

Peculiar Brother Bird

1 In the foothills of the Blue Ridge,
A peculiar Brother Bird
Started teaching a new doctrine
That no one had ever heard.

2 For he held that John the Baptist,
Who had warned of coming wrath,
Said the Lord His wheat would gather,
But would “burn up” all the chaff.

3 And he emphasized the “burn up”:
“Yes sir, *burn up* I have read!”
And he said it was just simply
What the Bible clearly said.

4 Then he turned in his old Bible
To the book of Malachi,
And he read, “The Day is comin’ -
Yes, a comin’ by and by.”

5 “And The Day that is a-comin’
Like an *oven* it’ll burn,
And’ll ‘burn up’ all the wicked-
Thus from Malachi we learn.”

6 And he emphasized the “burn up”:
“Yes sir, *burn up* I have read!”
And he said it was just simply
What the Bible clearly said.

7 Then he turned to Jude and Peter,
Where “eternal fire” had burned
In ol’ Sodom and Gomorrah -
Yet to “ashes” they were turned.

8 And he said that Jude and Peter
An “example” did proclaim
Of how *ashes* was the endin’
Of that dread eternal flame.

9 And he emphasized the “ashes”:
“Yes sir, *ashes* I have read!”
And he said it was just simply
What the Bible clearly said.

10 And some folks got sorta bothered
At the words of Brother Bird,
And a “heretic” they called ‘im,
And they said he was absurd.

11 And they championed endless torment
In a hell the lost to scare,
And they wondered if without it
Why would anybody care?

12 Then he took ‘em to a passage,
One of which they were so fond-
In the sixteenth verse, third chapter
Of the gospel of St. John.

13 “For it says, and says so clearly
Life, and *everlasting* too,
Or it’s *perish*-don’t you see it -
That word *perish* is a clue!”

14 And he emphasized the “perish”:
“Yes sir, *perish* I have read!”
And he said it was just simply
What the Bible clearly said.

15 “And that final Day of Judgment,
And that lake of fire,” he saith
Is *destruction* everlasting,
And is called “the Second *Death*.”

16 “For the punishment eternal
Is an everlasting thing;
But it’s punish-*ment*, please notice-
And it’s not a punish-*ing*.”

17 “And the punishment’s ‘destruction’-
It’s an everlasting *death*-
It’s destruc-*tion*, not destroy-*ing* -
That’s exactly what is saith.”

18 And he emphasized “destruction”:
“Yes *destruction* I have read,”
And he said it was just simply
What the Bible clearly said.

19 Then they shook their dusty Bibles
As they murmured and they cried,
“He’s a-tamperin’ with the Scripture,
And the *truth* he has denied!”

20 And they said that hell was endless
As recorded in the Word,
And they told folks not to listen
To that “lib-ral” Brother Bird.

21 Then he said, “We’ve all been brought up
To believe the endless way,
And it’s all we’ve ever thought of
Right up to the present day.”

22 And he told ‘em he was certain
That the Bible was inspired,
And preserved both pure and perfect,
And was all that he desired.

23 “But we thought we knew the meanin’
Long before we ever read
Just to find out and be certain
What it really, truly said.”

24 “And is *says* that sin has wages,
And the wages, yes, is *death*,
But the *gift* is *life eternal* -
That’s exactly what is saith.”

25 And he emphasized the “wages”:
“Yes sir, wages I have read!”
And he said it was just simply
What the Bible clearly said.

26 And this caused some folks to wonder,
And this made some folks to squirm,
And some argued ‘bout the rich man,
And the never-dying worm.

27 Then he showed ‘em that the sayin’
Of the worms and fire so hot
Was an excerpt from Isaiah,
Yes, Isaiah, was it not?

28 And he showed them in the passage
Of “the *carcasses* of men” -
The *consuming* of the wicked -
And they looked at it again.

29 “And our blessed Lord and Master
Would not quote a *temporal* end
Out of context as *eternal*
And confuse the minds of men.”

30 “For it speaks there of dead bodies,
Of the wicked’s certain doom,
And how fire and worms undyin’
Will their carcasses *consume*.”

31 And he answered all their questions
Of the rich man who did die,
And he showed ‘em he was *buried*
E’er he made his painful cry.

32 And he showed ‘em how a *spirit*
Does not have a tongue or eyes,
Or a bosom or a finger,
Then he caught ‘em by surprise:

33 "For it was a *buried body*,
Not a disembodied soul -
And for Pharisees who scorned Him
'Twas a piercing *par-a-ble*."

34 Well, sir, *that* word fanned their anger
From a flicker to a flame:
"It's no *par-a-ble*-No, never!
For He used a *proper* name."

35 Then he showed 'em how "*a certain*"
Was the way the Lord began
Oft to tell a pointed story:
"And there was "*a certain* man."

36 "And they could not serve their mammon
And be servants of the Lord,
Or call Abraham their father
If ol' Moses they ignored."

37 "And the *name* He said was *Laz'rus*,
And he meant just what He said
For they all knew it was *Laz'rus*
Who had risen from the dead."

38 "For 'a *certain* man named *Laz'rus*'
From a poorer family,
Had been sick and on his deathbed
In the town of Bethany."

39 "And though *Laz'rus* had arisen,
And had come back from the dead,
Those same fellers weren't a-listenin'
Just as Abraham had said."

40 "And the story of the rich man
Never says that hell's for aye
For it's not the final Judgment
And it's not the final Day."

41 And he showed 'em how that *Hades*
Is the Greek word for *Sheol*,
And can mean a *grave* or *gravedom*,
And denote a *hole* or *whole*.

42 And that "*Sheol* in the Scripture
Is the Gravedom of the *Dead*,
Of the righteous *and* the wicked" -
And he proved just what he said:

43 "In that precious psalm of David,
Of God's presence he did tell,
How the Lord would still be with him,
Though he made his bed in *hell*."

44 "And, 'what man is he that liveth,
and shall *not* see death' said he;
For the *Sheol* of a grave hole
Is our common destiny (89:48)

45 "In the belly of the great fish
In the belly of a whale-
Is where Jonah cried in anguish
From the belly of a...*hell*."

46 "And it's perfect in the King James,
Just the way they worded it-
It is *hell* if it's the *gravedom*;
Otherwise it's *grave* or *pit*."

47 "And of all the *Sheol's* mentioned,
There's not one in sixty-five
That e'er speaks of endless torment,
Or of souls that are alive."

48 "Nor do any of the prophets
Though of dearth and death do tell,
Ever mention any torments
In a never-ending *hell*."

49 "In the Acts of the Apostles-
There in sermons quite a few
You will find the gospel message
Doesn't give a single clue."

50 "In the words and in the writings
Of the dear apostle Paul,
Though he speaks of wrath and judgment
Never mentions *hell* at all."

51 "Don't it seem a bit abnormal,
That in all the Word of God,
That the sum of these is *zero*?
Don't that seem a little odd?"

52 "For if *hell* is really endless,
And eternal torment's true,
It should be a *couple hundred*,
Or at least a *one* or *two*."

53 "And the *words* that God has chosen
And the *pictures* He has drawn,
Were not used to be confusin'
But to make it clearly known."

54 "For they're *clear* words like *destruction*
That describe the sinner's doom,
Such as *end* and *death* and *perish*,
And *devour* and *consume*."

55 "With a plain word such as *perish*,
Could somebody tell me why
We have turned it inside outward
Til' it means to never die?"

56 "And we know just what a *fire* is,
And we know what it will do-
And we understand it clearly,
And should need no other clue."

57 "When the fire of God has fallen
From the God of fire in wrath,
It *destroyed* its prey *completely*,
And *consumed* all in its path."

58 "And the pictures of the judgment
Well, I'd say they're *clear enough*-
For the *chaff* and *tares* and *stubble*
And the *briars* will *burn up*!"

59 "Now if God had really meant it
To be endless, I inquire,
Would he picture only items
That'll burn up in the fire?"

60 "As the fire *devours* the stubble,
And the flame *consumes* the chaff,
So the *tares* cast in the furnace
Will be *burned* in final wrath."

61 "And if firemen were not able
To put out a fire, let's say -
Do you think the thing a-burnin'
Would burn on and on for aye?"

62 "Thus the quenchless flames of Hades,
And the fire you can't put out
Will not keep these things a-burnin' -
They'll *burn up* without a doubt."

63 And he emphasized the "burn up":
"Yes sir, *burn up* I have read!"
And he said it was just simply
What the Bible clearly said.

64 In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
This peculiar Brother Bird
Got some fire and brimstone preachers
Not a little bit disturbed.

65 And although he'd try to answer
Just whatever they would ask,
It was clear they weren't as willing
To perform a sim'lar task.

66 But they harped on Revelation
Of the “torment day and night,”
And for ever cried “Forever!”
As they made an “endless” fight.

67 And they called the theologians,
And they checked the hist'ry book,
And they even searched the Hebrew
And the Greek to take a look.

68 And they thought they finally had 'im,
When with glee they did extol
How “the Scripture clearly teaches
Immoral'ty of the soul.”

69 And they waited for his answer-
Ah! They knew they had him *there* -
When he opened up his Bible,
And he asked them, “Show me....*where*.”

70 Then they were a good bit puzzled
E'er they even took a look,
Yet they said that they were certain
It was written in the Book.

71 Then they checked in their concordance,
But they couldn't help but squirm,
For the best that they could muster
Was the never-dying worm.

72 Then he asked them to consider
Chapter six of Timothy,
How's there's one, and just one “*only*
Who hath immortality.”

73 And he emphasized the “only”:
“Yes sir, *only* I have read!”
And he said it was just simply
What the Bible clearly said.

74 And he turned to many verses
With that wiggly little term,
And he showed 'em from the Bible
That a worm is...well ... *a worm*.

75 “And our hope's in resurrection -
'In the twinklin' of an eye' -
And in *bodies made immortal*
Not in souls that never die.”

76 And he showed them “life eternal
Is a *gift* that we *receive*,
And the gift is in the Giver,
Just for those who do *believe*.”

77 “And his sheep will 'never perish'
For they know and follow Him,
And He *gives* them *life eternal* -
Yes, He *gives* it unto them.

78 “For the wicked surely perish,
While the saved know endless joy -
Thus we fear naught but the God who
Soul and body can *destroy*.”

79 And he emphasized “destroy”:
“Can *destroy the soul*,” I've read,
And he said it was just simply
What the Bible clearly said.

80 Then he scolded torment peddlers
With this gravest of concern:
“Are folks *truly* trusting Jesus,
Or just tryin' not to burn?”

81 “And your view on Revelation (14:10,11)
Is a little bit bizarre,
For it places hell in heaven
Where the Lamb and angels are.”

82 And he showed 'em what the “weepin'
And the wailin' was about:
“*When ye see*” the righteous gathered
And “yourselves” have been “thrust out.”

83 “And thrust out in 'outer *darkness*'
And 'the *mist of darkness*,' well -
Are not words of endless torment
In a blazin', fiery hell.”

84 “You can talk of cruelest torture
In the hottest flames of black,
But the mist of darkness surely
Means they're never comin' back.”

85 “And that wicked city Bab'lon
In an *hour* will be gone,
Yet the smoke of their great torment
Will ascend up on and on.”

86 “And the smoke tells of *consumption* -
Somethin's burnin' up for sure -
And bears witness to *destruction*,
Not more torments to endure.”

