

THE VISION OF TUNDALE

Edited by Noel Joshua Hadley

The Vision of Tundale was first written in Latin during the latter half of the twelfth century, during the span of decades that produced the writings of Chrétien de Troyes, Marie de France, Thomas of Britain, and Hue de Rotelande. Its author was Marcus, an Irish Benedictine monk who moved to the Scots Monastery at Regensburg in Germany and was asked to write down this story that he had brought from Ireland. Immensely popular throughout the Middle Ages, it was translated into many languages. This Middle English version is found in five manuscripts of the fifteenth century, including Cotton Caligula A ii in which is also found the stories of Sir Isumbras, Emaré, the Fair Unknown, Sir Eglamour of Artois, Sir Launfal, Octavian and Cheuelere Assigne.

Jesus Christos, mightiest of lords, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless everybody who will hear me to the end! If you will all stay and listen, I shall tell you things that will make you quake with fear and seek absolution from me here, afterwards, for your misdeeds!

IT happened in Ireland in the year 1149, as it is written, to a wealthy man whose name was Tundale. He was a notorious fellow, well-endowed with goods but bereft of all goodness! Treacherous, envious, proud, and angry, he was quick to seize the wealth of others but slow to do any service to God. His favorite pastimes were fornication and stuffing himself with food and drink! Mercy was not in his vocabulary. He loved neither God nor Holy Church, had a heart that felt no pity and gave nothing away in charity. He harbored all sorts of criminals in his retinue and loved nothing better than to gossip and to stitch people up. He loved fighting and conflict. He was the worst of all men. And yet, God as Christ in His infinite mercy found it hard to destroy a soul that He had once redeemed from Hell, so he gave Tundale a stern warning. As he lay unconscious, his soul was taken on a dreadful journey through some horrible places before returning to his body again. And Tundale was well able to recall the things that he had seen of Purgatory and Hell. You will learn about these nasty experiences that he had if you will listen!

Tundale had a number of friends, but he loved to deceive people. Many were frightened of him because he was impulsive, and his word meant nothing. When he lent out nine shillings, he demanded ten back in return, charged extra still for any delay and gave nothing to the Church. He would ask for more than a fair amount when selling something and would raise the price even further if payment was not prompt.

One day, Tundale went to collect some silver that was owing to him for three horses that he had sold, but the man who had bought the animals asked Tundale for more time to pay. The man offered Tundale oaths of assurance. Tundale became angry and threatened the poor fellow, increasing the price hugely because he could not pay at once. He was no beginner in business and made the man sign a written agreement.

This fellow who had bought the horses controlled himself admirably, spoke to Tundale courteously, lifted him out of his rage and invited him to stay for lunch. But when they were at the table, Tundale suddenly began to feel very unwell. After eating only a mouthful of food, his arm became paralyzed. He cried out and looked as though he had seen a vision of Death. 'Dear Lady,' he called to the mistress of the house, 'for mercy, fetch me my weapons and help me to your door, for I think that my end is near. I feel my strength ebbing! I sense that I am nigh to death! I am certain of it! Oh Jesus Christ! Have mercy upon me!' And Tundale made an effort to rise from the table, but instead, he collapsed to the floor.

Tundale's close friends, his nephews and cousins who had accompanied him, sensing immediately that something was wrong, came running up only to find him lying dead on the ground. They had the bells rung for him and sang the Placebo and the Dirge. All his clothes were removed, and he lay there as cold as a stone, except for a little warmth in his left side. Because of this warmth some declared that he might not be dead after all and therefore they left him lying there. But nonetheless, he lay like a dead man from mid-day Wednesday until Saturday afternoon. And when he regained consciousness, he could recall all that had happened to him as he was stretched out there dead! And listen to what this was! Listen please!

When Tundale collapsed, his spirit quickly departed from his body. And as soon as he was dead his soul came into a dark place, alone and wretched – it wept and was very distressed. Tundale thought that he had come to the place of eternal pain and damnation! He thought he would never exist in his body again, because of the sins that his flesh had committed and

that he would not be able to conceal. He would rather that the Earth could have returned! But he was to suffer and witness many hideous things and understand the range of joys and punishments that await us all, as this story shall bear witness.

As the spirit of Tundale stood in great confusion and dread, he saw an awesome collection of foul fiends rampaging towards him with mouths gaping like a pack of wild wolves. He wanted to flee for his life but had no idea how to do so. The fiends arrived and Tundale, understandably terrified, expected to be torn to pieces by them. To look at them was to move beyond fear; their bodies were black and dirty and the ground shook as they growled horribly. Their eyes were wide and sparkled like fire as though they were consumed with rage. Their huge open mouths spat out flames. They were filled with fire. Their lips hung beneath their chins exposing long teeth and wide throats, and their tongues hung out at the side, like a dog's. On their feet and hands, they had great claws and horny pads and their tails were sodden and poisonous. Their claws were as keen as sharpened steel – no man could feel any sharper! - and from these creatures came the foulest stink that anyone could imagine. They clawed at each other's faces and inflicted horrific wounds upon one another. Then they grimly cast their eyes upon Tundale and roared in unison: 'Let's set about this wicked ghost who has always given a willing ear to our council and done as we have urged! Let's sing him a song of death, for he is one of ours!'

