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## Religion, Writing, and Romantic Science in John Syng Dorsey's Poems, 1805-1818

### Description

John Syng Dorsey (1783-1818) was a Philadelphia surgeon and the author of *The Elements of Surgery* (1813), the first American textbook of surgery. He was also the author of *Poems, 1805-1818* (UPenn MS Coll. 251), a forty-page collection that reveals his interests in spirituality, the history of science, and classical and eighteenth-century English poetry. Decades after his death, his son Robert Ralston Dorsey (1808-1869) revised his father's poems, identified classical sources with Latin and Italian quotations, and completed Dorsey's final, unfinished poem. This annotated transcription and critical introduction analyzes Dorsey's literary, scientific, and biblical allusions and contextualizes his *Poems* within early nineteenth-century literary history and Romantic science.

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Religion, Writing, and Romantic Science in John Syng Dorsey's *Poems, 1805-1818* (MS Coll. 251)

The surgeon and poet John Syng Dorsey was born in Philadelphia on December 23, 1783 and died of typhus on November 12, 1818, shortly after giving his introductory lecture as Professor of Anatomy at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. At age fifteen, he began his medical education as an assistant to his maternal uncle Philip Syng Physick (1768-1837), one of the most renowned physicians in early America whose many discoveries earned him the nickname “the father of American surgery” (Smythe). Dorsey graduated two years early from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School at nineteen, and since he was too young to practice medicine, he spent an additional two years visiting major surgical institutions in Paris and London, where “he was not greatly impressed with the work of his European colleagues” (Smythe). Upon his return to Philadelphia in December 1804, he began to practice medicine at the Pennsylvania Hospital, and during the following year, he started working on his forty-page notebook of *Poems, 1805-1818* (UPenn MS Coll. 251). Just as Dorsey's medical career contributed to the growing field of surgery, his *Poems* reveal his interests in spirituality, the history of science, and classical and eighteenth-century English poetry and provide examples of formal and thematic trends in early American literature.

Dorsey is best known as the author of *The Elements of Surgery* (1813), the first American textbook of surgery. W. Roy Smythe writes that this two-volume work of nearly 800 pages was a “monumental” achievement because Dorsey singlehandedly wrote and illustrated a thorough guide to “all major clinical areas of surgery at that time.” Smythe argues that Dorsey was uniquely qualified to write it not only because of his surgical expertise and access to Physick's notes, but also because of his unusual skill as a writer and medical illustrator. *The Elements of Surgery* was published in three subsequent editions in 1818, 1823, and 1831 and became the

standard surgical textbook in the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century. It was also the first American textbook published in Edinburgh for students at the Edinburgh Medical School, which was the best medical school in the English-speaking world at the time, bringing American medical innovations to “the more established European centers of medical education” (Smythe).

Although Dorsey is remembered today as the author of *The Elements of Surgery*, his contemporaries also knew him as a poet. Dorsey published “critically acclaimed” poetry in early volumes of *The Port Folio*, a weekly literary and political magazine published in Philadelphia from 1801 to 1827 that Ross R. Bunting calls “at that time the only literary periodical of note in the United States” (Smythe, Bunting 548). In an obituary published in the April 1819 issue of *The Port Folio*, a mourner known as J. E. H. declares that Dorsey’s poems “evinced much classical taste and a vigorous imagination” (343). Bunting writes that “Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.,” the longest poem in MS Coll. 251 and one that Bunting appears to have read in *The Port Folio*, “embodies uncommon vigor of thought and power of description, and breathes throughout a feeling of piety worthy of Dante or Milton” (548). Although most of the poems in MS Coll. 251 do not appear to have been published, several different hands appear alongside Dorsey’s own in the manuscript, suggesting that Dorsey circulated his *Poems* so his friends and colleagues could edit and add on to his work and contribute their own voices to his collection.

In addition to this commentary within the manuscript and about Dorsey’s published work, a poetic tribute to Dorsey further suggests that he was almost as well-regarded for his literary abilities as he was for his contributions to medicine. John Agg’s 1819 collection *The Ocean Harp: a Poem, in two Cantos, with some smaller pieces; and a Monody on the Death of*

*John Syng Dorsey, M. D.* contains an elegy for Dorsey that portrays poetry as one of the many fields at which he excelled. Either the publisher or Agg, an English immigrant to Philadelphia who was best known as the author of two Byron apocrypha, thought this poem significant enough to include on the title page. The poem imagines Dorsey's urn joining those of the other eminent Philadelphia physicians Benjamin Rush, William Shippen, and Caspar Wistar and describes Dorsey's inclinations toward philosophy, poetry, music, morality, and piety. The elegy's heroic couplets and imagery related to death, darkness, and the heavens recall the form and content of Dorsey's own poems, such as "Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc." In the May 1819 issue of the *Analectic Magazine*, which Moses Thomas published in Philadelphia in addition to *The Ocean Harp*, a reviewer wrote that "the 'Monody' is not in good taste; a part of it is much the reverse, and is worthy of neither its subject nor its author," hinting at Dorsey's fame and skill as well as Agg's (367).

One of the greatest influences on Dorsey's *Poems* is the eighteenth-century English poet Alexander Pope, who was one of the most respected and widely read poets in both England and the United States in the early nineteenth century. Dorsey gives his manuscript the epigraph "nemo omnibus horis sapit," an abbreviated form of a Latin phrase meaning "no mortal is wise at all times" that is also the title of an unpublished satirical poem attributed to Pope. Dorsey also selects a quote from Pope's philosophical poem *An Essay on Man* (1734) as the epigraph to "Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.," then quotes *An Essay on Man* and Robert Dodsley's response to it within the poem itself. *An Essay on Man* inspired Dorsey's poem not only in its theme of the inability of human reason to understand God's ways, but also in its use of heroic couplets. This poetic form, which Pope mastered and popularized in his original satirical verse and his translations of Homer, appears frequently in Dorsey's manuscript, especially in its

first half, where four of the eight poems from 1805 are written in heroic couplets. In “Valedictory Address to my Muse,” Dorsey names Pope and Milton as his poetic idols with whom he cannot hope to compete and praises Pope for his skillful use of meter (“suavity of numbers”). Pope’s formal and thematic influence on Dorsey’s *Poems* shows that Dorsey was well-versed with the literature of his era and demonstrates that Pope remained hugely influential even as the first generation of Romantics like Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Blake were publishing their revolutionary collections at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Dorsey’s commitment to reading and writing poetry in addition to his medical career is representative of the interconnected nature of the sciences and the humanities during his lifetime. Scholars call this interdisciplinary intellectual environment Romantic science, which flourished during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries at the same time that Romanticism was also a major literary movement; Richard Holmes, for example, dates this era from Captain James Cook’s expedition around the world on the *Endeavour* in 1768 to Charles Darwin’s voyage to the Galapagos Islands in 1831 (xvi). Romantic science celebrates “the solitary scientific ‘genius’” who makes discoveries through sudden and intuitive imaginative leaps, a model that links scientific discovery “very closely to poetic inspiration and creativity” and conflates the figures of the scientist and the poet (Holmes xvii). Noah Heringman ascribes the development of Romantic science to a “larger economy of ideas and resources both reflected and regulated by the print culture encompassing literature and natural history in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Britain,” which created a “shared culture of ‘letters’ and of the epistemological claims of literary projects to explain the natural world (2, 6). As the publication of introductory scientific texts and the popularization of the latest discoveries through newspapers and public lectures made science more accessible to the general public, many

Romantic poets incorporated allusions to new scientific developments into their work. At the same time, scientists were spending their free time writing poetry: the renowned chemist Humphry Davy (1778-1829) wrote dozens of unpublished poems in notebooks like Dorsey's, while the Swiss anatomist, biologist, and botanist Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777), whom Dorsey includes in a catalogue of influential physicians in "Song at the Anniversary Dinner of the Philadelphia Society 1805," was also a prolific poet.