87 “And *forever* in my Bible
Is two words: *for ever*; see
And it's not always eternal,
As in Deuteronomy. (15:17)”

88 “It's a phrase of preposition,
As in *for* a time so long.
And then *ever* is indefinite,
As in *for*...and on and on.”

89 “And the Bible clearly tells us
What the wicked have in store -
How their thoughts will even perish,
And that they will be 'no more.’”

90 And he emphasized the “no more”:
“Yes sir, *no more* I have read!”
And he said it was just simply
What the Bible clearly said.

91 And some folks said he was lyin'
And a twistin' up the Word,
But some folks began to listen
To peculiar Brother Bird.

92 And the ones who were not Christians
Really hoped that it was so,
'Cause they didn't want to risk it,
And they didn't want to go.

93 But the ones who were real Christians,
Also hoped it could be true,
For they loved their Lord no matter,
And they had compassion, too.

94 And they could not say for certain
Whether Brother Bird was wrong,
For he raised some valid questions,
And his faith in God was strong.

95 And they would not be like Jonah,
And be mad it wasn't so,
But they sorta thought like Spurgeon,
And were hopin' none would go.

96 And at least they weren't offended
At peculiar Brother Bird,
But they thought the subject worthy
Of more study in the Word.

97 But the preachers and the teachers
With a thing or two to sell,
And the great big kingdom builders
All defended their own hell.

98 And they said it was the *gospel*!
And were sure that they were right,
But they didn't even bother
But a verse or two to cite.

99 And they took no time to study,
 For I reckon they preferred
 Just to cast a doubtful slander
 On the name of Brother Bird.

100 And they shared each other's pulpits,
 And they shook each other's hand,
 And were thankful for the faithful
 Who would firmly take a stand.

101 And with hell they'd sell their tickets
 To a mansion up above,
 But they did not know what manner
 Of a spirit they were of.

102 For they'd burn their wood or garbage
 And they'd feel the heat and say,
 With a calloused air of surety,
 "Folks will have some *hell* to pay!"

103 And they reasoned of its justice
 As if adding up the math-
 How a God of love and mercy
 Was a *holy* God of *wrath*.

104 (As if love could not be holy,
 Or that holy could not love-
 Was He Hyde or was He Jeckyl?
 How much pain would be enough?)

105 In the blood stains of the nail scars
 We His wondrous love may learn,
 But for those who fail to learn it,
 Well, *forever* they will burn???)

106 Though they'd give God all the credit
 They'd absolve Him of the guilt,
 And they'd blame it on the Devil
 For why Hell was ever built.

107 And some "Hard Shells" said God chose it
 And had picked some folks to go,
 While some "Free Wills" said He'd close it
 If we'd just say yes or no.

108 But there's been some noble Christians
 Through the heretics of time
 Who have questioned "endless" reason
 And have doubted "endless" rhyme.

109 And though some were sentimental,
 And a few perhaps absurd,
 There have been some valiant rebels
 Who stood firmly on the Word!

110 But the Endless Hell Defenders
 Were ascendant in the land-
 For ol' Plato in the Credo
 Always had the upper hand.

111 And with Augustine and Calvin
 There to tell 'em what to say
 They could just be good ol' parrots
 And repeat it all for 'aye.

112 But the truth is not the treasure
 Of the great majority,
 And the truth you cannot measure
 By its popularity.

113 When a monk named Martin Luther
 Nailed his theses to the door,
 They were written in the Latin,
 And were easy to ignore.

114 In a time we call "Dark Ages"
 When the clerics hid the Word,
 The prevailin' way of thinkin'
 Thought that Luther was absurd.

115 So now who's to say it's doubtless
 That the parrots will prevail
 And the creeds still go unchallenged
 On the endlessness of Hell?

116 For perhaps a thoughtful poem
 Could inspire some hearts to search,
 And begin a transformation
 Of this doctrine in the church.

117 In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
 Someone's hopin' to be heard
 In this story of the teachin'
 Of peculiar Brother Bird.

118 And to emphasize the "burn up":
 "Yes sir, *burn up* I have read!"
 And to say it is just simply
 What the Bible clearly said.

HE MEANS IT AS HE'S MEANT IT
Brother Bird II

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Our peculiar Brother Bird
Had been diggin' even deeper
In the treasures of the Word,

And was surer more than ever
Of the teaching he had spread
Of destruction of the wicked
At the judgment of the dead.

When a scholar of the Sandhills
From the seminary came;
A professor, "Dr. Brimstone" -
"Farren Brimstone" was his name.

And he came as a contender
For the credos of the past -
To defend endangered dogmas
Was the dogged doctor's task.

And a half o' dozen letters
Trailing right beside his name,
On a published dissertation
Was his pompous claim to fame.

And he mocked the simple reading
Of the words within the Word,
And condemned the crude credentials
Of our lowly Brother Bird.

And he lauded old confessions,
As he chided doctrines "new",
And he quoted Greek and Hebrew,
Or at least pretended to.

In command of several cliché's,
And control of ancient lore,
And in charge of seven proof-texts,
He made quick work of his chore.

And he challenged all the "notions"
Of peculiar Brother Bird,
And he said, "This view on *burn up*
Is most patently absurd!"

Brother Bird then asked the Doctor
The word *perish* to define,
And to use it in a sentence -
"Well Sir, if you wouldn't mind."

Then the Doctor stu-stu-stuttered
As he tried to answer Bird -
"Pu-Pu-Perish only means...uh -
(It's a very tricky word)-

"And it du-du-doesn't always
Have to mu-mu-mean "to die;"
It can mean "be lost" or "ruined"
As the scholars verify.

"And I guess you surely know it
Can be fi-fi-figur'tive;
As in "endless conscious torment
In which lost men ever live."

"*Ever* live? As in *for ever*?"
Brother Bird then asked the Doc-
"Ever *live*?" as in *existin'*
Why it seems you mean to mock.

"That's the OPPOSITE of *perish*-
And if truly "figur'tive,"
It's not true to any figure
To say *dyin'* means to *live*.

"And moreover," said our Brother,
"If you read its constant use
Through the length and breadth of Scripture,
You will be without excuse.

"For it says, 'THE WICKED PERISH'-
Into smoke they do *consume*-
And it says of 'them that perish'
That *destruction* is their doom.

"If God says, 'The wicked *perish*,'
Then I say they surely do,
And He means it as He's meant it
As He's used it through and through!

"For it's used of *war* and *famine*.
And of *dust* and *death* and *dearth*,
And of being *brought to nothing*,
And *destroyed from off the earth*.

"Of *consumption* and of *fever*
And of *dung* and *smoke* and *end*,
And of *cut down* and of *cut off*,
And of *beasts* and *wicked men*.

"And it's paralleled with *vanish*,
And with *withereth* and *slay*,
And it's linked with *being eat up*,
And with *die* and *fade away*.

"And it's used in clear distinction
To the term *eternal life*,
And in contrast to *endurin'*,
And *remainin'* and *abide*.

"The Divine Vocabulary
Has thus used it o'er and o'er,
In Its built-in Dictionary
Of one-hundred fifty-four.

"Yes, one hundred fifty four times
You will find it used, my friend,
And it *never* means a process
That will never have an end.

"But God gives *life everlasting*
To all those who are in Christ-
It is *these* who NEVER PERISH
Who receive *eternal life*.

"Would we charge the Scripture's Author
With such clumsiness of words?
The Creator of all language
With incompetence? Absurd!

"If God says, 'the wicked *perish*,'
Then I say they surely do,
And He means it as He's meant it
As He's used it through and through!

Then the disconcerted Doctor
Interrupted Brother Bird
"You are overlooking several
Abstract uses of the word.

"Such as *bottles* that are broken,
But that do not cease to be,
And of missing *sheep* and *coins*-
Well now, *that* should help you see!"

"Yes, it helps me see so clearly
That all uses of the word
Never speak of endless torment,
And its meaning is not blurred.

"For those bottles that were broken-
Those burst wineskins-don't you trust,
Do most justly picture *perish*,
For they've surely turned to dust.

"And the lost sheep and the coins
Aptly pictures souls as LOST,
And the *life lost* means to *perish*,
Which is sin's great final cost."

Farren Brimstone, by then steaming,
Cited each and ev'ry creed,
From the first church to Westminster,
"And all Christians have agreed!"

"The ma-jor-i-ty, *yes*," Bird said,
"But, no, *not* the early church -
And dissenters through the ages
Bore the fruit of honest search.

"But the truth can't be invented,
It just *is*, and that is that -
And majority opinion
Never made the round earth flat.

"We must humbly read and study
To find out what we should know;
We must nobly search the Scriptures
And to see if things are so.

"As Arnobius and Clement,
Guillebaud and Leroy Froom-
Who became convinced from Scripture
Of the fire that will consume.

"Dear John Wenham faced it squarely,
Pastor Dale his stance confessed;
Joseph Parker saw it fairly,
And John Stott this truth professed.

"Henry Constable was cogent;
Basil Atkinson discreet;
Edward White was so convincing,
And John Pettingell complete.

"Bishop Whately wouldn't kowtow;
Samuel Minton wouldn't budge;
And we all should be so grateful
For the work of Edward Fudge.

"These and many others like 'em,
Who have loved and searched the Word,
Have been logical and lucid,
And should finally be heard!

"If the wicked truly perish,
Or if endless torment's true,
Neither you nor I can change it-
There is nothing we can do.

"And God says, 'the wicked *perish*,'
Then I say they surely do,
And He means it as He's meant it
As He's used it through and through!

And just then the highbrow doctor
Quite offended and perturbed,
Shook the dust from off his sandals
And was done with Brother Bird.

But before the dust had settled
In came fiery Sister Smoke,
And encouraged Brother Bird to
Be more careful how he spoke.

"For you overlook God's judgment
And His wrath," said she to him,
"And your sentimental longings
Make your sense of justice dim.

"Yet you feign you know the meaning
Of each Greek and English word,"
And that fiery Smoke of torment
Nearly burned up Brother Bird.

For she thundered as she wondered
Of the sense o this and that;
And he wondered as she thundered,
Was it all just tit for tat?

But amid the rank and rankle,
Sister Smoke did yet confess,
She was not prepared to argue
For the point she did profess.

Brother Bird by then was puzzled-
If she had not searched it out,
Why she spoke of all those "red flags"
That had filled her mind with doubt?

Did she look up every Scripture?
Did she read just what it said?
Or just judge the poem's author
And not ponder what she read?

Was her problem with the poem,
Or just really with the poet?
If his points were truly valid,
Would she have the heart to know it?

Is it 'sentimental longings'
To reject perpetual wrath?
And would 'justice' be neglected
If Christ *burns up* all the chaff?

Does she wonder of the purpose
Of grim torment without end,
Since it won't reform the sinner,
And it can't destroy the sin?

Such a god would be a monster -
Not the Lord we know and love;
Not the maker of the flowers,
Or Creator of the dove.

Brother Bird became determined,
Pacing briskly as he spoke,
And he opened up his Bible,
And he summoned Sister Smoke.

And he showed her clear examples
Of God's judgment in the Word,
But she cried out, "They were *temporal!*"
And his point she hardly heard.

For his point was that the wording
Used of temporal wrath-the sum-
Is exactly *the same language*
That describes the wrath to come.

"Whether Sodom and Gomorrah
Or the judgment of the flood
Or of those who died with Korah,
Or the Galilean's blood.

"All the Scriptures say such PERISHED,
Were DESTROYED or were CONSUMED,
And the *same words* draw the picture
Of the sinner's final doom.

