

# ATHANASIUS CONTRA DECANUM

## ATHANASIVS CONTRA DECANVM

[To comfort him with the thought that a Dean may be damned without being a liar and slanderer, I offer this poem to the Rev. R. St. John Parry, M.A., D.D., Dean of Trinity College, Cambridge.]

### I

THE Anglicans (whose curious cult  
Still entertains "Quicunque vult")  
Boasted a grave and pious Dean  
Ecclesiastically lean,  
Grey-haired and spectacled, sharp-nosed,  
Whose tract on "Truth," it was supposed,  
Had in its day done much to stem  
The tide of Error among them  
Who, though well-meaning, nearly ripped your  
Church up by whetting tusks on Scripture.

### II

Some men arrive at ruin's brink  
By dice and drugs and dogs and drink ;  
Some drab, some dissipate, some drench  
Life through a weakness for a wench !

## THE EQUINOX

Our Dean, immune from all of these,  
Reached threescore years in honoured ease,  
When, controversies being over,  
He found no thistles in his clover.  
Who sleeps too soft is slow to wake,  
And finds himself with limbs that ache.  
No wolves were prowling round his fold ;  
He noticed he was getting old.  
Leisure, the vampire of the earth,  
Conceived by Satan, brought to birth  
A fiend, who said : “ Respected Dean,  
You’re not as young as you have been.  
The time is not far distant when  
Six other worthy clergymen  
Will put your body in a hole—  
And what will happen to your soul? ”

### III

The blameless Dean conceived a doubt.  
As humble as he was devout,  
All he would utter was a trust  
That God was good as He was just.  
Though he had doubtless been the means  
Of saving others, even Deans  
(Since St. Paul said it) well may say  
“ If I myself were cast away ! ”  
“ Ah ! ” said the demon, “ simple trust  
Becomes the ignorant, who must.  
But you have means whereby to test  
Your faith. I shall not let you rest,

## ATHANASIUS CONTRA DECANUM

Till under cross-examination  
You prove your title to salvation.  
Let us begin—who runs may read—  
With Athanasius his creed.”

### IV

He got through “neque confundentes”  
Gay as a boy is in his twenties.  
With sang-froid mingled with afflatus,  
He gladly uttered “Increatus.”  
“Immensus” and “omnipotens”  
Were meat to his “divinior mens.”  
“Tamen non tres dii” he smiled,  
“Sed unus Deus,” suave and mild ;  
Reciting thus the Creed verbatim  
To “Quia, sicut singillatim.”  
He slapped his venerable femur :  
“Religione prohibemur.”

### V

“A haughty sprite,” (said Solomon)  
“Goeth before destruction !”  
“Pride goes before a tumble !” we  
Learnt early, at our mother’s knee.  
This was to crush the cleric’s crest :  
“*Filius a patre solo est.*”  
Incomprehensibly, to us,  
He boggled at “sed genitus.”

## THE EQUINOX

### VI

The good Dean knitted noble brows  
That had been wont at ease to rouse  
Solution from the deepest lair  
Of whatsoever thoughts were there.  
Yet, here he stuck. If he were walking,  
"A patre solo" stopped him. Talking?  
"A patre solo" dammed the flood  
Of discourse, or it made it mud.  
"A patre solo" spoiled his sleep ;  
"A patre solo" soured his sheep ;  
"A patre solo" made him ill ;  
His thought-chops burned on conscience' grill.  
The grave, acute, enlightened mind  
Contemporaries left behind,  
Yet was an abscess crammed with pus  
Round that sand-grain "sed genitus."  
"Non possum" (inquit) "tanquam volo  
Credere hoc 'a patre solo.'"  
He corresponded for a year  
With doctors there and doctors here ;  
He wrote to brethren near and far,  
To Ebor and to Cantuar ;  
He even risked (half fear half hope)  
A private letter to the Pope.  
These creatures of a clotted church  
Left our inquirer in the lurch ;  
There was not one could reconcile  
By ancient thought or modern style,  
Two knights, each fit to lay his foe low,  
"Genitus" and "a patre solo."

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## VII

“A matre sola” were enough  
To make anatomists grow gruff!  
Yet he could postulate a post—  
“Colomba,” scilicet “The Ghost.”  
A thousand ways of thought he’d trod,  
Where God seemed bread and bread seemed God.  
It did not ruffle up his plumes  
To think that one should open tombs.  
He thought it simple work to see  
That Three in One was one in Three.  
But he thought lost whoe’er affirms  
A contradiction in terms:  
“Without a mother” (was his reading)  
“‘Begotten’ merely means ‘proceeding.’  
‘Begotten’ to my mind implies  
Some anatomic qualities.  
Seed cannot sprout without a soil;  
Oil fills the cruse, the cruse holds oil.  
A Word begotten of I AM  
Is nothing but to milk the ram!  
We know of things whose modest mission  
Is to give life by simple fission.  
The hydra, too, where pools are flooding  
Gemmates, *i.e.* gives birth by budding.  
The earliest forms of sex are seen  
Nor male nor female, but between.  
Do these ‘beget,’ may one affirm,  
In the strict meaning of the term?

## THE EQUINOX

Even so, did we admit this right,  
God would appear hermaphrodite ! ”

### VIII

This thought so shocked the worthy Dean  
Black bile corrupted his machine.  
Limbo of many a likely lad,  
The Dean went melancholy mad.  
It is with sorrow like a sword  
Cutting my heart that I record,  
In this account I dare not “ cook,”  
The fatal form his madness took.  
By Athanasius still obsessed,  
He was The Father, and his quest  
To solve the problem that had turned  
His spirit’s sword-edge, that had burned  
His mental fingers, by a means  
Fitter for schoolboys than for Deans.  
Theology has never lent  
Her sanction to Experiment !

### IX

At death his sanity’s last glimpse  
Scattered the cohorts of the imps.  
Yet on all hope the door was slammed ;  
He knew that he was surely damned.  
Despite his gaiters and his hat,  
He failed with “ Ita ” on the mat  
“ De Trinitate sentiat.”

## ATHANASIUS CONTRA DECANUM

It said as plain as words can say  
“ Haec est Fides Catholica,”  
Adding a warning of the risk we  
All of us run : “ Quam nisi quisque  
Fideliter crediderit,  
Non salvus esse poterit.”

### X

Horribly frightened and alone,  
Before the awful judgment throne  
The poor Dean stood, the myriad eyes  
Of Wheels and of Activities,  
Glitterers, Fiery Serpents, Kings,  
Gods, Sons of Gods (and other things)  
Fixed on him. “ Waste no time ! ” he cried,  
“ I own me guilty. I denied—  
Or could at least not acquiesce  
In—Athanasius. I confess  
‘ A patre solo ’ hard for throats.  
‘ Genitus ? ’—put me with the goats ! ”

### XI

“ Is this recorded ? ” asked the Lord.  
“ No,” said the angel. “ Yet Thy sword  
Of wrath avenging is his meed.  
Alas ! he played the goat indeed.  
The life Thou gavest him, full store  
Of opportunities galore,  
He wasted all and brought to naught.  
Ass-feeding thistles were his thought.



## THE EQUINOX

He used his intellectual hammer  
On minor points of Latin grammar,  
Ruined an excellent digestion  
By brooding on a sterile question,  
And went beside himself through fretting  
About 'proceeding' and 'begetting.' "

### XII

Damnation's tones in thunder roll :  
Gehenna caught the accursèd soul.

### XIII

"Satan," said God, "has always been  
Too clever for us with a Dean !"

ALEISTER CROWLEY.