Like the works of his Romantic contemporaries, Dorsey's *Poems* contain allusions to many of the most revolutionary scientific advances of his time. Although "Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc." ultimately argues that humans cannot and should not dare to attempt to understand the mysteries of God because the secrets of Heaven will be revealed to them after death, the third verse paragraph of the poem celebrates human reason by listing several recent discoveries about the natural world. In addition to earlier contributions by Isaac Newton and Benjamin Franklin, two milestones in Romantic science that Dorsey references are William Herschel's 1781 discovery of Uranus, which John Keats used to link literary and scientific innovation in his 1816 sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," and the Montgolfier brothers' 1782 invention of the hot air balloon, which poets such as Byron and Wordsworth adopted as a symbol of the imagination. Dorsey combines poetry, religion, and science to delineate the possibilities and limits of human reason. In "Song at the Anniversary Dinner of the Philadelphia Society 1805," which at first glance appears to be a drinking song celebrating wine, Dorsey provides a history of eighteenth-century medicine and competing theories of disease. Although these two poems are ostensibly about other subjects, they provide a comprehensive catalogue of contemporary developments in the natural sciences and medicine.

Although contemporary responses to his writing and the close relationship between poetry and the natural sciences in Romanticism imply that Dorsey was at home in both the literary and scientific communities of early nineteenth-century Philadelphia, MS Coll. 251 shows his ambivalence toward his dual passions for poetry and medicine. The cover of the notebook that Dorsey selected for his *Poems* is inscribed with “Memoranda Inertiae.” Since “inertia” can mean either “lack of skill, ignorance” or “idleness, indolence” in Latin, this phrase can be translated as “Unskilled Notes” or “Idle Notes,” suggesting that Dorsey viewed creative writing as a hobby less significant than his medical career. Indeed, in a profile of Dorsey for the *Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital*, A. Robin asserts that “his whole soul was wrapped in his chosen calling and no claims, even those of music and poetry, were superior to those of his profession” (130). However, “Valedictory Address to my Muse” contradicts this claim. Dorsey cites both meanings of “inertia” as reasons why he wants to stop writing, lamenting that he is not talented enough to express himself as eloquently as Pope or Milton and that his moments of poetic inspiration distract him from his work in medicine. He begs the Muse to “turn not from wisdom’s page astray / my wandering thoughts to trifles airy” and relates with distress how his thoughts of poetry often interrupt his study of the writings of John Hunter, an influential Scottish surgeon whom he greatly admired. Dorsey did not keep his promise to himself, as he wrote three more poems in 1805 and wrote an additional thirteen pages of poetry in 1817 after a twelve-year hiatus, nearly doubling the length of the manuscript. Still, the internal conflict that Dorsey describes expresses his reservations about poetic composition and illuminates the tension between his two major intellectual pursuits.

Dorsey’s professional achievements and growing family occupied his time from 1805 to 1817, when he either stopped writing poetry altogether or simply did not write in MS Coll. 251.



He became an adjunct professor of surgery at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1807 in order to take over some of the chronically ill Physick's teaching responsibilities; he became a professor of materia medica in 1813 and was appointed to the chair of that department in 1816, and in 1818 he was appointed to the Chair of Anatomy. He married Maria Ralston in 1807 and had three children, and he worked on *The Elements of Surgery* from 1807 to 1813 (Smythe).

When he resumed writing in 1817, he dealt almost exclusively with religious themes, returning to issues of human reason and the afterlife that he explored in his 1805 poems. In "Lunatic Stanza's," he acknowledges that humans cannot go to Heaven and learn about its mysteries until they die, as he explains in "Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc."; however, instead of declaring that God's limits are absolute and hoping to "serenely welcome death," he now wistfully wishes that he could access this forbidden knowledge in the present. "Religion as a duty and a sorrow" also shares the theme of "Reflections," but, like "Lunatic Stanza's," it laments the doctrine that people can use science to discover every secret of nature except those pertaining to Heaven. "Religion as a duty and a sorrow" is written in heroic couplets like those of "Reflections" and is an intellectual discussion of knowledge that Dorsey wants to gain, while "Lunatic Stanza's" uses celestial imagery to evoke this knowledge's physical source to which Dorsey wishes he could travel. "Lunatic Stanza's" is written in quatrains in iambic tetrameter, a form that Dorsey adopts for many of his 1817 poems as his work becomes more lyrical and ambivalent toward Christianity; this formal change mirrors the transition in English literary trends from Pope's satirical and didactic poems in heroic couplets to the Romantics' lyric poems, many of which are written in quatrains. The 1817 poems make religion more personal, both when Dorsey expresses his frustration with the teachings of his faith

in “Lunatic Stanza’s” and “Religion as a duty and a sorrow” and when he hopes for his and his son’s virtue and salvation in “Hymn Written for Robert R. Dorsey.” The only secular poem that Dorsey wrote in 1817 is “In Memory of Alexander James Dallas,” an elegy for a Philadelphia politician. Still, it fits in with the religious poems surrounding it because it defines and celebrates virtue and continues the theme that death should be welcomed because it reveals previously inaccessible knowledge and rewards Christians for lives spent serving God and other people.

The final entry in Dorsey’s *Poems* is written in a different hand and contains little of Dorsey’s own work. This poem is a continuation of Dorsey’s “last numbers” written by his son Robert Ralston Dorsey (1808-1869), who revised his father’s manuscript toward the end of his own life. Robert, who was Dorsey’s eldest child and only son, never married and received a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania but never seriously practiced as a physician. Most of his notes and revisions in graphite, which I have italicized, are comparatively minor: he marked the beginning of each poem with *P* or *P.* and occasionally changed the word choice or phrasing of a line. He also added classical allusions to the manuscript by quoting or paraphrasing Horace and Propertius whenever one of Dorsey’s lines recalls a line by a Roman poet, and even provided a paraphrase in Italian of a quote by the sixteenth-century poet Torquato Tasso; I have translated Robert’s marginal notes in Latin. He was perhaps inspired by a note that Dorsey himself made to “Valedictory Address to my Muse” in which he quotes the line from Horace’s *Odes* that he freely translated for use in his own poem. These allusions, just like Dorsey’s quotations of eighteenth-century English poets in “Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.,” help situate Dorsey’s *Poems* within literary history and provide examples of his thematic and stylistic models.

Dorsey's *Poems* are notable for their synthesis of seemingly disparate intellectual influences. Dorsey finds formal and thematic inspiration in the didactic, ornate works of Alexander Pope as well as in the Romantics' lyric poetry, showing that the influence of the former persisted even as the latter rose to prominence in the literary culture of England and the United States. The interplay between the sciences and the humanities in Dorsey's life and poetry reveals the interdisciplinary nature of Romanticism, a movement that came into conflict with Dorsey's Christianity as he explored the limits of the imagination and the mysteries of the natural world. Dorsey's work refutes binary divisions between Augustan and Romantic poetry and between science and literature, providing a valuable glimpse of the intellectual environment of the early nineteenth century.

(Epigraph)

Nemo omnibus horis sapit<sup>1</sup>.

(Page 1)

*P* Written on a fine summer evening.

1805

With tints far richer than of Tyrian dye,  
 The sun declining paints the western sky.  
 Lost is the splendour of his noontide blaze  
 Lost the effulgence of his ev'ning rays!  
 'Tis so with man;—he rises from the womb  
 Then shines a while, and sinks into the tomb.  
 Alas! how few who to their zenith rise.  
 And all their course pursue thro' cloudless skies!  
 Vapours and mists, that rising from the earth  
 Obscure the sun receive from him their birth.  
 'Tis so with man, the ills that cloud his brow  
 And all his mis'ries from his follies flow!

*P* Written at the urgent request of a lady

Two lines I write;—enough to prove  
 That writing less than thee I love!