"If you don't repent," said Jesus,
'You shall *likewise perish*, too' -
And we see how Christ meant *perish*,
And the *likewise* is a clue."

And he emphasized the *perish* -
"Yes Ma'am, *perish* I have read!"
And he said it was just simply
What the Bible clearly said.

"Would we charge the Scripture's Author
With such clumsiness of words?
The Creator of all language
With incompetence? Absurd?"

"If God says, 'the wicked *perish*,'
Then I say they surely do,
And He means it as He's meant it
As He's used it through and through!

Sister Smoke then turned quite ashen,
As she nearly lost her breath,
Yet she smoldered one last question
Of just what was meant by "death."

“Isn't death just *separation*
Of the body and the soul -
To be *shut out* from God's presence
While the endless ages roll?”

“That's the premise,” Brother Bird said,
“Of the endless torment folks,
As if bodies are the egg shells,
And the souls immortal yolks.

“But when God told father Adam
How that he would surely die,
And the serpent said he wouldn't -
Well, we know who told the lie.

“Dust thou art-to dust returnest,”
Is how God explained it then;
Thus by one man sin had entered,
And then *death* passed to all men.

“And we know *death* is the wages
And of sin the penalty,
But God's gift is life eternal -
Yes, to *live* eternally!

“And the lost shall one day *perish* -
Not just bodies, but the whole;
For we know God can *destroy*
Both the body and the soul.

“Can destroy both soul and body -
Can destroy them *both*, he saith;
Thus the lake of fire is rightly
Called by God “the second *death*.”

“Thus we learn the Scripture's meaning
That in death life has an END -
Loss of life - not life in torment
Is its meaning, my dear friend.

“And this penalty was pictured
In the sacrifices plain,
At the tabernacle altar
Where the animals were *slain*.

“For the sheep were not imprisoned,
And tormented endlessly,
And the oxen were not tortured
Or confined in misery.

“God's consistent jurisprudence
Points to this important truth,
That the *life* for life was taken -
Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.

“All transgressions under Moses
A *just* recompense received,
And the *loss of life* was harshest -
Yes, the harshest one conceived.

“And, in fact there were no prisons
In the land of Is-ra-el,
And no ghastly torture chambers
Like an endless-torment hell.

“And the Biblical expressions
Of atonement full and free
Are 'Christ *died* for the ungodly,'
And 'who gave himself for me.'

“For sin's penalty was conquered
Through the blood for sinners shed,
When Christ tasted DEATH for all men,
And then rose up from the dead.

“And although He greatly suffered
All the way to Calvary,
'Twas His *death* that brought redemption,
And that paid the penalty.

“And our Lord spoke of His own death
Of His death upon the tree,
When He said His *life* He giveth;
Yes, 'I lay it down,' said He.

“This coherent testimony
To the penalty of sin
Shows that *perish* means - yes, *perish*,
And not torment without end.

“If God says the wicked *perish*,
Then I say they surely do,
And He means it as He's meant it
As He's used it through and through.

“Would we charge the Scripture's Author
With such clumsiness of words?
The Creator of all language
With incompetence? Absurd!”

And she contemplated *perish* -
“Yes, it's *perish* I have read,
And it seems that you have shown me
What the Bible clearly said.”

Sister Smoke had truly listened,
And in some points had concurred,
And it seemed she even kindly
Bid farewell to Brother Bird.

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Brother Bird began to tire,
And was weary from the Smoke and
From the Farren Brimstone ire.

When a young man with a Bible
Came to make our Brother glad -
Yes, a youth for truth so hungry
By the name of Ernest Ladd.

Ernest Ladd was not a scholar,
But he had a habit true -
For he read his Bible often
And had read his Bible through.

Thus familiar with the wording
Of the words within the Word,
He had ears to hear the teaching
Of peculiar Brother Bird.

And he read his Bible over,
And he read it carefully;
And he said, “This 'Burn Up' Doctrine'
Sure sounds Biblical to me.”

And he analyzed *destruction*,
And investigated *death*,
And he scrutinized *consumption*,
And the *spirit, life and breath*.

And he found that all the “proof-texts,”
(For he took the time to read),
Did not say what most were claimin'
In the endless-torment creed.

He conversed with Doctor Brimstone
And with Sister Smoke conferred,
And examined all the writings,
Poems and charts of Brother Bird.

And he came up through the hollers,
And he climbed up o'er the knolls,
To discuss the Scripture's wording,
And di-sect immortal souls.

Brother Bird and he would gather
With a Bible in each lap,
And would search with a Concordance
As if scouring o'er a map.

And they'd read each pertinent Scripture,
And consider what it said,
And get more and more delighted
With each passage that they read.

And the Ladd was such a blessing,
But he could not figure out
Why so many could not see it,
When to him there was no doubt.

For he'd plainly pondered *perish*,
And had found its meaning plain,
And he couldn't reconcile it
With eternal conscious pain.

So he emphasized the *perish* -
"Indeed, *perish* I have read,"
And he said it was just purely
What the Scriptures plainly said.

"Since God says the wicked *perish*,
Then I'd say it must be true,
And He surely must have meant it
As He's used it through and through."

Brother Bird's blue eyes then twinkled,
As he stroked his whiskered chin:
"This old mountain man's so thankful
To have met you, my young friend."

And he was by then so hopeful
Ernest Ladd would come to be
A most passionate promoter
Of the truths he'd come to see.

But folks said the Ladd was "smitten
With the venom of the Bird,"
And had fatally been bitten
By "this teaching most absurd."

And they'd say "This is so *vital*"
When in hunt for heresy,
But when cornered by the Scripture,
"It don't matter much to me."

Thus he slowly got discouraged,
And disheartened and dismayed,
As he lost his zeal to quarrel
In his efforts to persuade.

Brother Bird was yet persistent
In the truth he did pursue,
And was equally insistent
That their efforts they renew.

And he said, "It is so *vital*
To please *God* instead of self,
And to share this truth with others,
And not hide it on the shelf.

"For our Father's not a monster,
And His love our hearts has won,
And we've met Him in the Scriptures,
And we've seen Him in the Son.

"And how could our God so holy
Author such a thing so bad?
And why would our Lord so lovely
Be eternally so mad?"

"If folks call that 'sentimental,'
Or a 'softening toward sin,'
Their own ghastly view of torment
They must little comprehend.

"From His own clear testimony
God has promised us that He
Will not always keep His anger -
Will not always angry be!"

"It's a noun and not a verb in
'Everlasting punishment' -
And the punishment's not torment,
But DESTRUCTION, it is writ!"

"Yes, God poureth out His anger
On the 'great and dreadful day,'
But it only lasts a *moment*,
While His mercy is for aye."

And he kept on quoting Scriptures,
And with Scriptures he did prod
Brother Ernest not to falter
For the love of our good God.

"*Life in Christ* is our great gospel -
Death in Sin our grave refrain;
And in faithfulness to Scripture
We must dare to make it plain!"

"And the reason few have bothered?
And the reason few have dared?
It is APATHY, my brother -
It's because so few have *cared!*"

"And of course we should be prudent
And not pester or annoy,
But not treat this as a trifle,
Or dismiss it as a toy.

"For we need persuaded Sisters
Who were skeptical at first,
And we need more Ernest Ladds who
For the truths of Scriptures thirst.

"Yes, we need discerning brothers
Who are careful with their words,
Oh, but humor me, my brother-
We sure need some noisy Birds

"To keep emphasizing PERISH,
'Yes, it's *perish* we have read!'
And to say "It is just simply
What the Bible clearly said!"

"Yes, God says, 'THE WICKED PERISH.'
So let's say, 'They surely do.'
And He means it as He's meant it
As He's used it through and through."

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Our peculiar Brother Bird
Is still hoping that a host of
Ernest Ladds will soon be heard.

THIRD BIRD

John 3:16-What does it mean?

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Our peculiar Brother Bird
Had been napping by a tree stump
When some laurel bushes stirred.

And just then sly Willie Waver
Poked his head up looking pale:
"I was comin' out to tell ya,
Ernest Ladd's been put in jail.

"Farren Brimstone caught him talkin'
'Bout that endless torment stuff,
And he hauled 'im to the jailhouse,
For he said he'd *had enough!*

"Said he's gonna put an end to
All this nonsense that he's heard -
And he's gonna set a trap for
That peculiar Brother Bird."

Brother Bird then said to Willie,
"It's a most *peculiar* thing
That we're hounded for believing
In John three, and verse sixteen.

"You would think our error graver
Than the gravest heresy-
Yet we just believe John's gospel -
Verse sixteen of chapter three.

"In that sixteenth verse, third chapter
Of the gospel of Saint John,
Is the purest, plainest statement
Of the truth we stand upon.

"It's the 'gospel in a nutshell'
That we've known from early youth;
And in all the Holy Scriptures
It's the most familiar truth.

"God *so loved* the world, dear brother,
That He gave His only Son -
Gave His *only*, His *begotten*-
And He said, 'For God *so loved*...'

"That *believers* will not *perish*-
But have *everlasting life* -
That's the clear vocabulary
From the lips of Jesus Christ.

And the rest of all the Scriptures
Are throughout and in-between
Comprehensively coherent
With John three, and verse sixteen.

"*Will not perish*-oh, how lucid!
Will not perish-oh, how clear!
Everlasting life in contrast -
All we stand for is right here!

"Is it heresy, dear Willie
To believe John 3:16?
Or false doctrine to be certain
That it says just what it means?"

Then they heard some coonhounds barkin'
And they saw some lanterns bright -
Farren Brimstone with a posse
Silhouetted in the night.

And then Willie said, "Now, Brother,
I'm no the-o-lo-ge-un,
But I know enough to tell ya
I believe we better run!"

But by then they were surrounded,
And it was too late to flee;
Dr. Brimstone read the charges:
"Heresy, in first degree.

"And you have no rights - be silent!
Everything you've said before
Can and will be used against you,
And we have no need of more."

"What I've said conforms to Scripture,"
Brother Bird began to plead.
"It is WRITTEN, Dr. Brimstone -
And is there for all to READ!

"*Everlasting life or perish*
Surely say just what they mean
In that memory verse from childhood
In John three, and verse sixteen.

"Is it heresy, O Doctor
To believe John 3:16?
Or false doctrine to be certain
That it says just what it means?"

Then the doctor hollered, "Quiet!
You will have your day in court,
So don't waste your whistle whining
Till I've made a full report."

Then the doctor said to Willie,
"And I'm taking *you* in, too,
For cavorting with no-Hellers
Who've indoctrinated you."

"Doctri-whata...?" said poor Willie-
"I'm not *sure* what I stand for."
"Then you'll come," said Dr. Brimstone,
And we'll *help* you to get sure!"

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Brother Bird was thrown in jail;
Ernest Ladd and Willie Waver
Plopped beside him in the cell.

Brother Bird then spoke to Ernest,
"Bless your heart, O valiant youth,
You are persecuted, brother
For your faithfulness to truth.

"From a child you've known the Scripture,
One of which you are still fond -
Sixteenth verse of the third chapter
Of the gospel of Saint John.

"Must have heard it as an infant;
Must have learned it as a tot;
But to claim it now as doctrine
Gets you into water hot!

"Treat it as a gift-shop motto;
Twist and wrest its words so clear -
You'll have friends among the scholars,
And approval of each peer.

