable and profligate character. He was at this time a supporter of Shaftesbury. He had superbly ridiculed Dryden and his plays in the comedy of *The Rehearsal*, 1671. Dryden had thus a double reason for satirizing him.

561] "Still" in the early sense of "always."

576] Lord Howard was said to have taken the Sacrament in "lamb's wool," a concoction of ale, sauce, and roasted apples, instead of in wine.

581] Sir William Jones, as Attorney-General, conducted the prosecutions of the Popish Plot but resigned office in order to support Shaftesbury. He secured the passage through the Commons in 1680 of the Bill--which he may have drawn up--to exclude the Duke of York from the succession.

585] Slingsby Bethel, a wealthy merchant and conspicuous republican, was elected sheriff of London in 1680 but his mean state during his term of office offended many citizens.

595] "Vare," from the Spanish *vara*, means a wand.

644] Titus Oates had taken orders in the Church of England following his father's lead who, after being a ribbon-weaver and an Anabaptist minister, was also a Church of England clergyman.

647] The ruddy complexion of a clergyman and a shining expression like Moses's when he came down from Mount Sinai.

659] Oates claimed to have received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Salamanca, a place which he is known never to have visited.

676] Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, the London magistrate before whom Oates deposed on oath his story of the Popish Plot, was murdered on Primrose Hill on October 12, 1678. The Protestants accused the Catholics of his murder and the Catholics retaliated by accusing the Whigs of murdering him in order to give substance to the Plot.

677] Presumably 1 Sam. 15:3.

697] Hybla drops: drops of Hybla honey.

700] Monmouth had been sent out of the country by the King in September 1679 but returned without permission in November. He was ordered to leave the country again and, when he disobeyed, was deprived of all his offices and banished from the Court.

730] Monmouth made a royal progress through western England after his banishment from Court and his attractive personality gained him and the Whigs many supporters.

817] The Duke of Ormonde, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, was an ardent royalist, and a man of remarkable purity and integrity of character, who, after being defeated in Ireland during the Civil War, was in exile until the Restoration, when he was restored to the offices he had held under Charles I.

831] Ormonde's eldest son was Thomas, Earl of Ossory (1614-1680), who, in John Evelyn's words, "deserved all that a sincere friend, a brave soldier, a virtuous courtier, a loyal subject, an honest man, a bountiful master, and good christian, could deserve of his prince and country."

866] The Bishop of London was Henry Compton (1632-1713), who had superintended the education of the Duke of York's daughters, Mary and Anne.

868] A reference to John Dolben (1625-1686), Bishop of Rochester and Dean of Westminster. The "Western dome" is Westminster Abbey, and the "Prophet's Sons," the boys of Westminster School.

877] The Earl of Mulgrave was both a poet and a particular friend and patron of Dryden.

881] Mulgrave was invested with some of the offices taken from Monmouth in 1679.

882] The Marquis of Halifax had once supported Shaftesbury but, alarmed at his excess, had become a supporter of the Court. It was entirely by his eloquence that the Exclusion Bill was defeated in the Lords in 1680. See also the Introductory Note.

888] Laurence Hyde was an ardent royalist, a confidant of the Duke of York, and a patron of Dryden. He was first commissioner of the treasury and an important power in the Administration.

899] Edward Seymour, who had been Speaker of the House of Commons from 1673 to 1678, was re-elected as Speaker in 1679, but the King refused to accept him. A Tory and Churchman, he opposed the Exclusion Bill in 1680.

928] The image is from the sport of hawking.

930] "Turn'd" in the same sense as in "wood-turner"--"shaped" or "manufactured"--as well as in the usual sense.

965-66] Compare Johnson's "Patriotism: the last refuge of a scoundrel." The term "patriot" remained disreputable through most of the eighteenth century, chiefly from being assumed by rabble-rousers.

967] "Brave" (more commonly "Bravo") denotes a swaggering bully rather than a true hero.

982] See Genesis 27.

1008] her: i.e., Law's.

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Form: Heroic Couplets

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