+ *I must make your 2 lines 4*  
*By wishing you'd loved writing more!*

RRD—1854

(Page 2)

*P. Reflections on the  
 Incomprehensibility of God etc.*

*Copied in Charles' hand writing*

1805

“Wait the great teacher Death, and God-adore!”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The epigraph Dorsey gives to his poems is an abbreviated form of “nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit,” Latin for “no mortal is wise at all times.” This phrase is also the title of an unpublished satirical poem attributed to Alexander Pope (GB 206-GB 206 Brotherton Collection MS Lt q 61, University of Leeds Special Collections).

<sup>2</sup> Dorsey quotes Pope’s didactic poem *An Essay on Man* (1734), a philosophical work in which Pope attempts to “vindicate the ways of God to man,” a goal which is itself modeled on Milton’s purpose of “justify[ing] the ways of God to men” in *Paradise Lost*. Pope argues that people must accept the position that God has given them in the Great Chain of Being, a Neoplatonic hierarchy of all life forms that influenced the Enlightenment idea that we live in the best of all possible worlds; in this particular quote, Pope claims that people should have faith in God while they are alive because they will only be able to understand his ways and the mysteries of the universe after death.

Immur'd in clay within its narrow home,  
 The struggling soul in vain desires to roam.  
 Vain is the wish on Angels wing to rise,  
 And soar seraphic through unbounded skies:  
 Vain her attempt—e'en nature to explore  
 Where sulph'rous flames, in Etna's caverns roar.  
 In vain she strives, her wandering self to scan,  
 And wonders still o'er "all the maze of man."<sup>3</sup>  
 But vainer far, and impious the design,  
 To fathom Godhead with a mortal line!

Can man, weak man, uplift the corner stone  
 Of nature's fabric? Drag the lightning down?  
 Arrest the whirlwind in its vapid course?  
 Restrain th' impetuous billows by his force?  
 Darken the planets? Bid the sun to rise?

Marshall<sup>4</sup>

(Page 3)

Marshall the glittering legions of the skies?  
 Vain thought—! not all his science,—all his art,  
 Can tell what moves one fibre of his heart!

All hail Philosophy! thy praise resound  
 Throughout an empire wide as nature's bound.  
 Far 'oer the globe thy ample pow'r proclaim.  
 Through earth, air, ocean, high exalt thy fame!  
 Go bid the stars conceal'd in yonder sky.  
 Unveil their glories to a Herschells<sup>5</sup> eye,  
 Proclaim when Sol obscures his noontide blaze  
 The silver moon hides her extinguish'd rays.  
 Planets eclips'd their borrow'd light resign  
 And Newton's name in all their splendor shine!  
 Electric thunders at thy word grow tame.  
 And wish their lightnings gild a Franklin's name!  
 For him the angry billows cease to foam.  
 And ruled by thee conspire to waft him home! +

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In this poem, Dorsey imitates Pope's celebration of scientific progress and human reason tempered by his condemnation of human attempts to understand God using similar Enlightenment methods.

<sup>3</sup> "All the winding maze of man" is a quote from Robert Dodsley's 1734 poem *An Epistle to Mr. Pope, Occasion'd by his Essay on Man*. Dodsley writes that he initially found Pope's poem difficult but later reread it and was impressed by its portrait of human nature and man's place in the universe (the "maze of man").

<sup>4</sup> In this poem and in "Lunatic Stanzas," Dorsey includes a catchword, or the first word of the following page, at the bottom of each page. Catchwords appeared in early printed books to help printers and bookbinders check that the pages of a book were bound in the proper order. The practice fell out of favor during the growth of industrial printing techniques toward the end of the eighteenth century, just before Dorsey wrote these two poems. Although Dorsey wrote by hand, his use of catchwords in his notebook is not unusual because catchwords originated in medieval manuscripts.

<sup>5</sup> William Herschel (1738-1822) was an astronomer best known for his discovery of Uranus in 1781.

Go! wish Montgolfier<sup>6</sup> mount thy airy boat.  
 O'er top the clouds, and through Olympus float  
 But ne'er presume, stamp'd wit a mortal form  
 To "ride the whirlwind or direct the storm!"<sup>7</sup>  
 Go! mount "through nature up to natures God,"<sup>8</sup>  
     + His discoveries of Electricity + oil on water +c<sup>9</sup>

But

(Page 4)

But then avaunt! nor tempt his angry nod.  
 Confess a pow'r which nobler beings own,  
 And humbly bow before Jehovah's throne!  
 Tis his, to govern, to create, to cause:—  
 Thine to obey; to admire; unfold his laws;  
 He bids a universe in chaos hurl'd  
 Arrange its atoms and produce a world!  
 Be thine the humbler task to praise his name  
 And thro' the earth his boundless pow'r proclaim.

    Mortal! would'st thou depict his awful form?  
 Sol's [contour] must the glowing pencil warm,  
 Thro' all immensity thy canvass stretch  
 With vivid lightning, bright the outline sketch!

    Not Bacchus, Ceres, nor triumphant—Jove,\*  
 Not the lewd Goddess of the Italian grove,  
 Not the poor Indian's rude misshapen clay  
 Alla, nor Ibis, nor the God of day  
 Vary in essence or in feature more  
 Than Gods whom sapient—infidels adore.  
 Fair on his pallet—ev'ry wish display'd  
 Each paints the God his fancy has portray'd  
 The pliant pencil moved,—the colours blend

\*Tasso says very beautifully "*Quel Dio che fea tutti e Giove*"<sup>10</sup> RRD

<sup>6</sup> Brothers Joseph-Michel and Jacques-Étienne Montgolfier invented the first hot air balloon in 1782.

<sup>7</sup> Dorsey paraphrases a line from *The Campaign* (1704) by Joseph Addison (1672-1719), an English writer and politician best known for cofounding *The Spectator* magazine with Richard Steele. In an epic simile, Addison compares Marlborough's effective leadership at the Battle of Blenheim to that of an angel who, "pleas'd the Almighty's orders to perform, / Rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm." Dorsey writes that humans can perform great deeds and make scientific discoveries but should not dare to perform the work of God or attempt to understand his laws.

<sup>8</sup> Another quote from *An Essay on Man*, which explains that anyone who "looks through nature up to nature's God" can perceive the Great Chain of Being that unifies all things. Dorsey qualifies Pope's statement by saying that humans can seek to understand natural laws through science but should not incite God's wrath by trying to understand his laws.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to his foundational discoveries about the nature of electricity, Benjamin Franklin noted that pouring oil on bodies of water calms waves (why "for him the angry billows cease to foam").

<sup>10</sup> Robert alludes to Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), an Italian poet whose work influenced many English Elizabethan poets. Robert paraphrases a line from Canto 4, Stanza 42 of Tasso's most famous work, *La Gerusalemme liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*), an epic poem about the First Crusade published in 1581. English translations of *Jerusalem Delivered* were first published in 1594 and 1600; it is not impossible that Dorsey read John Hoole's 1772 translation

The

(Page 5)

The canvass brightens, and the lines extend.  
 The picture finished, let them all appear!  
 No two alike, and yet one name they bear!

One dreads the vengeance of his potent arm  
 Frighten'd from vice, but blind to virtue's charm,  
He pleads conformity to ev'ry law,  
 Yet shudders at the danger of a flaw.  
 Doubts if his God be able to forgive  
 And bid the guilt-confessing Sinner live!

Behold, how different in his present form!  
 Not more bright noontide, from the midnight-storm  
 Now mercy triumphs; vengeance dies away  
 And gay Lothario<sup>11</sup> swears he need not pray!

"If God creates us, surely 'tis his place,  
 To guard from evil, all his human race.  
 Such is their doctrine, such their vain belief,  
 Who charge their maker with each silly grief,  
 And trust that in a future world of bliss  
 He will reward them for the ills of this!  
 There are who place upon this earthly ball  
 Their hopes of happiness, their heaven, their all!  
 Content, if they may but endure a day,

Gaily

(Page 6)

Gaily to trifle all its hours away  
 And wishing [caprice] bow to passion's sway.  
 Which some deny such folly, and declare  
 The path of pleasure a seductive snare,  
 "All shall be saved at last" one sinner cried  
~~Who but the fanatic His truth denies<sup>12</sup>~~  
 Who but fanatics this plain truth denies?     ?  
 Another gravely tells us, God's elect  
 How [precious] the blessings they expect.  
 The die is cast, and all must now await  
 The final [expedition] of their fate

---

in heroic couplets. Tasso writes "testimon'è quel Dio, ch'a tutti è Giove," meaning "witness is the God who to everyone is Jupiter," in a passage that gives equal weight to both Christianity and Islam, just as Dorsey refers to the gods of various religions ("each paints the God his fancy has portray'd").