"Quote it in its simple beauty;
Preach it in its power plain;
Teach it true and unembellished
And you'll find but sure disdain.

"*God so loved*-O praise the Father!
That he gave-O praise the Son!
Inspired words-O praise the Spirit!
What a precious verse in John!

"See the text in brilliant context-
Nicodemus comes by night,
Learns the way to life eternal
From the words of Jesus Christ.

"*Whosoever* that *believeth*
Shall not perish - oh, now see -
Shall not PERISH - now the contrast -
But shall *live eternally*.

“*Everlasting life or perish,*
Endless life or life that ends;
Is it not so self-defining?
Is it not so clear, my friend?”

“But the doctor with his dogma
Says we speak a dang'rous lie;
He says *none* will really perish,
But that *all* will never die.

“Turns a word as clear as perish
Upside down and inside out;
Turns a verse as clear as this one
Into one of unclear doubt.

“Is it heresy, dear Ernest
To believe John 3:16?
Or false doctrine to be certain
That it says just what it means?”

Ernest Ladd then turned to Willie-
“What say you, or will you say?
I'll admit I didn't figure
I'd see *you* locked up this way.”

“Well, now, I don't know,” said Willie,
“I can't be sure, myself,
And some things are better, I'd say
To be left up on the shelf.

“*Maybe so*, is what I'm thinkin'-
Maybe not, is what I've thought;
Bur perhaps the *best* position
Is to keep from getting caught.”

Then the three discussed the subject,
Without yielding to a yawn,
Until Willie started nodding
At the waking of the dawn.

That same morning at the courthouse
Flocks of folks from hill and dale -
Curious and conscientious -
Came to fan the fires of hell.

Came to watch Doc Farren Brimstone,
Came to hear and to be heard,
Came to ponder on the puzzle
Of peculiar Brother Bird.

Brother Bird could see the jury
Had been chosen carefully -
Twelve convinced of endless torment,
Just as firm as they could be.

Larry Barry, Big “B” Baptist;
“Brother Bob” of Gospel Bright;
Benton Cherry, of the Presbies,
And Professor Malways Wright.

Clayton Buckett, Bird's first pastor;
Early Young, who baptized him;
Noah Guard, ordaining elder -
Brother Bird knew all of them.

Dr. Ray of Bible College,
And Evangelist O'Wowell;
Dandy Redwords, hotshot preacher,
All prepared to face him now.

Missionary Marty Martin;
Sister Mary (Quite) Contraire;
These the twelve who formed the jury-
Sure to be most just and fair.

Brother Bird knew most were good men,
But a few were rude and trite;
And he knew this subject often
Kindled much more heat than light.

In the room a crowd of people -
Sister Smoke sat near the aisle;
Bishops, elders, priests, and deacons -
All were eager for the trial.

Dr. Brimstone asked for silence -
“We are here today to quell
Any teaching that would threaten
To put out the fires of hell.

“This man Bird has spread the error
That our creeds are but a lie -
That there is no endless torment,
And the soul of man can die.

“He contends that God so holy
Would not torture anyone,
But that wicked men will perish
In the fire of wrath to come.

“He denies the cardinal doctrine
Of the faith we love so well,
That the whole point of atonement
Was to rescue us from hell.

“And he's pushed this point, my brothers,
And what makes this oh, so bad,
Is that he has de-ceived others
Like this poor young Ernest Ladd.

“And now Ernest Ladd's a zealot,
And it's growing here and there,
And if we don't stop it promptly
It will spread to who knows where!”

Then the courtroom shook with grumbling,
And the jury looked perturbed,
And all eyes and ears were waiting
For a word from Brother Bird.

Brother Bird stood front and center,
And he beckoned with his hand,
“Men and brethren, and dear sisters,
I would have you understand

“That I love the Holy Scriptures,
And believe them every whit,
And concerning hell and judgment
I accept just what is writ.

“You would think our error graver
Than the gravest heresy -
Yet we just believe John's gospel -
Verse sixteen of chapter three.

“In that sixteenth verse, third chapter
Of the gospel of Saint John,
Is the purest, plainest statement
Of the truth we stand upon.

“Is it heresy, my brethren
To believe John 3:16?
Or false doctrine to be certain
That it says just what it means?”

Then the room began to rumble
With the mumblings of the crowd -
All were musing on the reference,
Or were quoting it aloud.

Dr. Brimstone cried, “Objection!
What an effort to be slick,
And avoid your actual meaning
By a childish little trick!”

“For the verse you've called in question -
Yes, John three, and verse sixteen -
Cannot mean what *you* are meaning,
That is, what you *really* mean.”

“It is childish, yes, O Doctor,
For we learned it as a child -
And I only seek to show you
That my view is not so wild.

And my meaning *is* of meaning -
Of just what plain words do mean,
And I think they're crystal clear, Sir,
In John three, and verse sixteen!

"I uphold the Bible's teaching
Of a dreadful end called Hell,
But the texts we use to prove it
Do not endless torment spell.

"I affirm the resurrection
And the judgment of the dead,
And maintain what I've been teaching
From the *words* that I have read.

"Words like *perish* and *destruction*,
And *devour* and *consume*;
Words like *death* and *end* and *burn up*,
That describe the sinner's doom.

"And I've emphasized the *perish* -
Yes, sir, PERISH I have *read*,
So I've said it is just simply
What the Bible clearly said.

"And God says the wicked PERISH,
So I've said, "They surely do,
And God means it as He's meant it
As He's used it through and through.

"Would we charge the Scripture's Author
With such clumsiness of words?
The Creator of all language
With incompetence? Absurd!"

And then Malways Wright, Professor,
After proffring his own view,
Said, "Expound John 3:16, and
Search the context through and through."

Sister Smoke could tell that Malways
Thought himself to be so smart,
But she knew he had it coming,
When our Brother made his start:

"I believe it as I read it,
And no other sense I seek,
For its words are self-defining
In the English and the Greek.

"*Shall not* PERISH is in contrast
To eternal, endless LIFE.
And consistent with the context
Are these words of Jesus Christ.

"For Christ tells us just like Moses
(Numbers, chapter twenty-one);
Lifted up the brazen serpent
Even so must be the Son.

"And the serpent is a type of
Sin and death, and death by sin,
And Christ said to Nicodemus
That he must be born again.

"For our first birth is in Adam,
And brings death, an end of life;
But a new birth of the spirit
Gives us endless life in Christ!

"Christ was lifted up at Calvary,
And He died the sinner's death;
He who knew no sin was made sin,
That is what the Scriptures saith.

"Therefore like the brazen serpent,
Christ, who died and rose again,
Has been lifted up to look to,
And give life to dying men.

"So by faith we look to Jesus -
'Look and *live*, O sinner, *live*!' -
And our risen Lord and Saviour
Has eternal life to give.

"Is this not a clear expounding
Of just what these words must mean?
Endless torment's but confounding
To John three, and verse sixteen.

"For all those with but a first birth
Have not everlasting life,
And they shall most surely PERISH
Who do not believe in Christ.

"*Perish* is the word in focus
In John three, and verse sixteen;
Apollumi in the Greek text,
And we know just what it means.

"God has used this word so often
In His Holy Book divine,
That its meaning is quite easy
By its usage to define.

"It means *perish* in the English,
And the Greek original,
It means *perish* in the context,
Both in part and in the whole!

"Ask your children, yes, your children,
'What does *perish* mean to you?'
And if left to answer simply
They will give its meaning true.

"Ask your pastor the same question,
And he'll tell you that you need
A good lexicon to help you
Line up *perish* with the creed.

"He'll deny consistent usage
As defining of the word,
And then cite presumed exceptions
As the meaning most preferred.

"Is it heresy, Professor
To believe John 3:16?
Or false doctrine to be certain
That it says just what it means?"

Then the doctor interrupted,
For he saw that some were stirred,
And he feared the less committed
Might be swayed by what they heard.

"That's enough!" he stomped and sputtered,
"We have heard his heresy -
His own tongue has tried and found him
Just as guilty as can be!"

And the jury in agreement,
Said a long and loud "Amen!"
Larry Barry yelled, "This jailbird
Must not ever chirp again!"

"This will doom our foreign missions,
And no one will even go;
And why even be a Christian
If there be no endless woe?"

Then a mob in senseless frenzy
Rushed the threesome up a knoll,
And though Sister Smoke implored them,
It was out of her control.

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge,
How that knoll began to quake -
Brother Bird and Ernest Ladd were
To be burned there on a stake.

For they did not flinch or falter,
And they would not budge or bend,
And they did not whiffle-waffle
To avoid a dreadful end.

Willie Waver said, however,
Right before he up and ran,
“I have always, and will ever
Be an endless torment man!”

Ernest Ladd did testify to
Everyone who stood nearby;
“Life in Christ, and death in Adam
Is the truth for which we die.

“And we love our precious Saviour,
Our dear Lord who gave us life -
And we long to share the gospel
Of eternal life in Christ.

“Read your Bibles! Search the Scriptures!
And you'll find our 'heresy'
Is but only the clear wording
God has used consistently.”

“Malachi and John the Baptist,
Jude and Peter and the law;
Psalms and Proverbs and the Prophets,
Jesus Christ and Brother Paul;

“These have spoken by the Spirit;
These have told us everyone,
That the unbelieving *perish*
In the fire of wrath to come.”

Benton Cherry then beseeched him,
“Dear young brother, please desist;
Your immortal soul's endangered
If in error you persist.”

“Is it error, Elder Cherry
To believe John 3:16?
Or a danger to be certain
That it says just what it means?”

Then the doctor struck a match on
A big rock he leaned upon;
Then the two began repeating
That dear precious verse in John.

“God so loved the world,” they quoted,
Then some folks began to cry,
“Oh, we dare not really burn them,
And we cannot watch them die.”

But it was too late for pity,
For the Doctor lit the pyre,
And the flames crept ever upward,
And the smoke began to spire.

Brother Bird was bravely quoting,
When a voice did interrupt-
Was the voice of Willie Waver:
“Brother Bird, Wake up! Wake up!”

Then the flames were disappearing,
As his head began to rise,
And the smoke was quickly clearing
When he opened up his eyes.

And he stared for just a moment
At the tree stump at his side,
And he looked at Willie Waver,
With his eyes now open wide.

“I've been *dreaming? Only dreaming?*
Oh, dear Willie, what a dream!
It was really such a nightmare,
And how real it all did seem.

“You would not believe it, Willie -
Off to jail, and then to trial,
And the jury - what an outfit! -
Brother Bird began to smile.

Then they heard some coonhounds barking,
And they saw some lanterns bright -
Just some locals on a coonhunt,
And no cause for any fright.

Brother Bird enjoys his freedom
To discuss God's Word on hell,
And he's thankful he can do so
And not have to go to jail.

Yet he knows that many brethren
Are not free to search it out -
By their creed and in their circle,
They are not allowed to doubt.

For they fear their peer group's censor,
Or the label of a “cult,”
And a feeble acquiescence
Is the pitiful result.

Is it heresy, dear reader
To believe John 3:16,
Or false doctrine to be certain
That it says just what it means?

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Someone's sure it cannot be,
But perhaps he's only dreaming
To be hoping you'll agree.

**THE NEW BOX, THE OLD BOOK,
AND ONE MORE BEREAN**

Bird the Fourth

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Our peculiar Brother Bird
Had grown weary from his effort
Just to get his message heard.

For he'd wrote about the wresters,
And the creedalists for hire,
And had made a list on *perish*,
And designed a chart on *fire*.

