

Apocalypse Poems

Hardly a Poem but don't mope, Mate

It was a lovely morning and we - that is Marge and me -

decided the kids deserved a treat, so off we went.

We live in Barking, so we didn't have far to go.

We did the City and wandered down to Pudding Lane,

where once the king's bakery stood -

before it went up in flames, taking most of London with it.

The king loved his loaves hot.

We saw Wren's masterpiece and whispered in the gallery,

came out and wondered where to go next. Marge said:

"Bill, ask that bobby, he looks the friendly type.

So I went up to him and said:

"Good morning, Constable,

any suggestions for an excursion without frills?"

I see the good lady's with you,

so it can't be Soho and cheap thrills.

Take 'em down to Hyde Park, Speakers' Corner,

round that way. You can take the Central Line."

That got us to Marble Arch in no time.

"Could do with a cuppa char" - that was Marge, not me

.

"Why don't we have a look at the speakers,

then go to that corner house for some nice cream buns?"

Marge agreed, so we walked over to the railings.

One guy was a Communist intent on revolution,

another a vegetarian, who said Adam and eve ate figs

until the fall, after which they ate pork pies and beef rolls.

Then there was this West Indian who ..

but then this other geezer caught my eye.

He was standing under a banner on his soap box under a banner:

"The End is at Hand. Prepare to meet thy Doom."

His suit was black, hardly surprising, his shirt white,

but his face wore a dirty smirk.

All else fitted but the grin.

Was he savouring the memory of some naughtiness or sin?

Strange happiness amid prophecies dire of gloom.

"Uranium comes from Heaven,

and Plutonium from Hell.

And the two is gettin' married.

Jingle, jangle does the bell.

If you're good, you'll go to Heaven.

If not, you know the place.

Either way, be gettin' ready.

Thin's is moving at a pace."

So I said to Marge:

"Marge, get the kids.

Let's have a cuppa while we can.."

"Silly," said Marge, "it's hours before closing time."

"Not according to what he says, it ain't," I said.

The Usual Load of Rot

No one seemed to take much note at first.

Old-timers on park benches passed a comment or two,

Somebody wrote a letter to the local rag,

but no one (who mattered, that is)

really seemed to mind.

Of course, you will always have

your bellyachers and woolly romantics

with nothing better to do than whine

about the way things are going, -

the loss of bird life, the silenced dawn chorus,

the vanishing English hedgerow,

you know the sort of thing.

The leaves began falling long before autumn.

"Funny," they said, "curious," "that's one for the book."

This was all very interesting for botanists,

environmentalists, chemists and the like.

Such words as "pollution," "soil erosion"
and "deprivation" were bandied about,
but no one was much the wiser though
the experts were agreed on one point.

"Photosynthesis provides the basis of all life."

This was interesting but nothing like
as interesting as the favourite for Ascot,
the football results, the Top of the Pops,
the late night thriller or the FT index.

All that changed.

Foresters and timber merchants became concerned
about the decaying cores of many trees.

The government became concerned, too,
(not so much about the fate of the trees as such
as about the effect the scarcity of wood
was having on the paper industry and inflation).

Then the doom-watchers caught the scent
and there was talk of an imminent ecological collapse,
but the man in the street still
passed it all off as the usual load of rot.

Then Kew Gardens, Epping Forest, Central Park,
the Everglades and the Bois de Boulogne
went the way of all wood.

A tramp, locally known as Nat the Nut,
was found in the village cemetery gibbering,
Before being bundled into an ambulance,

he was heard to say:

"With these very ears I heard 'em groan,
and this is what one of 'em said:
'Tonight we are dying, yew and I,
and the morrow sees us dead.'
And the willows wept in the valleys
and the trees on the hills pined away."

When the harvest failed,
the church bells tolled
for a woe no man could gainsay,
for none doubted then the trees were lost
or held it was only they.

PHOENIX ENTERPRISES

FOR SALE: Luxury Condominiums somewhere in the Heart of Nevada

Independent power plant,
Fuel to last you eighteen months,
Built into solid rock,

Proof against nuclear blast,

Fallout and, as a special feature:

Da-dada-da - NEUTRON RADIATION,

Geiger counter warning system,

Airlocks at exit and entrance,

Water from non-pollutable source,

TV monitoring of all access routes.

Our survival co-operative also provides:

Radiation-proof protective clothing,

Ample food stocks,

All-in protection.

Every adult male in the group is encouraged to put in three hours' shooting

practice and paramilitary training on all days except Sunday.

Now is your chance. You owe it to the family. We can all see

what's on the way. Dark storm clouds are gathering.

Civilization is in a deep crisis. After the first nuclear

exchange law and order will break down completely;

hordes of desperate survivors will ravage the country

pillaging, raping as murdering as they go. There will be

cannibalism on a massive Zombie film scale.

Be prepared! Think positively. Join Phoenix Enterprises now. We are

armed to the teeth. We are NOT - repeat NOT - resigned to our fate.

We are optimists.

From the ashes of the old, we shall rise forth like fire-spitting serpents
to create a new civilization.

Invest NOW and let the mortgage take care of itself. We shall begin
all over again. We shall defend ourselves against the improvident
by every means.

We shall create a NEW world - A NEW WORLD.

KNOWLEDGE AND SCIENCE

Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a book I sometimes dip into. For modern
readers it does not lend itself to a quick browse. It's pretty clear from the
start who dunnit.

My version in paperback contains insightful explanatory notes.

Apparently "Science" in the Tempter's words "O Sacred,

Wise and Wisdomgiving Plant, Mother of Science", * being derived from the Latin verb "scire", really means what we now
understand as "knowledge".

This note seems to be for the benefit of such innocents who are

unaware of the process of diachronic semantic change, and who

may also entertain misgivings about nuclear power plants.

Newton's apple might jolt us into considering matters of considerable gravity.

Today we are concerned more about fallout than with the Fall, more with the atom than with Adam.

Science is not primarily concerned with moral questions, yet

we have all benefited from science. That science has also

furnished Man with the means of self-extermination and involves environmental pollution on a global scale we must accept as collateral damage, call it what you will.

Science is not primarily concerned with moral questions.

Even though scientific knowledge is based on the axiom that our sensory perceptions, the experiments, observations and theories of science cohere,

being phenomena in one and the same time-space continuum, a scientist

should not be diverted from his or her quest by troublesome thoughts about extraneous factors, be they social, political or moral in nature, that impinge on the awareness of one indivisible reality.

In Milton's day "science" simply meant "knowledge".

Milton was concerned with the problem of good and evil, the relationship of God and Man, the conflict between Truth and Mammon, not with the complex realities of our modern industrial high-tech world.

Perhaps cogito ergo sum, that premise of the modern scientific method, also has a moral dimension.

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How wan the lily of the vale,

How sick the rose.

No children play,

No children sing.

Have you seen our little sister?

We saw her in our garden,

Her pockets full of posies,

We saw her skip away to yonder hill.

A gale is strangely blowing

Through beds of wilting flowers,

And the crimson sun is sinking

Until its strength must fail

Unmindful of our woes

And the burdens of this day,

If you see our little sister,
tell her we wish her well.

The willows are yet weeping,
The cedar still is mourning
And birds refuse to sing.

If you see our little sister,
Then tell her not to fear
For her home of quiet darkness
Is a better place than here.

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