<sup>11</sup> In *El Curioso Impertinente* (*The Impertinently Curious Man*), a narrative imbedded within *Don Quixote*, Lothario attempts to seduce his friend's wife when his friend asks him to test her fidelity. The name became a synonym for a male seducer, especially an obsessive or callous one.

<sup>12</sup> Here Robert crosses out his own revision, evidently finding that he preferred his father's phrasing after all.

Unchanged it rests, no can th'almighty arm  
 Rob them of peace, or those preserve from harm!

“And is that arm Almighty” others ask,  
 “Which cannot readily perform the task?”

Thus Man in spite of nature will be wise; +  
 Imagination every want supplies.

Should reason err, and understanding fail  
 Fancy impore him with propitious gale,  
 Wafts him in oceans never plow'd before  
 To trace the wonders of some distant shore,  
 Guides him thro' other to yon realms of light,  
 When endless noon expels the shades of night.

+praising God as [illegible] [illegible] has said something [illegible] RRD

“*Qui [ne venit] ? -caelum ipsum petimus stultitia*” RRD<sup>13</sup>

The

(Page 7)

The ? ? to his view

Now stops at this, but ? its author too!

Delusion efforts all! the unrefin'd }

Imagination, with foul reason join'd }

And ev'ry daring faculty of mind }

? ? with efforts ? and bold

To [praise] his [comments], his designs unfold,

Can ? what effort worthy of his rod,

Who tells us “Man by reason knows not God”

A nobler faculty than this I ask

Or humbly shrink from the unequal task

Death shall hasten it, and the soul refine

From all the [dregs] that fills its earthy mine.

Sun, moon and stars, must fade before my sight

And nature's glories sink in endless night:

No evening gale soft melodies shall float

No [illegible] note,

No more the view of loss shall move my ear

No [foolish] ? my ? to cheer,

---

<sup>13</sup> Robert writes a famous quotation from Horace's *Odes* 1.3, “caelum ipsum petimus stultitia” (“we attack heaven itself with stupidity”), vertically on the right-hand margin of the page. In the late eighteenth century, this phrase became associated with early hot air balloon attempts, such as the experiments of the Montgolfier brothers that Dorsey alludes to earlier in the poem. It is also the epigraph of “To Mr. Blanchard the Celebrated Aeronaut in America” by Philip Freneau (1752-1832), an American poet and Federalist whose poems, like Dorsey's, anticipate the Gothic and Transcendentalist movements in mid-nineteenth century American literature. Jean-Pierre Blanchard was a French inventor who popularized ballooning; his ascent from Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia in 1793, the first manned balloon flight in the Americas, is the subject of Freneau's poem. Freneau tells the balloonist to wait for the Christian afterlife to understand the mysteries of nature instead of daring to rise to heaven through human technology, a theme also found in “Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc.”



No more my lip shall taste the balmy kiss  
 By pure affection heighten'd into bliss.  
 The pains of sense, its pleasures shall depart

No

(Page 8)

No grief dispels, no joy renews my heart;  
 Anger no more shall reign within my breast  
 No baleful passion rob my soul of rest.  
 No [evil] sorrow turn to sighs my breath  
 But all be touch'd by the cold grasp of Death!  
     Mysterious death! ah ?? than bad?  
 Why shrinks the soul at thy approaching tread?  
 Infernall darkness veils how'round  
 Hush'd is each whisper, silence how profound!  
     Terrific death! when the black midnight storm,  
 Bears thee triumphant in each horrid form  
 Thy ruler sees the liquid mountains roll  
 + *brightly blaze the heavens from pole to pole* \*  
~~And bright the heavens blaze from pole to pole,~~  
 Mid yawning caverns, hideous rooks surround  
 And deafening thunder o'er his head resound  
 The blast resistless bellows o'er the deep  
 The lofty surges proud Olympus [steep],  
 The bolt descends:—thy hand directs the course,  
 It strikes thy victim with infernall force,  
 The gulf receives him, and the swelling wave  
 Build the wretch in an untrophied grave!

Triumphant death! when the proud banners wave  
 \*~~illegible~~ better? RRD

And

(Page 9)

And the shrill trumpet bids each heart be brave  
 Opposing legions meet in dread array  
 And gallant chieftans hail the bloody day.  
 In war's fell danger do they ease delight  
 And martial horrors [permeate/recreate] thy sight;  
 Quick is the heart, thou guid's't the pearled steel,  
 As quick the emptying streams of life congeal:  
 Thy voice loud issues from the cannon's throat,  
 To summon myriads with tremendous note.  
 Thou lends't thy wings, and swift the deadly Call  
 Flies thro' the ranks, and mighty warriors fall!  
 By thee commission'd, Lodis' hero raves  
 And millions perish in untimely graves.

Relentless death! borne on the dogstar's ray<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> A reference to Sirius, a star system which appears during the hottest part of the summer; this timing made the ancient Greeks believe that it brought death and disease, especially to dogs.

The fiend of pestilence treads on the way.  
 The poison'd chalice, and the adder's fang,  
 Rending each nerve with agonizing pang.  
 The rival[']s poignard; the assassins steel—  
 These are thy ministers of potent zeal.  
 Despair and horror marshall'd in their train  
 With ev'ry dark variety of pain  
 Proclaim the tyrant, absolute of sway

Whom

(Page 10)

Whom peasants dread, and monarchs must obey.

But welcome death! there are who do not fear,  
 Or shed at thy approach th'unwilling tear,  
 Who wait thy coming, and resign their breath  
 And with a smile, serenely welcome death!  
 Hunter<sup>15</sup>, a name to science ever dear,  
 With soul elate and conscience, void of fear,  
 Saw thee advance without a single sigh,  
 And dying cried; how pleasant 'tis to die!  
 Thus let me hail thee, and with smile serene,  
 Sink unto dust and quit earth's transient scene!  
 Then shall my eager soul throw off the clod  
 That keeps her from the presence of her God,  
 Then shall her faculties resplendent shine  
 Reflecting wisdom from a source divine.  
 Then shall obscurity forever cease;  
 The veil of mystery shall be removed,  
 And God revealed shall be supremely lov'd!  
 Oh! for a muse with heav'nly fire to raise  
 A note more lofty in Jehovah's praise!  
 Archangels tune your voices! Seraphs join

And

(Page 11)

And hail his majesty with song divine  
 Thro' all eternity the strain prolong!

---

<sup>15</sup> John Hunter (1728-1793) was a Scottish surgeon who made many discoveries related to human and comparative anatomy and was an early advocate of applying the scientific method to medicine, elevating surgery to a scientific profession based on biological principles. He also mentored most of the founders of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School and took a particular liking to Dorsey's uncle Philip Syng Physick. Dorsey greatly admired his work and lamented in the preface to *The Elements of Surgery* that Hunter's writings were "unknown or disregarded throughout the continent of Europe" (quoted in Smythe). Samuel Taylor Coleridge saw Hunter's work as a foundation of Romantic medicine, which combined the humanities, the natural sciences, and spirituality in an attempt to understand life as a force greater than material principles. Although Dorsey states that he merely wishes to die as peacefully as his fellow surgeon, this identification with his predecessor perhaps suggests that he hopes to make similar scientific advances before he dies and gain earthly knowledge before he accesses divine wisdom.