And had proven that our Master
Did not say the more on hell,
And that "holy wrath" was made up
And unscriptural as well.

And had labored o'er the rich man
The real meaning to discern,
And had studied smoke and ashes
Just to see what he could learn.

And had lengthy conversations
With the gentle and the gruff,
And had tried to answer questions
From the easy to the tough.

And was quick to quarrel and query
With the few who pitched a fit,
And debated Benton Cherry
Until Bent just up and quit.

And though Sister Smoke conceded,
And became an ally true,
And though Ernest was a champion
Of the anti-endless view,

Still it seemed that few had int'rest
In the subject anymore,
And to even read a poem
Was for some an irksome chore.

Quite a few, like Willie Waver,
Said they just could not be sure,
And in apathy and ignorance
Were lethargic'ly secure.

Thus our Brother greatly wondered
Of this lack of thoughtful search,
And he couldn't help but long for
More Bereans in the church.

(The Bereans were "more noble,"
In the book of Acts, you know,
For they searched the Scriptures daily
Just to see if things were so.)

So he up and went to visit
Okie Dokey in his home,
And though Okie was quite cordial,
Still he left the TV on.

Okie was a friendly brother -
Never meant or did no harm;
Had a way with dogs and children
On his modest little farm.

First they talked about the weather,
Of the recent ice and snow;
Then they couldn't help but comment
On the funny TV show.

Then our Brother said to Okie,
"What I've come to talk about
Is why many Christians never
Ever search a subject out."

And then Okie said, "It's shameful
How when Pastor reads the Book,
That so few who brought their Bibles
Even turn to take a look.

"But not me," said Okie Dokey,
Ev'ry Sunday I expect,
I have always read the verses
Of the pastor's sermon text."

Then the flicker from the center
Captivated once again,
And the two friends watched the TV
'Til the news came to an end.

And then Brother Bird continued,
And he would have said much more
Had not Okie changed the channel
To check out the latest score.

And just then this one commercial
Took the brethren by surprise
For a couple awkward seconds
'Til they turned away their eyes.

Thus for just about an hour
Brother Bird and Okie met,
With their visit dominated
By that crazy TV set.

And our brother was discouraged
As the snow turned into sleet,
When a sudden thought inspired him
To take victory from defeat.

So when Okie went to find some
Cherry cough drops for his cough,
Just like *that* the lights and TV
And electric heat went off.

"Must be ice," said Okie Dokie,
"Downin' limbs upon the lines -
So let's get a fire a-blazin' -
And'll be just like old times."

Well, that fire sure did some kindlin'
In the mind of Brother Bird,
And his mem'ry went a-driftin'
As his heart was greatly stirred.

And he reminisced of childhood,
Of a box inside the den -
How it captured the attention
Of the people way back when.

Thus inspired by his nostalgia
From the point the fire was lit,
And with joy of grand discovery,
Brother Bird exclaimed, "That's it!"

"Yes, a *box* could be the secret
Of a captivated mind,
And a *box* could be the answer
I was hoping I could find."

And the fire in that old wood stove
Glowed a mellow yellow red
That reflected on the dark screen
Of the TV set now dead.

And he thought of how the TV
Interfered that very night,
And divided their attention
In its hypnotizing light.

And he looked right at that TV -
Like a looking glass it seemed -
And as though he saw a picture,
He then spoke as if he dreamed:

"All the family sat around it
Once the sun had settled down,
And it warmed them while they watched it
As they gathered all around.

“With a blue glow in its belly
It would shine its light about,
Which would flicker even brighter
When the lamps were all put out.

“Oh, the memories made around it -
How it filled the room with light,
And they could not live without it
On a boring winter's night.

“Yes, that box gave such a pleasure
With its flicker and its glow,
And that box was such a treasure
In the days of long ago.

“Oh, the stories in its presence,
And the laughter in its view,
And the many an adventure,
And a tear a time or two.

“Dad would be the first to start it
Not to miss his favorite show,
And he'd be the last to watch it
Just to keep it all a-glow.

“And the mother loved it dearly,
And it kept the children in,
And the family all together
As a true and trusted friend.

“And was on most ev'ry morning -
What a way to start the day -
There to fill you with its vision,
And to warm you on your way.

“And the news was heard each evening
And the scores of ev'ry game,
And sometimes the kinfolk joined 'em,
And sometimes the neighbors came.

“And sometimes they'd pop some popcorn,
And sometimes they'd pop some more,
And just sit and look at pictures
By that box upon the floor.

“And a way up on the rooftop
Was a thing to let you know
That by looking in the window
You could see its glory glow.

“But that box has been forsaken -
Oh, I wonder where it's gone;
There's a new box in the house now,
There's a new one in the home.”

And then Okie said, “Now brother,
I had thought I got your gist,
But now speakin' of a new box
Makes me wonder what I missed.”

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
On that white and wintry day
Brother Bird knelt by the firelight,
And to Okie he did say:

“Yes, that old box is discarded
As a relic from the past,
And you've asked me of the new box,
So, I'll tell you, since you asked.

“All the family sits around it
From the dawn 'til set of sun,
But it chills them while they watch it,
And it numbs them every one.

“With a blue glow in its belly
It still shines a light about,
With a flicker most bewitchin'
When the lights are all turned out.

“But the memories made around it
Are the kind that fill the sight
With a thousand scenes of evil
In the middle of the night.

“Now this box will render pleasure
With its flicker and its glow,
But this box is not the treasure
Of that box of long ago.

“Many stories in its presence,
Lots of laughter in its view,
While it's undermining values
Of the good and of the true.

“And in many an adventure,
Many kill and many die,
And while watchin' folks pretendin'
Men and women sit and cry.

“And they lose their sense in sensing
What is real and what is right,
And get used to all the darkness
In the absence of the light.

“Dad should be the first to stop it,
And be wise enough to know
That it's dang-er-ous to watch it
When it really ought to go.

“And the mother should see clearly
What its doing in the end -
That it's harming all her children
And is *not* the family's friend!

“When it's on most ev'ry morning
At the start of ev'ry day,
It will fill you with a vision
That won't help you on your way.

“And to hear *its* news each evening,
And the scores of ev'ry game
Will just cripple any Christian
'Til his walk with God is lame.

“And that dish upon the rooftop
Might link up the satellite,
But the blue glow in the new box
Will black out your gospel sight.

“And the pictures you are filing
In the cabinet of your mind
Will just cater to the carnal
And will make the spirit blind.

“But that old box was a dandy -
Was a wonderful delight -
For that old box was a *woodstove*
With its fire a-burning bright.

“Was a blessin' to the family -
Brought 'em all around the heat,
As they'd read or sew or whittle
With the fellowshipin' sweet.

“But this new one's a disaster,
And companionship it drains,
And it teaches what it shouldn't
While it crudely entertains.

“And it keeps us from our Bible,
Squanders time and pilfers home,
For this new box is a *TV*,
And it's almost always on.

“We could truly live without it -
Truly *live* is what I say,
For it's not a life we're livin'
Watchin' *that* thing ev'ry day!

“We could get to know each other,
Have more time to sit and talk;
Be a blessing to a brother,
Read a book or take a walk.

“In the room we call the 'living'
We could have some heat and light
If we'd bring back that old woodstove
With its fire a-burning bright.

“Swap that new box and its pleasure,
With its flicker and its glow,
For that old box and the treasure
Of a *life* of long ago.”

And so Brother Bird completed
His oration on the box
As a somber Okie Dokey
Fiddled with his thermal socks.

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Our peculiar Brother Bird
Is sure that entertainment
Hinders searching of the Word.

“Entertainment is the culprit,
And amusement is the cause
Why so many Christians seldom
Take a meditative pause.

“Yes, it's true that most are fearful
Of the label 'heresy,'
But it seems that entertainment
Is the root of apathy.

“Internet and big-screen movies,
Videos and DVD's,
Radio and sporting contests,
And of course the Dish TV.

“Why, if evolution's truthful,”
Brother Bird said, and I quote:
“We would all be one big eyeball,
With one finger for remote.”

Okie Dokey curled one finger,
As his eyes expanded wide,
Glancing at his handy remote
And disheveled TV Guide.

Then he eyed his idle Bible,
Where some sneaky little runt
Had wrote “Read Me” with his finger
On the dusty Bible front.

And he wondered who had done it,
For it cut him to the quick,
But that two-word admonition
Was a sermon that would stick.

Then he stirred the amber embers,
And put on another log,
While our brother was still musing
As he patted Okie's dog:

“The word *muse*, it means *to think*, see -
A means *no*, and as a link,
You can see what it's suggestin -
Yes, *amuse* just means *no think!*”

“Thus amused by entertainment,
And entranced with silly show,
We *no think* about the sober,
But embrace the status quo.

“And the precious Holy Scriptures
Should receive its due respect,
But the dust upon our Bibles
Testifies to our neglect.

“Have we less days in our years now?
Or less hours in our days?
Do we labor even longer
In our fast, indulgent ways?

“No, there's time for Bible study,
And there's time to read the Word
If above our entertainment
It was something we preferred.

“If we spent just half an hour,
Just the time of one short show,
We could read all of Colossians,
And could read it good and slow.

And Philemon we could handle
In the time that it would take
To see sev'ral advertisements
In a short commercial break.

“Just ten minutes ev'ry morning
In the Scripture cheers and calms -
In a month we thus could finish
All one hundred-fifty Psalms.

“And the time to watch a movie
Of a moderate duration,
Could be used to read and study
Half the book of Revelation.

“In a year, if we are willing,
This is what we each could do -
In but fifteen minutes daily
We could read the Bible through.

“Keep a Bible in our bedroom
And a Testament close by;
And another in our pocket
So it oft will catch our eye.”

And then looking out the window
At a water drop so clear,
Dripping from the frosty rooftop,
Musing on the Word so dear:

“It is water, pure clear water,
And it washes from within;
And it cleanses, yes, it cleanses
All the heart and mind of sin.

“It's a hammer, such a hammer,
And it comes down with a quake,
And however hard the rock is,
Into pieces it will break.

“It's a sword, and even sharper
Than the finest, sharpest sword,
And it pierces soul and spirit
By the spirit of the Lord.

“It's my Bible, Holy Bible,
Perfect law of liberty;
It's the book above all others,
And it is the Book for me!

It's a lamp that burns so brightly
For the pathway of my feet,
And it's sweeter than the honey,
And the honeycomb so sweet.

“It's the sincere milk of newborns,
It is meat for those with age;
It is bread for all believers,
Full of life on ev'ry page.

“It's a mirror, God's clear mirror
That reflects the image true,
Guides the pilgrim on his journey -
Tells the puzzled what to do.

“It's my Bible, perfect Bible,
Just as pure as it can be-
Filled with timely truths eternal,
And it is the Book for me!

“It is called the Holy Scriptures,
It is called the Word of God,
And its words paint such a picture
Of the paths the saints have trod.

“It is filled with laws and lessons
And with poetry and psalms,
And it's proved itself a blessing,
With its words of healing balm.

“And its stories of adventure,
And of triumph of the right,
And of romance of redemption
Bring the love of God to light.

“It's my Bible, wondrous Bible,
It's the truth that makes me free -
It's the library of the ages,
And it is the Book for me!

“Oh, its author is the Father,
And its subject is the Son,
And 'twas written thru the Spirit,
And the Three agree in One.

