

THE RETREAT (21-32 EXPL.)

*O, how I long to travel back,
And tread again that ancient track!
That I might once more reach that plain
Where first I left my glorious train,
From whence th' enlightened spirit sees
That shady city of palm trees.
But, ah! my soul with too much stay
Is drunk, and staggers in the way.
Some men a forward motion love;
But I by backward steps would move,
And when this dust falls to the urn,
In that state I came, return.*

Lines 21-32: Now the poet longs to travel back, to retrace that earlier journey. So, might he once more reach the plain where he first lost his early brightness, from which place a pure spirit might see the city shaded by palm trees [Jericho].

But alas, the poet's soul has stayed too long in earthly life, and is drunk, staggering on its way. Some men love to move forward, but he would choose to go backwards, so that when his body turns to dust which is placed in his funerary urn, he himself would be back in the state of being in which he had set out.

GLOSSARY AND NOTES

O how...ancient track (21-22): *The poet wishes to retrace his steps to the past when he was a child.*

From whence...Palme trees (25-26): *From the top of Pisgah, Moses viewed the valley of Jericho which God had promised to the Israelites. Deuteronomy 34:3 describes it as 'the city of palm trees.' The vantage point from which Vaughan hopes to have a vision of heaven is the earliest years of his childhood.*

But(ah!) ... the war: too much...drunk (27-28): *My soul is intoxicated by having stayed too long in this world and therefore staggers in its attempts to trace the steps back to my childhood.*

Move (30): *The suggestion is that a movement back to childhood would also be a spiritual progression.*

And when ... came return (31-32): *Death will free me from my 'fleshly dresse' (line 19) and then my soul will regain the state it was in when it came down to the earth. In that state it will return once again to heaven.*