*RRD*<sup>16</sup> Melodious heaven! echo with the song!  
 Bid all thy gleaming worlds that shine around  
 Responsive [emulate] the glad'ning sound  
 Let nature<sup>pour</sup> from her ten thousand throats  
 The joyful, grateful, tributary notes!  
 And let my humble pen<sup>17</sup> this tribute pay,  
 How'eer unworthy prove the artless lay!  
<sup>18</sup>Convinced of ignorance, still let me trust  
 Whate'er the fate of man that God is Just!

(Page 12)

P. Invocation to Oblivion

1805

Gentle nymph of brow serene,  
 Ruffled ne'er by grief or woe,  
 Calm contentment's placid queen,  
 Ruthless memory's conquering foe!  
 Oblivion! from heaven descend  
 The wretches' dearest choicest friend!  
 With thee bring an ample cup,  
 Fill'd from thy Lethean urn,  
 All my care to pleasure turn!  
 Lov'st thou at departed day  
 On Lethe's sober banks to pray  
 Or seek'st thou pensive solitude  
 In the dark, deserted wood?  
 Where no mortal step profane  
 Dares molest her quiet reign?  
 Oft I've sought thee mid the crowd  
 That round the festive board convene,

(Page 13)

Mirth was there, and laughter loud,  
 Wine, and wit, and jest obscene  
 Pleasure fled; and haggard care  
 Told me thou wa'st never there!  
 To the midnight female throng  
 Pleasure seemed to track thy way,  
 Through the mazy dance along  
 I fought thee till returning day.

<sup>16</sup> *RRD* appears in graphite in the left margin next to this line, though there are no other notes or revisions on this page.

<sup>17</sup> Just as Pope delineates the Great Chain of Being in *An Essay on Man*, Dorsey situates himself within a natural hierarchy of life forms that praise God and trust his judgment.

<sup>18</sup> Brackets in graphite in the left margin mark this final couplet; perhaps Robert selected these lines as a concise summary of the poem's theme.

Then returning doubt and fear  
 Told me thou wast never there!  
     On the rosy mark I sought  
     The vain relief from anxious thought  
     From all the tumults of the breast,—  
     From care's corroding canker rest;—  
 Bus'ness soon I found a mare,  
 Gilt with many a splendid care  
 T'was in vain I sought thee there!

    Fancy once with everlasting smile  
     Strove my sorrows to beguile.

(Page 14)

Printing out thy fairy form  
 Like Iris bright amid the storm!  
 In thy hand a chalice borne  
 Fill'd from Lethe's flowing urn!  
 'Twas at eve when Cynthia's<sup>19</sup> ray  
 Emulous of parted day  
 Playful, with reflected beam  
 Glittered in the silver stream,  
 At thy presence nature brighten'd  
 Hush'd was every noisy breeze  
 Free from care my bosom lighten'd  
 Tasted all the charms of ease.  
 Future years seem'd form'd for pleasure  
 Friendship, mirth, the muse, and love.  
 Love! life's richest choicest treasure  
 Foretaste of the joys above!  
 Cruel memory undeceiv'd me  
 Soon these fancied joys were gone!  
 Quick of pleasure she bereav'd me  
 Sweet oblivion thou had'st flown!

(Page 15)

Fancy still with boundless eye  
 Peeps into futurity  
 Hope with her ten thousand charms  
 Gives Oblivion to my arms!  
 Soon hope's visions melt to air  
 Chas'd by the demon of despair!

Oh! once again from Heav'n descend:  
 The wretches choicest dearest friend.  
 Root each sorrow from my breast

---

<sup>19</sup> Cynthia is an epithet of Artemis which refers to her role as the goddess of the moon; here Dorsey describes moonlight.

Soothe each tumult into rest!  
 For thine alone the magic art  
 To quell the tumults of the soul,  
 For ev'ry grief a balm t' impart  
 And ev'ry bitter pang controul.  
 Like oil upon the raging deep  
 'Tis thine to smooth the brow of care.  
 Each horny passion hush to sleep  
 And shield the wretched from despair!

1805

(Page 16)

*P.* Advice to a young lady

1805

When foplings address you with flattering speeches  
 And swear you're an angel, or call you divine  
 Believe me Matilda 'tis reason that teaches  
 The fools and their flatt'ry alike to decline  
 The butterfly fluttering from flower to flower.  
 Inconstant and gaudy was lately a worm  
 His beautee poor insect endure but an hour  
 Like the fop, all his charms are his dress + his form  
 The fop lover it is true with entire devotion  
 Not fickle (believe me) but true and sincere,  
 Of himself he has always so lofty a notion  
 That woman ne'er costs him a sigh or a tear!  
 Let the youth of your choice be with prudence selected,  
 No vain silly boy full of love for himself  
 Nor should you, since fortune has always protected  
 From want and from poverty, choose him for pelf<sup>20</sup>  
 With virtue!—~~with~~ and courage, to guide and defend you  
 His morals unblemish'd his honour unstained  
 His manner so polish'd as ne'er to offend you  
 Forever obliging yet never constrain'd!

(Page 17)

Such a youth you deserve, such a youth would deserve ^ you  
 Then heed not sweet lady what foplings may say  
 The poet how blest! should his maxims preserve you  
 Oh deign then to trust him, and list to his lay!

*P.* Valedictory<sup>21</sup> Address to my Muse

---

<sup>20</sup> A synonym for money, often with a negative connotation (OED).

<sup>21</sup> Although this poem is meant to mark Dorsey's farewell to writing poetry, he writes three more poems dated 1805. After a twelve-year break during which he apparently kept the promise he made in this poem (or at least did not write poetry in this particular notebook), he resumes with "Lunatic Stanzas" in 1817 and doubles the length of this manuscript by the time of this death. This divides his poetry into two compositional periods, 1805 and 1817.

Hence wanton muse! no longer tease me  
 No longer do I covet thy smiles  
 For now I know thy artful wiles  
 In vain again shoul't strive again to please me  
 Thy fire inconstant ne'er can guide me  
 Through clouds of dullness to Parnassus' top  
 And never will my restless spirit stop  
 \* Midway content, with Milton's self beside me!<sup>22</sup>  
 And since to rival thy lov'd Pope<sup>23</sup>  
 In fire or suavity of numbers  
 I scarce with modesty can hope  
 Pray gentle muse, resign me to my slumbers!  
 \**Non ego possum rivalem ferre Jovem—Propertius—RRD*<sup>24</sup>

(Page 18)

Fill not my head with visions gay  
 Of moonlight scene and dancing fairy  
 Turn not from wisdom's page astray  
 My wandering thoughts to trifles airy!  
 No longer force me to resign  
 The lessons grave of Locke or Newton  
 For bards with awkward wit who shine  
 Like 'prentice boy with Sunday prison!  
 Oft' when my midnight taper burns  
 To shed a ray on Hunter's<sup>25</sup> page  
 My wayward fancy briskly turns  
 And quits for thee th' instructive sage!

Hence! and no longer force me rhyme  
 Nor wage with native dullness wars  
 Fill not my head with strains sublime  
 Nor crack my skull against the stars \*

---

<sup>22</sup> Although Pope's preferred form of heroic couplets, as well as multiple quotations from his poems, permeate Dorsey's poetry, here Dorsey names Milton as another influence. Since he accuses his own writing of "dullness" in this phrase, he perhaps saw Milton's religious content as a thematic inspiration and took Pope's "suavity of numbers" as a formal guide.

<sup>23</sup> Dorsey calls Pope a favorite of the Muse and envies his eloquence and metrical skill. Although many of Dorsey's other poems are written in heroic couplets modeled on Pope's, this poem takes a different form than the "numbers" at which he thinks he is inexpert, alternating between iambic tetrameter and iambic pentameter. It also contains the first reference to Dorsey's model by name.

<sup>24</sup> Robert changes the word order of a line from Propertius' *Elegies* II.34.18, "rivalem possum non ego ferre Jovem," which means "I myself am not able to bear Jove as a rival." He applies Propertius' condemnation of jealousy between men who desire the same woman to Dorsey's envy of Milton and Pope's far superior abilities. Dorsey laments that he isn't skilled enough to express himself as well as his models, and he thinks that writing inadequate poetry has become so frustrating that he wants to give it up.