The fiends crowded around Tundale and shouted: 'You wretched, sinful creature, there is a place in Hell reserved for you, for you are one of us now! You are a daughter of Death! Eternal fire shall befriend you! Darkness shall be your companion and light shall be your enemy! You have lied and deceived! You love conflict, as we all do! You have had sex with married women! Every vice imaginable is ingrained into your character! You could have mended your ways while you lived but you chose not to! And where is all your wealth now? Where is your gold and your treasure? What good can it do you now? All the wealth on Earth, and all the prayers that may be said for your soul, all the Matins and Masses, cannot save you now from the pain of Hell and eternal damnation!

'You concealed your sins from the Church and confessed nothing. Therefore, you must come with us! Your life has shown you to be one of us, villain! Come with us then, to eternal damnation!'

The ghost of Tundale stood; it was as dark as night, but then a bright star appeared. Tundale gazed at the star and found comfort in its light, for he felt a glimmer of hope as he thought upon God's mercy. The star took on the form of Tundale's guardian angel.

The angel approached and greeted him courteously. 'Tundale,' he said, 'what are you doing here?'

When he heard the shining angel speak his name, Tundale was very happy and cried: 'Sweet father, mercy! For my sins, these fiends are trying to lead me to the fires of Hell!'

'You call me father and lord now,' replied the angel, 'but why did you not before? I was beside you morning and evening, ever since you were born, but you would not listen to me or do anything I asked.'

'Lord, I have never seen you before,' insisted Tundale. 'I have never heard you say anything.'

The mighty angel fearlessly approached one of the fiends. 'Tundale,' he called, 'this is the hideous and terrifying creature that you have always listened to. You have guided your life by its will and by nothing of mine. But God's mercy might still save you, although you don't deserve it and you shall not earn it without a hard struggle.'

Tundale was relieved to hear this, although he was afterwards put sorely to the test, for he came among dreadful suffering and shared in much of it, so that he could better recall things from bitter experience when he came back into his body. The angel brought Tundale out of that place, for he thought he had been frightened enough. When the fiends saw that Tundale was escaping from them they began to roar and scream and cried dreadful oaths against God: 'You are unjust!' they cried. 'You deceive and mislead! You said you would bring a man a swift reward according to his deserts! Tundale is ours by right! He has lived a wicked life and served us unflinchingly. If we have to leave him here, you wrong us!'

They roared out their anger and frustration, bit and scratched one another and released such a stink that no earthly man has ever smelt the like!

The angel turned to Tundale. 'Follow me!' he said quickly.

'Then it will be the last you will ever see of me!' replied Tundale. 'These fiends will seize me from behind and carry me off to hellfire!'

‘Don’t worry about them,’ replied the angel. ‘They are not able to take you from me. However many you think are here, there are in fact a great many more still, and with equally sharp claws, but while God walks with us they can do us no harm.’

When the angel had finished speaking, he led Tundale through a dark tunnel. There was no light except for that which the angel himself emitted and soon they came into a gloomy valley. What Tundale saw there worried him greatly and he shook with anxiety as he studied the dismal landscape and smelt the stench that filled the air. The ground was an expanse of burning coals and over the hot coals was laid iron that was glowing red from the heat; the bars of metal rose to the height of a man and the flames passed through them as though designed to inflict the severest pain from the intense heat it gave to the iron and the acrid stench of carbon and sulphur. Nothing before had ever frightened Tundale so much as this sight did, for fiends were laying souls out upon the iron and these souls were consumed in the stinking heat and melted like wax in a pan and the molten liquid passed through the iron and the coals like paraffin through a cloth to be collected and re-formed and put back by the fiends onto the iron once more for the torment to begin afresh.

‘Here is a place of great distress,’ said the angel. ‘These souls have all been guilty of murder or complicity to murder. There is no release from this agony, and it shall have no end for them, although their torment is not confined only to what you see here. You may still escape this pain yourself, although you have well deserved it.’

They moved on and came to a great mountain and here Tundale heard cries of distress. One side of the mountain, it seemed, was alight; there was smoke and fire, and it stank of tar and sulphur. On the other side of the mountain the ground was covered with thick snow and ice and the air was lashed by blizzards. Tundale saw many wicked fiends filling the air with their roars and yells and they held tongs and forks in their hands and red-hot iron skewers which they used to prod at the wretched souls, snatching them out of the fire and thrusting them towards the cold snow, then out of the snow and back again into the fire. And so, their pain alternated from burning to freezing and back again to burning.