“Brings salvation to the sinner
As it quickens from the dead;
Doesn't need to be rewritten -
Only needs to be reread.

“So I'll read it, yes, I'll read it -
Oh, such pleasure there I'll find!
And I'll hide it, memorize it -
What a treasure that is mine!

“It's my Bible, precious Bible,
Helps me live, dear Lord, for Thee,
And I love it, yes, I love it,
Oh, it is the Book for me!”

And then Okie clutched his Bible,
As he made a gritty face -
“I am *really* gonna read it -
May the good Lord give me grace!”

Then the two friends read together,
And did muse and meditate,
And got out a Strong's Concordance,
And the fellowship was great.

And they studied 'bout the judgment,
And of *hell*, and *death*, and *life*,
And of *perish*, and *destruction*,
And *eternal life in Christ*.

And they searched the text and context
All around and in-between,
And of course they did some musing
On John three, and verse sixteen.

By the firelight of the wood stove
They delighted in the Word,
And ol' Okie the Berean
Sure delighted Brother Bird.

Then they heard somebody knockin'
On the icy window pane-
Ernest Ladd had come a-callin'
Through the snow and freezin' rain.

And he came in with a “howdy,”
And then asked the two of them
Why the neighbors all had power,
Yet the Dokey house was dim.

And then Okie said, “Oh, really?
Well, I'd say that's strange indeed,
But it's truly been a blessin',
And has helped me see my need.”

Then he told him of the boxes,
And then said to Brother Bird,
“Let's show Ernest what we're findin'
In our searchin' of the Word.”

So the three continued reading
In the Scriptures for a while,
And the taste of buttered popcorn
Brought a satisfying smile.

And the firelight from their wood stove
Was reflecting in their eyes,
When the time came for departing,
And for saying their “goodbyes.”

So then Okie Dokey thanked 'em
And he said, “I feel most blessed,”
Which made Brother Bird uneasy,
And he more or less confessed.

For he reached down in his pocket,
And took out a fuse or two,
And revealed a dusty finger
As he bid his friends adieu.

And as Okie took the fuses,
He responded with a grin,
And he still could see the “Read Me”
On his Bible in the den.

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Our conniving Brother Bird
Is still huntin' more Bereans
Who will read and search the Word,

And find joy in Bible study
And the wonders it unlocks,
And choose truth above their pleasure
And the Book above the box.

Micro Chip and Mocking Bird

Peculiar Brother Bird #5

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Our peculiar Brother Bird
Met his match on being thorough
In a young computer nerd,

Who was quite a whipper-snapper
Just as smart as, well, a whip,
And his name was Chip McMaster
But his friends all called him *Chip*.

Micro Chip as some had dubbed him,
Big of brain, but small of size -
He could e-mail, surf, and download
Without o-pen-ing his eyes.

Was a high-tech, hard-drive whiz kid
And so clever, yes he was-
That he built his own Computer
That he named the Wiz of Oz.

Didn't have to go to college,
For the college came to *him*,
To upgrade their old computers
And to train and tutor *them*.

Farren Brimstone was quite certain
Micro Chip and Wiz of Oz
Would enchant the local young folks
And convince their Ma's and Pa's.

And so Dr. Brimstone hired 'im
To bring falsehood to an end,
And design a fail-safe program
Endless torment to defend.

And so Chip took up the challenge,
With his genius juices stirred,
And created all new software
That he called the *Mocking Bird*.

With his quick-draw browser finger
On his high-speed DSL,
He downloaded tons of info
Off the web concerning hell.

Ev'ry council and confession,
Quenchless fire and deathless worms,
Etymologies of key words,
And a glossary of terms.

And inserted works related,
Dante, Milton, and their lore,
Bavink, Munsey, Pink and Spurgeon,
Walvoord, Bartlett, and much more.

Peterson and Harry Buis,
Edwards, Gerstner, G.T. Shedd,
John R. Rice and J.N. Humphrey,
Both the living and the dead.

Put in per-ti-nent ideas,
Greek and Hebrew language rules;
Vines & Wuest & Strong's Concordance,
And more cool and brainy tools.

Poems and tracts and polls and surveys,
Art and myth and movie clips,
Documents and songs and clichés,
Cartoons, jokes, and comic strips.

Chronologic'lly he built-in
Ev'ry creed of Christian truth,
And a detailed sermon index
Analyzing all the proof.

Alphabetic'lly he listed
Ev'ry worthwhile art-i-cle,
And more relevant quotations
'Til it was completely full.

Then he organized it neatly,
Each and ev'ry font and file,
In a handy-dandy format
And a user-friendly style.

And he tied it all together
With internal master links,
And examined it intently
Just to work out any kinks.

Then there came the time to test it,
Check its ease of function, too;
Ask it any kind of question -
See what *Mocking Bird* could do.

Micro Chip and Farren Brimstone
Fed it info from the cults,
And the Doctor was delighted
With the pow-er-ful results.

And invited Benton Cherry,
Willie Waver, Ernest Ladd,
Sister Smoke and Okie Dokie
To come see just what they had.

So they quizzed it and they queried,
And they zipped from link to link,
And it was so interactive
That they couldn't help but think.

Benton Cherry was elated
With this high-tech priest of proof,
And was sure that what it stated
Was the everlasting truth.

Okie Dokie thought it nifty -
A Berean treasure chest! -
And was sure it would be useful
In a Bible study quest.

Sister Smoke was soon enamored
With the throng of able minds,
And rethought the subject matter
Down more systematic lines.

Willie Waver loved the graphics,
And the clever pop-ups, too,
And was certain that it maybe
Absolutely might be true.

Ernest Ladd was duly cautious,
And though bias made him doubt,
He was willing to continue
Searching all the data out.

Mocking Bird was quite impressive
With its output and its speed,
And its answers were persuasive,
As most everyone agreed.

And of any other effort
It was certainly the best,
And was ready for the challenge
Of its full and final test.

And so Dr. Brimstone scheduled
A debate with Brother Bird,
But of Micro Chip's creation
He had told him not a word.

Handbills posted through the foothills
Advertised the coming duel,
And invited all the Blue Ridge
To the Element'ry School.

And anticipation swelled up
Like a bullfrog 'bout to bust,
'Til the dirt lot by the old gym
Was just one big cloud of dust.

And the crowd filled up the bleachers
As the doctor took the stage,
And our brother sat behind him,
Like a bird inside a cage.

While the doctor gave his "Welcome,"
And his "Introduct'ry Word,"
Micro Chip snuck in the back way
With the cryptic *Mocking Bird*.

And he stayed behind the curtain,
Our of everybody's sight,
And installed a power-booster,
And was raring for the fight.

Larry Barry, Big B Baptist,
Had agreed to act as though
He was their side's chosen spokesman,
And was really "in the know."

And the Doctor orchestrated
Ev'ry detail from the start
As the MC-Moderator
To co-or-dinate each part.

And he had a sand-filled timer
And he'd turn it upside-down,
And when all the grains had emptied
He would start another round.

Micro Chip would slip the answers
To the waiting Larry B,
Who would read them off so smoothly
Like a great authority.

And the *Mocking Bird* was brilliant,
Reeling off the facts so fast,
And providing quick quotations
From the heroes of the past.

Everlasting was the key word
Larry Barry harped upon,
Everlasting and *eternal*,
And *forever*, on and on.

"And the creeds and great confessions
Larry said, "Do all confirm
That the soul is as immortal
As the never-dying worm.

"And the story of the Rich man
And of Lazarus, as well,
Clearly speak of endless torment
In an everlasting hell.

"If the *life* is 'everlasting'
Then the *punishment* is too,
For the same word modifies it,
And thus proves it to be true.

"So the torment's *everlasting* -
Without end without a doubt -
Everlasting as *forever*
Isn't hard to figure out!

"And the torment is 'forever' -
'Day and night,' to say the least -
Of the Devil (that is, Satan),
The false prophet and the beast.

"And just *where* does all this take place?
Well... *where is it?* I inquire -
It's the *same* place where the lost go -
In that dreadful 'lake of fire.'

"And the smoke ascends *forever*
From the torment mentioned in
Revelation, chapter fourteen,
Where it's obvious again.

"And the fire is everlasting -
Everlasting fire its name -
And *unquenchable, eternal*,
Say identically the same.

"And as Gerstner oft has stated,
Sins against the Infinite,
Or an infinite transgressing,
Demands endless punishment.

"And philosophy and reason,
And just jurisprudence side
With the Biblical expressions
Of a wrath that will abide.

"So the torment's *everlasting* -
Without end without a doubt -
Everlasting as *forever*
Isn't hard to figure out!"

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
With the help of *Mocking Bird*,
A whole gym of all the hill folk,
Were impressed with what they heard.

"I agree," our Brother answered,
That the PUNISHMENT, indeed,
Is *eternal, everlasting* -
That's exactly what I read.

"*Everlasting* modifies *it*,
But the point I hope you get -
Is just what is *it* describing;
Of just what is meant by *it*.

"*It's* the *noun* that we're debating,
Not the *adjective*, you see,
It's a *noun*, and not a *verb*, Sir
Upon which we disagree.

"*It* is punish-*ment* eternal,
Not eternal punish-*ing* -
It's *destruction* everlasting,
Not an endless suffering.

"*It* is final, full *consumption*;
It is called the 'second *death*,'
It is what is meant by *perish*;
It is what the Scriptures saith.

"We agree on *everlasting*,
But an everlasting *what*?
Is the punishment *destruction*,
Is *it* that, or is *it* not?"

"You assume that *it* is torment -
But you should not so assume,
For the Scriptures say DESTRUCTION
Is the sinner's final doom.

"For a similar expressing
You may readily consult,
How 'redemption' is 'eternal,'
Not the *process*, but *result*.

"For Christ 'once for all' obtained it
ONCE for all, and in the past,
And that *it* is past-tense purchased,
Yet that *it* will ever last!

"Thessalonians confirms it,
Just the way it's worded there -
'*Punished with*, yes, EVERLASTING...'-
But now notice this with care:

"*Everlasting* modifies it-
Punished with *what* punishment?-
Yes, *destruction* everlasting;
Thus DESTRUCTION is the *it*!

"And it's not the word 'destroying,'
For it's 'punished,' as in past;
The *destruction* thus resulting
Is the *it* that e'er will last!

“And the fire is everlasting -
Yes, the *fire*, without a doubt -
But the *chaff* is said to burn up
In the fire that won't burn out.

“Yes, God's fire is everlasting,
And it shouldn't be thought odd
That the fire of God's *eternal*,
For it is the fire of *God!*”

“It does not need to be started -
And you couldn't if it would -
But it falls already blazing,
Without earthly fuel or wood,

“And God's fire is called *eternal*,
Not the cities which it burned,
As in Sodom and Gomorrah,
For to ASHES they were turned.

“It's the *fire* that's everlasting,
Not the *stubble* or the *chaff* -
It's the *fire* that is eternal,
Not the objects in its path.”

Then a flustered Farren Brimstone
Was a little more than gruff,
When the sand-filled timer emptied,
And the Doctor growled, “Enough!”

And while Brother Bird was talking
Micro Chip was on the sly
Tweaking *Mocking Bird* to come back
With a dynamite reply.

And ol' Larry was imposing
As he read the slipped-in notes,
And he sounded real convincing
In repeating others' quotes.

But he got a mite-bit haughty
And a little debonair,
When he gestured with such gusto,
That he tumbled in his chair.