<sup>25</sup> Scottish surgeon John Hunter (see note 15).

Leave me and never more return  
 Pegasus waits me at the door  
 I'll hold the stirrup quick begone!  
 And never let me see thee more!—  
 \* “Sublimi feriam sidera vertice” Horace<sup>26</sup>

(Page 19)

### Song

Song at the Anniversary Dinner of the  
 Philadelphia Medical Society 1805  
 Portfolio vol 5.855<sup>27</sup>

A fig for the doctor that never will join  
 His good honour'd friends o'er a bottle of wine  
 For tho' he may know how to cure a disease  
 'Tis plain he don't know what to do with his fees!  
 Apollo refuses protection to those \*  
 Who to Venus and Bacchus declare themselves foes  
 So that no one need hope much in physick to shine  
 Unless he enliven his genius with wine!

Philosophers long have disputed in vain  
 To find how ideas are found in the brain  
 They need not have puzzled their brains much to find  
 How vastly good liquor enlivens the mind!  
 Cornaro<sup>28</sup> they tell us was very well fed  
 With a glass of cold water and crust of dry bread  
 With Cornarno all those who love water may join  
 But for my part contented I stick to my wine!  
 + Sine venere, fuget Apollo”<sup>29</sup>

(Page 20)

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<sup>26</sup> This final line of Horace's *Odes* 1.1 means “with head lifted, I will strike the stars.” Horace ends the first poem in his collection with his desire to be immortalized as a great poet, the type of glory that Dorsey rejects because he wants to be able to focus on science instead of being distracted from his medical career by poetic inspiration. Here Dorsey provides the source of the line that he has paraphrased, unlike the classical allusions in the rest of the manuscript, where Robert adds the Latin text that his father references.

<sup>27</sup> This note implies that the “Song” was published in Volume 5 of *The Port Folio*. Robin, who examined this manuscript, incorrectly thought that the “Song” was the last poem that Dorsey wrote in 1805, but two religious poems follow the “Song”

<sup>28</sup> Alvise (Luigi) Cornaro (1467-1566) ascribed his poor health in middle age to his indulgence in food, alcohol, and sex and developed a calorie restriction diet which he described in *The Sure and Certain Method of Attaining a Long and Healthful Life* (1550). His life and work increased interest in the possibilities of not only living into old age, but also aging well, future benefits which Dorsey disregards in favor of enjoying wine in the present. Indeed, he even says that being able to enjoy social drinking is an important part of being a good doctor.

<sup>29</sup> “Without Venus, Apollo flees”—Dorsey contradicts Cornaro's condemnation of alcohol and sex as unhealthy, instead claiming that wine and love are essential for doctors because they stimulate the mind. By the poem's end, wine becomes even more pleasurable than practicing medicine.

John Hunter<sup>30</sup> has taught us there's life in the blood  
 A doctrine admitted when well understood  
 But e'en were it dead, as a fact I'd maintain  
 That a bumper can quicken the blood in each vein!  
 Doctor Black<sup>31</sup> and the wise modern chemists declare  
 That animal heat is derived from the air  
 Whilst each jolly vot'ry at Bacchus's shrine!  
 Well knows that its source is a bumper of wine!

Brown's "excitement"<sup>32</sup> by whiskey was often increased  
 But at length it wore out, and the Doctor deceased  
 While Haller<sup>33</sup> himself who drank water alone  
 Was tortured to death by the gout and the stone.  
 With Rush<sup>34</sup> I like bleeding, because I'm right here  
 There are fifty diseases ~~which bleeding~~ the lancet can cure  
 But the tapping a vein I'd with pleasure resign  
 For the pleasure of tapping a hogshead of wine!  
 [Insert to p20]<sup>35</sup>  
 In Cullen's<sup>36</sup> nosology [hafou] you'll find  
 The source of disease, of body + mind  
 All [authors of medic] in vain you'd combine  
 To give such relief as a bumper of wine  
 [Morbid] action say's Rush is the only divine  
 Cut that with the lancet and pocket your fees

---

<sup>30</sup> This marks Dorsey's third reference to the Scottish surgeon (see note 15). Here he alludes to Hunter's extensive research on blood and blood vessel growth, including the revolutionary idea that inflammation is a symptom of disease rather than a disease in itself.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph Black (1728-1799) was a Scottish doctor and chemist who made several chemical discoveries, including that of latent heat ("animal heat is derived from the air").

<sup>32</sup> Scottish doctor John Brown (1735-1788) created the Brunonian system of medicine, which treats disease as the result of too much or too little "excitement."

<sup>33</sup> Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777) was a Swiss physician, politician, and poet who conducted research on anatomy, developmental biology, and botany.

<sup>34</sup> Founding Father Benjamin Rush (1745-1813) was a social and political reformer in Philadelphia and a professor of medicine and chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania, where he taught alongside Dorsey and majorly influenced the development of the medical profession in post-Revolutionary America. Dorsey, who attended to Rush during his final illness, refers to Rush's famous eagerness to use bloodletting on his patients.

<sup>35</sup> This final stanza is written on a square of paper pasted in the empty space at the bottom of the page, below what appears to be the original end of the poem. The hand is much more cramped and messy than Dorsey's large, evenly spaced hand in the rest of the manuscript and doesn't match the hand of Robert's notes, suggesting that it was written by another person and added later as a continuation of Dorsey's poem.

<sup>36</sup> A central figure of the Scottish Enlightenment, William Cullen (1710-1790) was a physician, chemist, and agriculturalist who was also an influential professor at the Edinburgh Medical School, which was the best medical school in the English-speaking world in the eighteenth century. He taught several influential physicians mentioned in Dorsey's poem: Joseph Black, Benjamin Rush, and John Brown, whose Brunonian system of medicine rivaled his own system of nosology. Building on the work of Albrecht von Haller (also mentioned by Dorsey), Cullen argued that disease was caused by an imbalance of irritability and sensibility, or disturbances to the nervous system causing irregular muscle movements.



~~One disease will admit Jove would try~~  
~~For us p<sup>?</sup> that drink~~ turn ?  
 But Chapman say's no; there are ~~fifty~~ could.  
 + ? ?  
 + ~~of these~~ good madeira can cure fifty more

(Page 21)

*P* Impromptu occasioned by the preaching  
 of the Reverend Mister S.kinner<sup>37</sup> 1805

When from dread Sinai, thunder roar'd around,  
 Aghast the Sinner shudder'd at the sound,  
 But when o'er Calv'ry's<sup>38</sup> top the Christian's eye  
 Beholds a saviour calm the troubled sky  
 Bright Hope succeeds to cheer his anxious heart  
 And Faith, and Charity then balm impart  
 Thus from the pulpit when Fanatic's rave,  
 And dare to curse, whom Jesus died to save  
 Launching anathemas with ev'ry breath  
 To frighten fools and babes with hell, and death  
 Preaching the law;—the gospel quite forgot,  
 No hope of heaven to cheer the sinners lot;—  
 The Christian confident in JESUS' grace  
 Beholds unaw'd the angry preachers face  
 Bids him rail on till lungs or hearing fail,  
 And then renew the oft repeated tale,  
 JEHOVAH. slander'd looks indignant down;  
 Mercy the brightest jewel of his crown;

(Page 22)

'Cease railer cease! [he evil]; no more rejoice  
 'To deal damnation with unhallow'd voice,  
 'Go! imitate the Saviours milder mien,  
 'Who to be lov'd needs only to be seen,  
 'Pray more';—preach less;—and penitently own,  
 'That GOD has mercy tho' thyself has none!

---

<sup>37</sup> Dorsey uses the superscript abbreviation Rev<sup>d</sup> M<sup>r</sup> and gives the reverend's name as only S., which Robert completes in graphite. Robin, who examined this manuscript, thought that the "Song" was the last poem that Dorsey wrote in 1805, but this poem and the companion piece "Another on the doctrine that it is a sin for sinners to pray" show that Robin was incorrect.