‘This is the punishment allotted to thieves,’ explained the angel, ‘and to those who rob or take things away against the owner’s will through deception or fraud, or in other ways manage to dupe a man into parting with his lawful possessions.’

When they had seen all this torment, they continued further on their journey.

The angel led the way and Tundale followed behind him, fearful and afraid, until they came to another valley. It was dark and deep and Tundale's soul was apprehensive when he saw it, for he had seen nothing like it on Earth. The floor of the depression was so far beneath them that it was hidden from sight, but they could hear the cries and screams of burning souls coming from below. Out of the great pit came a horrible stench of tar and sulphur and it seemed to Tundale to be by far the most evil place that he had ever been.

On the other side of the pit stood another mountain and across the gorge hung a bridge that was a thousand yards long and barely a foot wide. This bridge shook so much that it seemed impossible for any man to cross it safely, be he learned or ignorant, or any woman; none except perhaps a holy man who had led a perfect life. Tundale saw many souls falling off this bridge. The only person he saw cross successfully was a priest who had been on pilgrimage; he was holding a palm frond and, just as he had in life, so in death he trod a difficult path with only himself for company.

Tundale said to the angel: 'I have never been so scared. There is no possibility that I could ever cross this bridge!'

"Don't worry," replied the angel. "You shall avoid this punishment, although many others lie in store for you. This grievous torment is reserved for the over-proud and the boastful." And the angel quickly took Tundale by the hand and led him across, much to his relief.

They continued their way together down a long, dark path, and Tundale's soul had no idea where the journey was leading. But at last, they came into the light and Tundale saw a vast and fearsome thing; a huge boar that was bigger than any mountain he had ever seen; the span of its eyes was wider than a valley! Nine thousand men could easily ride into its mouth and between its tusks hung two giants! Tundale could see the head of one of the giants dangling down and the feet of another, and the centre of the boar's mouth was held apart with two pillars in such a way that it formed an entrance like three open gates. Vast flames of fire issued from its mouth and such a horrible smell that it is impossible to imagine it or to describe. Within, they could hear the anguished cries of thousands of souls screaming and lamenting: 'God help us!' they cried. 'Have we deserved this?' Many thousands of eager devils hovered in front of the

boar's mouth, busying themselves and using their strength with burning rods to shepherd souls towards this place of torment.

When Tundale saw this creature and the evil spirits around its mouth and heard the hideous cries coming from within, he turned to the angel and said: 'What does this horrible sight mean?'

'This beast is called Acheron,' replied the angel. 'You will have to go through it if we are to continue our journey. None may pass unscathed from this punishment except those who have led a clean and perfect life. This huge beast, I must inform you, swallows all covetous men, all those who in life were never content with what they had but whose pride drove them to seize more and more, which they now have ample time to regret. It is written in the Bible that a beast shall swallow the covetous. It has such a craving that every drop of water that has ever swelled the rivers of the Earth could not satisfy its thirst. This torment is therefore suitable for those who have never been satisfied with what they have and never thought that God had given them enough. And those giants that you see hanging between the boar's tusks, they did not believe in the word of God but followed their own law, and they were called Fergus mac Roi and Conall Cernach who figure in the Ulster Cycle of pagan Irish legend.'

'Alas!' replied Tundale. 'What torment they must be going through if they have to dangle there forever.'

'I wouldn't gloat,' replied the angel, 'for you have lived like them.'

As the angel said this, they approached so near to the creature that they stood before it, much to Tundale's concern. Then the angel disappeared suddenly. Tundale was petrified with fear! The fiends came quickly and bound him up, then cast him into the beast's mouth. He was beaten by evil spirits; his bones were gnawed at by hungry lions and his vital organs pulled out by dragons. Venomous snakes consumed his limbs. Fire burned him, then ice froze him. His tears stung his cheeks like fire. He was full of woe! There was a strong stink of sulphur. He was tormented in many ways. He tore at his own cheeks with his nails! For each sin he had ever committed he was punished. Nothing was hidden. Despair was his constant companion. He could see no hope of escape.

But suddenly Tundale was released. He had no idea how it happened, but he was very pleased that it had. One moment all hope had been abandoned and the next he found himself free. He lay for a while as though dead and then raised himself into a sitting position. The angel was

standing in front of him. The light from the angel comforted him and when the angel touched Tundale he gave him strength and made him well. Then Tundale wept for the love of God.

And so, they passed that place of torment. But there were more to come.