And he landed on the curtain,
And the curtain slightly stirred,
And revealed the monkey-business
In the sight of Brother Bird.

But the monkeys were uncertain
If the bird had seen or not,
So they awkwardly proceeded
With their sneaky little plot.

And they focused on the wording
Of the legendary creeds
As the fruit of Bible doctrine
And the root of noble deeds.

“These were hammered by the faithful,”
Larry Barry said with pride,
“On the anvil of conviction
Of the martyrs who have died.

“Godly pastors; gifted teachers;
Theologians of renown -
Have the truth of endless torment
To their children handed down.

“Are we smarter than our fathers,
The reformers, wise and good?
Do we know more than our elders?
Do we really think we could?”

And then Brother Bird retorted,
“These dear 'fathers' weren't the norm,
For they challenged creeds in their day,
And were agents of reform.

“Would they say that they had figured
Ev'ry single doctrine out -
When with teachings of their own time
They had entertained some doubt?”

“And we're not in full agreement
With their words upon our shelves,
and these 'fathers,' bless their memory,
Disagreed among themselves!”

Then it heated up intensely,
Back and forth and toe to toe,
And the Birdies and the monkeys
Really put on quite a show!

Larry: “It's no PUNISHMENT to *perish*-
That's just what the sinners want!”
Bird: “Ask the inmates out on death row
And they'll tell you that they don't!”

Larry: “But a final, swift destruction
Cannot be the word's intent.”
Bird: “The *destruction* of Gomorrah
Scriptures calls a *punishment!*”

Larry: “But *annihilation* isn't
Anything of which to fear!”
Bird: “If we thought a bomb were present,
We'd be getting' outta here!”

Larry: “Will our children follow Jesus
If Hell's torments have an end?”
Bird: “Do you think they're truly Christians
If they wouldn't then, my friend?”

Larry: “*From the presence* means *away* from-
It's *away*- so face the facts!
Bird: “*From the presence* means *He's present*-
In the context and in Acts!” (3:19)

Larry: “But the WORM - it *never dieth* -
Not a worm down in a hole!”
Bird: “It is *carcasses* the worms eat -
And the worm is not the soul!” (Is. 66:24)

Larry: “What of *weeping* and of *wailing*?
And it says, 'where there shall be' -
Bird: “It says '*there shall be,*' my brother,
And yet not eternally!”

Larry: “*Pain* is what the fire pictures -
Pain is what the flames will bring.”
Bird: “But the objects in the picture
Illustrate a different thing!”

Larry: “In the book of Revelation
It is *un-mis-tak-a-ble!*”
Bird: “It's the last and not the first book,
And most *al-le-gor-i-cal!*”

Micro Chip was working gamely
Just to keep up with the flow,
But at times he needed Larry
Just to go a little slow.

Then our brother had an idea,
Since computers cannot lie,
He would ask of certain details
That it wouldn't dare deny.

“It's repeated by so many
That our Lord said more of hell
Than he ever did of heaven -
Is it true, or can you tell?”

Micro Chip zoomed through the program
And slipped Larry this on cue:
“Forty-seven different writers
All confirm that it is true.”

But then Brother Bird responded,
“I'm not asking the amount
Of the parrots who have said it -
But a real objective count

“And with judgment as their message,
And repentance as their goal,
Did the prophets ever speak of
Endless torment of the soul?”

“And with Paul and the apostles
When they preached the gospel plain,
Did they mention hell or torments,
Or a place of endless pain?”

“In John's gospel is there any
Word of endless hell to fear?
It's the one book in our Bibles
There to make the good news clear.”

And the prophets and apostles
Do...not warn...of endless hell,
And then Paul...and in John's gospel
There's...no word...of it, as well.”

“And pray tell me,” begged our brother,
“And please open up my eyes
If the unbelieving sinner
Ever really truly DIES?”

And then Micro Chip was stymied
By the contradict'ry words
From the hundreds of quotations
In the files of *Mocking Bird*.

For McCheyne (yes, Robert Murray),
Said, “Eternal hell's the death
That the sinners are to die, and
Yet they *never die*,” he saith.

And the words of Jeremy Taylor:
“They shall burn eternally”-
But now listen to his statement:
“*Without dying*,” so saith he.

“You will *live*,” yes, “*live forever*,
But just *where*?” asks Ricky Jones;
John L. Barry is just as certain
That “in Hell men will *live on!*”

William Dowell said “souls and bodies...
Souls and bodies that CANNOT...
Cannot perish, but will suffer...
Suffer in a hell so hot.”

“For the wicked *live forever*,”
One J. Angus is so sure,
And “*alive* all o'er” quotes Wesley,
And feel pain “at ev'ry pore.”

Micro Chip then saw the wording
Of the Scriptures disagreed
With these LIFE and DEATH descriptions
In the sermons and the creeds.

And our brother sensed the tension
When he dealt the fatal blow:
“I have only one more question-
Just one more before we go.”

“If God says, 'The wicked *perish*:
Then I say they surely do,
And He means it as He's meant it
As He's used it through and through!”

“And I've emphasized the *perish*:
For it's PERISH I have read!
And I've said it is just simply
What the Bible clearly said.”

“Can you give me one example
Of a use of *perish* when
Scripture means it as a process
That will never have an end?”

Then he took the sand-filled timer
And he turned it upside-down,
And he said, “Let's all be patient
Until one such use is found.”

And the seconds trudged to minutes,
And the minutes slowly passed,
As the grains of sand fell downward
From the first until the last.

Speedy Micro Chip was flying
On the keyboard and the mouse,
While a nervous Dr. Brimstone
Tried to occupy the house.

Then an “error” message came up
Right before the screen went dark
And the hard drive went *ka-plooeey*,
And shot out a blinding spark.

And the spark ignited wiring,
And a fire began to rage,
And the Doctor, Chip, and Larry
Promptly exited the stage.

But our brother, now in danger,
Grabbed a fire ex-tinguish-er,
But he couldn't quench the burning
Of the red-hot *Mocking Bird*.

But the rest he safely put out,
While the *Mocking Bird* burned on,
And its smoke rose up for...*ever*,
Though it burned up and was gone.

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge,
This peculiar *Mocking Bird*
Found DESTRUCTION EVERLASTING
As the *punishment* incurred.

Benton Cherry was deflated;
Ernest Ladd was not surprised;
Farren Brimstone, aggravated;
Willie Waver hypnotized.

Larry Barry was defensive;
Okie Dokie was amazed;
Sister Smoke was apprehensive;
But so many were unfazed.

But young Micro Chip upgraded,
Through this endless torment strife,
To a high-tech, hard-drive whiz kid
Holding forth the Word of *Life!*

And he built a new computer,
And a clever CD-Rom,
And he's helping on the website
Of our brotherbird.com.

Brother Bird and the Man from Hell

Peculiar Brother Bird #6

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Our peculiar Brother Bird
Took some time to do some writing
Which is what he most preferred.

Willie Waver was now married,
Farren Brimstone done and gone,
And the Big Feud just a mem'ry
When the "rich man" came along.

Well, the rich man was a poor man,
Or at least he so appeared,
Clothed in rags all singed and blackened
With a long white ashen beard.

And he smelled of burning sulfur,
And he reeked of soot and smoke,
With his face and arms all blistered,
Wildly coughing when he spoke.

And he said he was the rich man
Who was sent back from the dead,
Just to warn of endless torment-
Well, at least that's what he said.

And he stood out in the graveyard,
Shrieking madly with each breath,
"You will burn in Hell forever!"
Scaring some folks half to death.

But most people thought 'im crazy,
While some others thought 'im true,
And a few were pretty shook up,
And not sure just what to do.

That's when Sheriff Roscoe Ramey
Hauled the rich man off to jail,
And he asked him where he came from,
And he said, "I came from *Hell!*"

And he asked him what his name was,
And he said, "My name is Dives,"
And said, "Abraham's my father,
And of brothers I have five."

And whatever Roscoe asked 'im,
He would answer just that way,
And keep crying, "Hell's eternal!"
And that's all he'd ever say.

Then the Sheriff asked our brother
If he'd come down to the jail,
And attempt a conversation
With the man who came from Hell.

And it seemed that Dives was eager
With our brother to converse,
Almost like he had to do it
To remove some awful curse.

And by then he was much calmer
As he said with certainty,
"I must tell you that my story
Is most lit-er-al, you see!"

"But it's not," our brother told 'im,
Sort o' playing right along,
"And to prove you are the rich man
You must prove that I am wrong."

"Oh, most gladly," said the rich man,
"I can prove just what I claim,
For a par-a-ble can never
Ever use a proper name."

Bird: "Ah, the law of proper names, eh?
And just when was that law writ?
And by who was it enacted?
And just who enforces it?"

Dives: "In the Scofield Reference Bible
It is manifestly claimed,
In no par-a-ble, his note says
Is an individual named."

Bird: "Yet another chapter, Scofield,
Heads surprisingly enough
As *The Par'ble of A-ho-lah*
And (the name) *A-ho-li-bah*."

"And it's not coincidental
In each 'Gospel Harmony'
Luke sixteen and John eleven
Are in close proximity.

"For a name Christ used was Laz'rus,
And he planned just what He said,
For His list'ners knew 'twas Laz'rus
Who had risen from the dead.

"For a *certain* man named Laz'rus'
from a poorer family,
Had been sick and on his deathbed
In the town of Bethany.

"And though Laz'rus had arisen,
And had come back from the dead,
Those same fellers weren't a-listenin',
Just as Abraham had said.

"But this story of the rich man
Never says that hell's for aye,
And it's not the final Judgment
And it's not the final Day.

"Otis Sellers has a notion
He delineates with zest,
That the story Jesus crafted
Is pure satire at its best.

"It's a literary method
That our Lord has used before,
And it's not far-fetched to figure
That He used it here once more.

"Whether parable or satire,
Either-or, I know it's not
Some newspaper-headline-story:
When? & Where? & Who? & What?

"But a pointed poignant message
From the Lord in simi-les
To the covetous and scornful
Mammon-serving Pharisees.

"For they could not serve their mammon
And be servants of the Lord,
Or call Abraham their father
If ol' Moses they ignored.

"So the po-int of the story
Is of negligence and greed,
Not a cutaway of Hades
For the endless torment creed.

"And when Pharisees and chief priests
Heard some other such from Him-
Well, they didn't take it lit'ral,
But 'perceived he spake of *them*.'

"And in fact, one place, it tells us,
Of our Lord so wise and meek,
That without such kind of stories
Unto them He didn't speak(Mk 4:11, 34)

"If it's concrete detailed data,
Such could hardly be believed;
But as lessons in a picture
They are readily received.

"Would the wedding of a king's son
Not at least appeal to some?
Would the ones who were invited
Kill the ones who bid them come?"

“Would a man choose ten to marry
Five of whom he never knew?
Could they purchase oil at midnight?
Could this possibly be true?”

“Would the owner of a vineyard
Send his own beloved son
To some mean and wicked servants
After all that they had done?”

“But those stories have a message;
Yes a point so plain to see
When they’re understood as pictures,
And not taken li-t’ral-ly.

“Yes, our Father to His vineyard
Sent the prophets who were slain,
And the precious son is Jesus-
Now, you see, it is so plain.

“And so many of Christ’s sayings
Are constructed like this too,
Where we know that they’re not lit’ral
Yet the points they make are true.

“No one really swallows camels;
No one really strains at gnats;
But it’s so true to the figure
That they really do do that.