<sup>38</sup> Sinai and Calvary are two sacred biblical mountains, the former from the Old Testament and the latter from the New Testament. In the Book of Exodus, God gives Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, while according to the Gospels, Calvary (Golgotha) is the site outside Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. Together, as Dorsey writes, they represent the laws that Christians must follow and the possibility of redemption for sinners who break those laws, as well as the movement from divine judgment and human fear to divine forgiveness and human salvation. Dorsey creates a similar contrast between the Reverend's fearmongering and the truth of God's mercy that the Reverend ignores.

*P* Another on the doctrine that it is a sin  
for sinners to pray.

His Rev'ence points out very clearly the way  
That leads to the deepest damnation  
He says 'tis a sin for a sinner to pray  
And from this warns his vile congregation!

If pray'r be a crime, and no hope then remain,  
To comfort a heart-broken sinner,  
One question occurs, very simply and plain  
Should he trust to his bible or Sk— r?

(Page 23)

Lunatic Stanza's—for [ship] R.R.  
written by moonlight at Mount Peace 1817

How sweetly beams thy silver ray  
To glad the weary pilgrims eye  
And cheer him on his lonely way  
Fair traveler thro' the trackless sky!

Oh could I mount your darting beam  
And ride my native planet o'er  
And skim wide ocean's troubled stream  
Unmindful of the billows roar

or still more daring upward soar  
Through realms of pure Empyrean space  
Where ne'er did mortal eye before  
The wonder of creation trace—

There catch an unreflected beam  
From Sol's bright orb to guide my course  
From star to star;— this vivid stream  
Of light (without the lightning's force).

(Page 24)

Each planet [orb] might well display  
And warm o'er Saturns chilly pole  
Then safe conduct my homeward way  
Before dull earth had made one roll!

So swiftly flies the solar light!  
So swift the moon-beam darts afar!  
And seraph forms of angels bright  
Thus journey on from star to star!

But not to mortals is it giv'n;—  
 Their clay confin'd to native earth  
 Must never raise itself to heaven  
 'Till it receive another birth

Still tho' by earthy clogs confin'd  
 The restless spirit dares to rise  
 And often the immortal mind  
 Aspires to gain its native skies

Fancy

(Page 25)

Fancy with rapid pinion cleaves  
 Etherial realms, and swift as light  
 This orb terrestrial sportive leaves  
 And wings to other worlds her flight

Hymn written for Rober<sup>t</sup> R. Dorsey [+ Henry Roberts]

Who shall my [ancient blessings] claim  
 And who my infant lays?  
 JEHOVAH! Thine the sacred name  
 My lisping tongue shall praise

2

For thou hast form'd me by thy voice  
 To thee my life I owe  
 Teach me my dutee to fulfil  
 Thy holy love to know!

3

Thy tender care my life preserv'd  
 When danger's form appall'd  
 And when from duty's path I've swerv'd  
 Thy warning voice recall'd.

(Page 26)

4

Protected by thy watchful care  
 My feet can never stray  
 Where guilty pleasure spreads the snare  
 If Thou direct [thine] way

5

Thou lying lips O GOD of truth!  
 And a blaspheming tongue  
 Preserve my feeble faltr'ing youth  
 Amid temptations strong[:]

6

Teach me in honour's path to tread

In virtue's narrow way  
 Correct my heart;— improve my head  
 With wisdom's purest ray!

7

Should life be long,—preserve me Lord!  
 From sorrow and from sin  
 And teach me by thy holy word  
 To keep my conscience clean[.]

Should

(Page 27)

8

Should death an early visit pay  
 Receive my latest breath  
 Oh! take my willing soul away  
 And bid me welcome death!

9

To all thy mercies dearest Lord  
 Oh! may I grateful prove  
 But chiefly prize thy holy word  
 And Jesus' dying love!

Hymn written for the Orphans for the [Boylog]

JEHOVAH, guardian, parent, friend!  
 Inspire our infant lays,  
 And teach our voices to ascend  
 In anthems to thy praise!

2

Will God in heaven, with pity hear  
 The humble orphan's cry?  
 Oh yes! for hallow'd is the tear  
 That gems the orphan's eye!  
 (Page 28)

3

And God will wipe that tear away  
 And bid each sorrow cease  
 Hark! angel whispers seem to say  
 My children shall have peace!

4

Of earthly parents, though bereft  
 [Here are] in heaven above  
 A [kinder] father he that's left,  
 And boundless is his love!

5

E'en when in anger he repoves  
 Rich mercies are in store,

He only chastens, those he loves  
To make them love him more!

6

Then teach our LORD to kiss thy rod  
And praise thee here below  
Be thou our father, and our GOD  
Here and hereafter too!

(Page 29)

Religion as a duty and a sorrow

\* Religion as a duty stands display'd  
In [EARTH] stars so strong of light and shade,  
That he who needs may see upheld to view  
All articles of faith and practic'd law  
Writ as with pen [beamd] on a darken'd wall  
They strike the eyes and conscience of all  
No [Idiot] so dull or void of brain  
But pride the lesson as the daylight [vain]!  
There beams dark clouds of ignorance dispel  
And radiant shine from heaven to [begin] from hell!  
The Christian doctrine their resplendent shine  
And prove their nature as their source divine  
Rich legacy from GOD; own dying son  
Bequeath'd to save a world by sin undone!

Religion as a science! oh how hard  
To open gates which god's own hands have barr'd  
Portals of light on ev'ry theme but this  
Stand wide and open as the realms of bliss.

\* *This is much in Carson's style 1867*

(Page 30)

All nature's wonders are [effac'd] to view  
But Revelation holds conceal'd a few,  
And man inquisitive forever pries  
And searches there, with fire-beclouded eyes,  
The mole shall find the sun, and quit his clod,  
E're man unfold the mysteries of GOD!

Written at Elizabeth town-point on a tavern wall.  
The walls + windows of which were covered with names.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Dorsey claims to transcribe an anonymous poem he saw in a public space, adding to the impression (as we see when Robert notes that "Reflections on the Incomprehensibility of God etc." was "copied in Charles' hand writing") that he wanted other people to write in his notebook, which he must have circulated among his friends and colleagues, and welcomed the inclusion of others' voices among his own work. Instead of other people writing



Each social virtue in his bosom shrin'd  
 Shed the mild lustre of a soul refin'd  
 O'er the bright beamings of his manly face

Persuasive eloquence in deep debate  
 And wit that sparkled never to offend  
 And wisdom's maxims that sustain'd the state,  
 When war had urg'd the crisis of her fate[.]  
 These stamp'd the patriot his country's friend.

What Dallas was the muse could still rehearse  
 And bid our unavailing sorrows flow[:]  
 But vain—the dirge of dull funereal verse.  
 The death bell sounds;—rolls heavily the hearse,  
 And leaves our aching bosoms lasting woe.  
 Aug 1817<sup>42</sup>

(Page 33)

P. Christian Honour addressed to ??  
 Whilst others sing the hero's fame  
 Whose blood-stain'd banner floats afar,  
 And crown with loud applause a name  
 Splendent<sup>43</sup> in victory and war!  
 Be mine the task in humbler verse  
 The Christian's monument to raise  
 The good man's virtues to rehearse  
 Whose modest merit shrinks from praise[:]  
 Yet I will praise thee man of GOD  
 Above the illustrious proud and great[:]  
 Thy soul now prisoned in its clod  
 Is heir to more than regal state.  
 A crown of glory brighter far  
 Than ever grac'd a monarch's brow  
 Thine honour'd tempter soon shall wear  
 Tho' bleach'd by cares and sorrows now.  
 Who can discern this man of GOD?  
 describe the livery he wears?  
 'Tis he who dreads his master's nod  
 And trembles at temptation's snares.

