BOOK THE FIRST

The Golden Age

1:113 The **golden age** was first; when Man yet new,
1:114 No rule but uncorrupted reason knew:
1:115 And, with a native bent, did good pursue.
1:116 Unforc'd by punishment, un-aw'd by fear,
1:117 His words were simple, and his soul sincere;
1:118 Needless was written law, where none opprest:
1:119 The law of Man was written in his breast:
1:120 No suppliant crowds before the judge appear'd,
1:121 No court erected yet, nor cause was heard:
1:122 But all was safe, for conscience was their guard.
1:123 The mountain-trees in distant prospect please,
1:124 E're yet the pine descended to the seas:
1:125 E're sails were spread, new oceans to explore:
1:126 And happy mortals, unconcern'd for more,
1:127 Confin'd their wishes to their native shore.
1:128 No walls were yet; nor fence, nor mote, nor mound,
1:129 Nor drum was heard, nor trumpet's angry sound:
1:130 Nor swords were forg'd; but void of care and crime,
1:131 The soft creation slept away their time.
1:132 The teeming Earth, yet guiltless of the plough,
1:133 And unprovok'd, did fruitful stores allow:
1:134 Content with food, which Nature freely bred,
1:135 On wildings and on strawberries they fed;
1:136 Cornels and b Bramble-berries gave the rest,
1:137 And falling acorns furnish'd out a feast.
1:138 The flow'rs unsown, in fields and meadows reign'd:
1:139 And Western winds immortal spring maintain'd.
1:140 In following years, the bearded corn ensu'd
1:141 From Earth unask'd, nor was that Earth renew'd.
1:142 From veins of vallies, milk and nectar broke;
1:143 And honey sweating through the pores of oak.

The Silver Age
But when good Saturn, banish'd from above,
Was driv'n to Hell, the world was under Jove.
Succeeding times a silver age behold,
Excelling brass, but more excell'd by gold.
Then summer, autumn, winter did appear:
And spring was but a season of the year.
The sun his annual course obliquely made,
Good days contracted, and enlarg'd the bad.
Then air with sultry heats began to glow;
The wings of winds were clogg'd with ice and snow;
And shivering mortals, into houses driv'n,
Sought shelter from th' inclemency of Heav'n.
Those houses, then, were caves, or homely sheds;
With twining oziers fenc'd; and moss their beds.
Then ploughs, for seed, the fruitful furrows broke,
And oxen labour'd first beneath the yoke.

The Brazen Age

To this came next in course, the brazen age:
A warlike offspring, prompt to bloody rage,
Not impious yet...

The Iron Age

Hard steel succeeded then:
And stubborn as the metal, were the men.
Truth, modesty, and shame, the world forsook:
Fraud, avarice, and force, their places took.
Then sails were spread, to every wind that blew.
Raw were the sailors, and the depths were new:
Trees, rudely hollow'd, did the waves sustain;
E're ships in triumph plough'd the watry plain.

Then land-marks limited to each his right:
For all before was common as the light.
Nor was the ground alone requir'd to bear
Her annual income to the crooked share,
But greedy mortals, rummaging her store,
Digg'd from her entrails first the precious oar;
Which next to Hell, the prudent Gods had laid;
And that alluring ill, to sight display'd.
Thus cursed steel, and more accursed gold,
Gave mischief birth, and made that mischief bold:
And double death did wretched Man invade,
By steel assaulted, and by gold betray'd,
1:183 Now (brandish'd weapons glittering in their hands)
1:184 Mankind is broken loose from moral bands;
1:185 No rights of hospitality remain:
1:186 The guest, by him who harbour'd him, is slain,
1:187 The son-in-law pursues the father's life;
1:188 The wife her husband murders, he the wife.
1:189 The step-dame poyson for the son prepares;
1:190 The son inquires into his father's years.
1:191 Faith flies, and piety in exile mourns;
1:192 And justice, here opprest, to Heav'n returns.