“Who has wood beams in their eyeballs?
Or casts pearls before swine?
Wolves don’t really wear sheep’s clothing,
And the Lord is not a vine.

“And yet spir-it-ual-ly speaking,
Doesn’t ‘vine’ make perfect sense?
Thus these stories and these sayings
Are con-du-its to convince!

“And when people heard the Savior
did they ask for facts or proof?
No, they *knew* He spoke in pictures
To point out a certain truth.”

Then the rich man said, “A *certain*-
‘Twas a *certain* rich man, see,
So ‘a certain’ means it’s certain
That it is a *certain*-ty!”

Brother Bird then said, ‘A *certain*
Was the way the Lord began
Oft to tell a pointed story:
‘And there was a *certain* man...’

“And ‘a *certain* priest and Levite,’
And a couple *certain* kings,
And a nobleman and farmer,
And some other *certain* things.

“And then five times in the gospels
These two words are in a mull,
Where the Lord would say ‘a *certain*’
When he ‘spake a *par-a-ble*.’

“So a *certain* doesn’t mean it’s
Not a par-a-ble, you see-
It’s a means of introduction,
Not a lit’ral guarantee.

“And the story of the rich man
Does not teach that hell’s for aye-
On the subject of duration
It has nary word to say.”

And then Sheriff Roscoe Ramey
Brought some vittles in a trunk,
With an inmate, Bogus Campbell,
Who was drunker than a skunk.

In the trunk there was a pitcher
And some Mason jars of tea,
And some chicken, beans and taters
From the Sheriff’s “Auntie Bea.”

And ol’ Bogus wobbly anchored
On the cot inside the cell,
And lay staring weirdly wide-eyed
At the man who came from hell.

When they all had finished supper
Brother Bird explained to them
Of the contest now a-stirrin’
‘Tween the crazy man and him.

Then the rich man said, “The ‘great gulf’
Is a proof for endless hell;
It is ‘fixed’ and can’t be conquered,
Thus continuous as well.”

Bird: “If I spoke of ‘here to Venus’
As impossible to climb,
It is relative to distance,
But irrelevant to time.”

Then the rich man said, “In torments
Of my body and my soul
I have been and ever will be
While the ceaseless ages roll.”

“Of your *body*?” asked our brother,
“Of your *body*?” Why, do tell
How it joined your soul in torments
In the nether world of Hell?

“Has there been a resurrection
To restore your flesh and bones?
Are there skeletons in spirits
To hang tongues and eyeballs on?”

Then the rich man hesitated
In a puzzled sort o’ way,
As he ob-vi-ous-ly didn’t
Know exactly what to say.

And then Bogus Campbell stammered
As he stumbled to a post-
“Bru- bru- brother, are you saying
He’s some kind of gu- gu- ghost?”

“Well... exactly!” snapped the rich man,
“I’m a phantom from Sheol:
I’m a disembodied spirit;
I’m a never-dying soul!

“But my mind and sense and mem’ry
And awareness I retain,
And the essence of my spirit
Truly feels and suffers pain.”

“But how could it be your spirit?”
Brother Bird asked half amused,
But the rich man didn’t answer,
But seemed cornered and confused.

Then our brother said, “A spirit
Does not have a tongue or eyes,
Or a bosom or a finger,
As the Scripture testifies:

“When the Lord had resurrected,
he said, ‘Handle me, and see,
For a spirit doesn’t have the
Flesh and bones ye *see* in me.’

“And it says you *saw* ol’ Laz’rus
And your father Abraham-
Were they only apparitions
In a nightmare of the damned?

“And just when did your free spirit
Find itself in Hades’ fire?
Was it instantly or shortly
When at last you did expire?”

“Well... it was,” the rich man muttered,
“When I closed my eyes in death,
I im-me-di-ate-ly looked up,
And in hell took my next breath.”

“But the order of the story,”
Brother Bird at once replied
States the fact that you were buried
E’er before you even died.”

“Oh, that’s nonsense,” said the rich man,
As if taken by surprise-
“First I died, and *then* was buried,
And in hell lift up my eyes.”

“Ah... you’re *right!*” our brother told ‘im,
Yes, of course, I must admit-
First you died, and *then* were buried-
That’s exactly how it’s writ.

“So that means that you were buried
Then, *before* you were inflamed-
Not the instance that you died, hmm?
As you earlier had claimed.

“For it was your buried body,
Not your disembodied soul
In the grave and in the gravedom
Of both *Hades* and *Sheol*.”

Then he showed ‘im how that *Hades*
Is the Greek word for *Sheol*,
And can mean a *grave* or *gravedom*,
And denote a *hole* or *whole*.

And that “*Sheol* in the Scripture
Is the Gravedom of the *Dead*,
Of the righteous *and* the wicked”-
And he proved just what he said:

“In that precious psalm of David,
Of God’s presence he did tell,
How the Lord would still be with him,
Though he made his bed in *hell*”

“And, ‘what man is he that liveth,
And shall not see *death*’ said he;
For the *Sheol* of the grave hole
Is our common destiny. (89:48)

“In the belly of the great fish;
In the belly of a whale-
Is where Jonah cried in anguish
From the belly of a...*hell*.”

“And it’s perfect in the English,
Just the way they worded it-
It is *hell* if it’s the *gravedom*;
Otherwise it’s *grave* or *pit*.”

“And of all the *Sheol*’s mentioned,
There’s not one in sixty-five
That e’er speaks of endless torment,
Or of souls that are alive.”

“And the story of the rich man
Never says that hell’s for aye
For it’s not the final Judgment
And it’s not the final Day.”

“But it is a picture story,
And not lit’ral as you tell,
For the Lord used allegory,
When He spake in par-a-ble,

Then the rich man interrupted,
“I was there so I should know-
It’s an actual and a factual
Picture of the world below.”

It was then that Bogus cried out
From the window ledge in dread,
“There’s another spa- spa- spirit
Ca- ca- come back from the dead!”

But the Sheriff only figured
It was spirits from a flask,
When about the rich man’s entry
Brother Bird was quick to ask:

“In the instance that you entered
Would you not have been confused?
Overwhelmed in shock and terror,”
Solemnly our brother mused.

“So just how could you have known it
Was your father Abraham?
How’d ya know it wasn’t Isaac,
Or Bartholomew or Sam?”

“In the throes of fiery torment
And the grasp of ghastly pain,
Could you have a conversation
So coherent and so plain?”

“Could you frame a fluid sentence,
Or just weep and wail and groan?
And ar-tic-u-late petitions,
Or just shriek and flail and moan?”

“From burn-victim testimonies
There is one thing we have learned:
They can’t formulate a sentence
In the midst of being burned.

“And how is it ‘outer darkness’
In such fiery flames so bright?
Or how is it “mists of darkness’
In the midst of blazing light?”

“Since you’re sure it is so lit’ral
And of stark reality,
Then my questions are most proper
To see if it’s ‘verily’!

“No, the texture of your story
In the very warp and woof
Of its contrasts, names, and features
Speaks of metaphoric truth.

“Why, the preachers do not preach it
As a text on saving grace-
That to go to Abram’s bosom
‘Evil things’ you have to face!

“Or that angels transport spirits,
And then when they make it through
Abraham’s the first to greet ‘em
With the other side in view!

“And if Laz’rus heard your pleading
Clear across the gulf in hell,
Then he must have heard the screamin’
Of a million more as well!

“If such sights and sounds surround ‘im
That are anything but nice,
Could you say that he finds ‘comfort’?
Would you call it ‘paradise’?”

And then someone went to bangin’,
Loudly bangin’ on the door,
And the Sheriff let him enter
Lest he bang on it some more.

Who then said, “My name is Laz’rus,
And I’ve come back from the dead
To refute this lyin’ con man”-
Well, at least that’s what he said.

Bogus Campbell was a-frightened,
And he slunk back in the cell
From the man who came from Heaven
And the man who came from Hell.

“Laz’rus” looked just like a mummy
Wrapped in gauze from head to toe,
And he smelled just like a dishrag,
And his eyes were all aglow.

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
People came from hill and dale
To see Laz’rus and the rich man
In the Surry County Jail.

Willie with his darlin’ Daisy,
Ernest Ladd and Sister Smoke,
Ida Clara, Ima Vera,
And a bunch of other folk.

Like detective Diddy Doright,
And ol’ Fetch, his blue tick hound,
Okie Dokie and his neighbors,
With ol’ Bogus gathered round.

That’s when Laz’rus started listing
Useful facts from A to Z-
Fascinating information
Versus endless misery.

Of the contrast in the Scriptures
Of *eternal life* and *death*,
And of *perish* and *destruction*,
And of how the Scripture saith

That the chaff will surely burn up
In a fire you can’t put out,
And that *perish* means, well, *perish*
With no shadow of a doubt.

How the pictures in the Scriptures
And the words within the Word
Fully verify the teaching
Of peculiar Brother Bird.

And he pondered how the story
Could have ever come to be
Any proof for endless torment
When it’s just not there to see.

“This account our Lord has given
Does not state that hell’s for aye-
On the topic of duration
It has not a word to say.

“And it was a buried body,
Not a disembodied soul,
And between his death and entrance
Was a proper fun-er-al.

“It’s a pointed picture story,
And it paints the picture well;
Illustrative allegory,
Not a window into hell.”

And that’s when the rich man figured
Who this “Laz’rus” really was,
And remembered a computer
That was named *the Wiz of Oz*.

So he pulled one piece of wrapping
With which Laz’rus had been bound,
‘Til the beggar went to whirlin’
Round and round until unwound.

Bogus Campbell’s head was spinnin’
And he blamed the whole affair
On an impure run of moonshine
Which he swore off then and there.

Then the beggar was the focus
In the Surry County pen
In his night shirt and his long johns,
And an impish little grin.

Willie whispered to sweet Daisy,
“What a clever little sneak;”
While the rich man roared in fury,
“It is Micro Chip the geek!”

Well, I guess that was a miscue;
Yes, a careless little slip,
For our brother asked the rich man,
“How do *you* know Micro Chip?”

And just then ol’ Fetch the coon hound
Toward the rich man quickly veered
Lickin’ greasy scraps of chicken
Tangled in the ashen beard.

And the beard and wig fell off ‘im,
And to ev’ryone’s surprise
It was Doctor Farren Brimstone
In that soot and smoke disguise!

How he wished he *were* a spirit
And could quickly disappear,
But he wasn’t and he couldn’t
And then Brother Bird drew near.

“And said, Farren, oh poor Farren,
What you’ll do your case to win,
And with such determination
That the torments never end.

“If it’s true it can’t be altered
By a question or a doubt,
And my tiny little squirt gun
Will not ever put it out.

“If it’s not you can’t create it
Through a vote or by a creed,
So relax and get your Bible
And just open it, and read.

“No one’s dug down to the center
Of the earth so they can know,
But we can dig in the Scriptures
For to see if things are so.

“And this story of your ‘rich man’
Never says that hell’s for aye,
And it’s not the final judgment,
And it’s not the final day.

“But it is a picture story
Of the mammon-servers greed,
Not a cutaway of Hades
For the endless torment creed.

“No, the story of the rich man
Does not teach that hell’s for aye-
On the subject of duration
It has nary word to say.”

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge
Bogus Campbell sobered up,
And you won’t find bootleg whiskey
In the bottom of his cup.

And our brother hopes that others
Will respond as soberly,
And soon learn that endless torment
Is as bogus as can be.