(Page 34)

Justice o'er all his acts presides  
Mercy delights him more than gains  
Humility his footsteps guides

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<sup>42</sup> While Dorsey usually notes the date of his poems to the right of their titles, here a different hand has ornamentally dated the poem inside the loops of the curlicue used to mark the end of each poem.

<sup>43</sup> An archaic word meaning "shining brightly" (OED).

Conscience from daring sin abstain.  
 Apall'd by slander's venom'd tongue  
 His meekness bears him harmless through  
 Repays with kindness cruel wrong  
 And prays that GOD may pardon too.  
 How soars his lofty soul above  
 The vengeance of th'ignoble crowd  
 Who by the bloody duel prove  
 That e'en a coward may be proud—  
 For cowards often dare to fight  
 Who dare not brave the scoffer's tongue  
 Too timid to defend the right  
 They basely do, and suffer wrong.  
 Tho' Coward call'd by fool or knave  
 Whose villainy traduc'd his name  
 Yet wisdom whispers he is brave  
 Who dares for Christ to risk his fame.

(Page 35)

His fame! his honour! aye his life!  
 If ventured in his Saviour's cause  
 He'd nobly dare in any strife  
 To stake and to abide the loss!  
 Martyrs attest that glorious truth  
 And angels witness it above  
 From hoary age to feeble growth  
 Thousands have died for JESU'S love.  
 Jesus for them had done the same  
 For them had died upon the tree  
 Then welcome death! the stake;—the flame;—  
 No horrors, Christian, have for thee!  
 But not a Christian life or death  
 Can earn a mansion in the skies  
 All done, the last, the parting breath!  
 Must call on mercy for the prize  
 For man e'en in his best estate  
 Is prone to sin as sparks to rise  
 That pow'r alone that could create  
 Can raise him to his native skies.

(Page 36)

Sad that some praise shall barely raise  
 All who [relive] th'unerring word  
 And humbly join the song of praise  
 Not [word] in thee O LORD!!!  
 [?] 1817



Those of the following lines contained in Brackets  
were written + left unfinished by my father  
shortly before his death, + are I believe his last  
numbers : those succeeding I designed to complete the subject.<sup>44</sup>

Sep. 1826. RRD—

1.

There is a moment hastening on  
When I must bid this earth, farewell,  
When, all my number'd moments gone,  
My soul must steer for Heaven or Hell.

2.

At that dread hour how shrinks the soul!  
The body trembles, too, with dread,  
Long joined, one sympathetic whole  
(Page 37)  
The man must mingle with the dead.

3.

The dead! ah what mysterious change  
Does Death inflict on Adam's race!  
J. S. D. 1818<sup>45</sup> Thro' what unheard of scenes to range  
Thro what infinity of space!

4.

The mighty realms where all the dead  
Repose! there, he in yonder grave  
For whom ten thousand vainly bled,  
Whom tens of thousands could not save.

5.

And there the slave who feared his rod,  
Yet now might smile to see his fate,  
Lord only of the wormy sod  
Whom nations stiled the lord of Fate.

6.

Vainly we ask, '+ why this change,  
'When once the spirit spurns it clod,  
'Why is the soul thus forced to range?'  
Be silent — 'tis the will of GOD.

7.

(Page 38)  
Be silent — thus doth [death] advises—  
With doubts, no [longer vex] thy brain,  
Learn that the Spirit never dies,  
The body too shall live again

8

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<sup>44</sup> This note and the whole of the following poem are written in Robert's hand, suggesting that Robert copied Dorsey's lines from an original document into his father's notebook before adding his own concluding stanzas.

<sup>45</sup> This marginal note marks the end of the brackets and Dorsey's last known line.

But this, oh man! be this thy care—  
 That Death's grim touch may not fight  
 Thy parting soul thy soul prepare  
 To travel thro the realms of night.

9

When doomed Death's dreary vale to tread  
*shalt*<sup>46</sup>  
 A staff to prop thee thou will find;  
 Softly thro every danger led,  
 What will it fool that thou wert blind?

10.

*shalt*  
 Shortly will every doubt remove;  
 Thou shalt rejoice in scenes of bliss,  
 & happy in a world of love,  
 Cease to regret one tear in this.

11.

“Whence comes the wind or whither tends,  
 “Define its course<sup>47</sup>” — the Saviour said,  
 (Page 39)  
 In vain man strives to learn the ends  
 Of things his maker wisely made.

12.

Wisely, be sure— tho' to thy mind  
 The subject seem a gloomy night—  
 Say could'st thou ever to the blind  
 Convey a just idea of light?

13.

Yet, light in glory to surpass  
 Nature exhausts her stores in vain—  
 Golconda's<sup>48</sup> brightest purest mass  
 Its splendor's shadow could not feign.

14.

But from this thought derive content,  
 Hereafter angels shall relate  
 To those whose lives in peace were spent  
 and love to GOD the laws of fate.

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<sup>46</sup> Robert corrects himself in graphite just as he corrects several of his father's poems. Here and in the following stanza, he substitutes a more formal verb reminiscent of biblical diction to better match his religious topic.

<sup>47</sup> “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (*King James Version*, John 3:8). This biblical verse evokes humans' inability to explain how people are born of the Spirit. In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that people cannot enter or know about the kingdom of God until they die and are born again in Heaven, a doctrine that Dorsey references in many of his poems and that Robert also includes in this stanza.

<sup>48</sup> Golkonda is a region in Southern India famous for its diamond mines; the name is a synonym for a rich mine or source of fantastic wealth.

15.

With lore like this to moral giv'n  
 Now poor & wretched were his state!  
 What tho' he saw the bliss of Heaven,  
 while unto him was barred its gate!  
 (Page 40)

16.

Disgusted with this earth too soon  
 His soul by life not yet reformed  
 Wretched indeed would prove the boon  
 Of knowledge to his sinful mind!

17.

refined  
 But when ^ from earthly dross,  
 When in affliction's furnace tried,  
 Firmly he bears & loves his cross,  
 That cross on which his Saviour died.

18.

Now asks what's death? Oh no, to him  
 Faith hath revealed that death is peace  
 Yet failed hath Faith's most glowing beam  
 R.R.D.<sup>49</sup> To point those joys that ne'er shall cease.

(Loose square 1)<sup>50</sup>

Alas! for Pope! if Poetry this be,  
 How far removed from excellence is he,  
 If rhyming only doth compose a verse,  
 Then surely this is smooth enough & terse!  
 But if poetic measure must combine  
 With rhyming; then there's not a line  
 Worthy of taking up the readers time,  
 For this is only a mean sounding chyme.<sup>51</sup>

Impromptue on reading this  
 pamphlet.

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<sup>49</sup> Robert marks the end of his continuation of Dorsey's poem with this marginal note rather than the curlicue that Dorsey draws below the last line of each poem. Since Dorsey wrote fewer than three of the poem's eighteen stanzas, the poem is an example of Robert's work rather than Dorsey's.

<sup>50</sup> This poem is written in a hand not found anywhere in the manuscript and contradicts Dorsey's ideas about poetry. While Dorsey praises Pope's "suavity of numbers" in "Valedictory Address to my Muse," the author of this "Impromptue" derides Dorsey's poetic model for his inept use of meter.

<sup>51</sup> Chyme is the semi-fluid mixture of gastric juices and partially digested food that moves from the stomach to the small intestine. This comparison, which implies that Pope's poetry is clumsy and underdeveloped, suggests that the author of the "Impromptue" may have been a fellow physician or had medical training.

(Loose square 2)<sup>52</sup>

His Rev'ence points out very clearly the way.  
 That leads to the deepest damnation  
 He says "'tis a sin for a sinner to pray,"  
 And from this warns his vile congregation.

Since pray'r is a crime, & no hope can remain,  
 To comfort the heart broken sinner  
 One question occurs— very simply and plain—  
 Should he trust to the bible or Sk— r

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<sup>52</sup> This poem in Dorsey's hand is "Another on the doctrine that it is a sin for sinners to pray" with alternate punctuation.

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