The pair of them continued on their journey until they came to a dreadful lake. The waves towered above them and the crash of the water was deafening. Within the lake there were huge beasts with large eyes that burned like lamps at night as they roared and made the water bubble furiously around them. These creatures waited on either side to swallow the souls that were their main prey; for over the lake hung a long, narrow bridge - it was two miles in length, and it seemed to Tundale to be scarcely the width of a hand. Set into it were sharp spikes of iron and steel that were grievous to touch – no one could cross that bridge without sustaining severe injuries to his feet!

The hideous creatures in the lake drew closer to the bridge in hope born of experience; they were huge, and they fed upon falling souls. Tundale saw fire coming from their mouths and all the water around them boiled - the noise they made was appalling!

On the bridge Tundale noticed a figure on the far side with a sack of corn on his back. The man was groaning piteously and lamenting all his sins. The spikes cut harshly at his feet, but his greatest fear was directed towards the creatures in the water who were waiting expectantly for their meal.

Tundale asked the bright angel: 'What does this awful bridge mean?'

'It is for those who have robbed and taken men's property,' the angel replied, 'be they common men or learned scholars, and those who have stolen from Holy Church. But some have more torment and some less, depending upon the gravity of their sins. Some have not balked at burning down a church! Others are fickle and disloyal. Some rob from churches, which is termed sacrilege. Those who have committed crimes within a church or desecrated a place of sanctuary, all these shall receive their punishment here. The man on the bridge you can see carrying the sheaves of corn and crying out in distress, he stole the corn from Holy Church, for they were taxes he owed and did not pay. You see how much they cost him now!

‘You shall cross this bridge leading a nervous cow. Watch out for her footing and be careful as you lead her! When you have completed the crossing, you may give her back to me. This punishment is for stealing a cow.’

‘Mercy!’ replied Tundale. ‘Lord, have mercy! Even if I did steal the heifer, the friend I stole her from got her back in the end.’

‘That is true - you were unable to keep what you had taken and because of this, your torment shall be less than it might have been. But every wicked deed is punished, however small, and God is just as mindful to punish evil intent as he is to punish a successful felony.’

As Tundale stood there anxiously, a wild cow was brought up. Regardless of the distress he felt, Tundale was obliged to take hold of the cow and begin to lead her across the bridge. Unwillingly, he did as the angel instructed, took the cow by the horns, and maneuvered her carefully towards the crossing.

When they set foot upon the structure, the cow refused to shift. Tundale saw the creatures in the lake move ever closer to the bridge in expectation of a swift meal. The cow nearly toppled over into the water and Tundale almost fell over the other side. He was beyond fear. Slowly and painfully, he made his way with the cow to the centre of the crossing, sometimes with the cow leading, sometimes him. They were both terrified.

Then they met with the person who was carrying the corn. Both now knew that they were lost, for the bridge was too narrow for them to go past one another. The anguish of both was extreme for neither could turn around and neither dared to even look behind him! The sharp points that they had to walk on made their feet bleed so much that the blood dripped down into the lake! The man carrying the sheaf of corn begged Tundale to let him pass.

‘Let me by,’ he wept, ‘for there is no way that I can get past you unless you move aside.’ They both wept, for it was impossible for them to proceed.

As Tundale stood holding the cow, the angel appeared beside him. Then he found himself on dry land once more.

‘Let the cow go,’ said the angel. ‘Be assured, you don’t need to lead her anymore.’ Tundale showed the angel his feet. ‘I cannot go a step further!’ he sobbed. ‘Let this be a warning of the difficulty of your path,’ replied

the angel. Then he touched Tundale's feet and instantly the wounds healed.

'Thank you!' exclaimed Tundale.

'You will soon find that another great anguish awaits us,' replied the angel, 'and from this one there will be no escape! You must come with me, for you have no other choice!'

Tundale and the angel continued their journey, through dark ways and wilderness, until they came to a building that was as large and as high as a mountain. It was built like an oven with a wide mouth at the front and from this aperture great flames emerged, shooting a thousand feet across the ground into crowds of souls that the evil spirits had brought before it, burning them all to nothing!

Tundale turned to the angel and said: 'This is a dreadful place - it looks like the very gates of death! Please tell me that I don't have to spend an eternity here!'

'You shall not spend an eternity here,' the good angel reassured him.

'God would have given great power,' said Tundale, 'to the person who could deliver me from this place!'

'Don't be frightened,' replied the angel. 'But you must go into this building, although the fire shall not harm you.'

As Tundale approached nearer to this great structure he could see butchers standing in the midst of the flames; some holding sharp knives and fearsome cleavers, others wielding saws, forks for skewering meat over a fire, broad axes and instruments designed to drill holes into bone. They made an engaging sight! Some held very long knives and others, sharp hooks. Tundale looked on with horror at the way these fiends butchered the souls. Some struck off the head, others the thighs, arms, legs at the knees, and some hacked the souls into pieces. Yet they were all soon restored back again into their original shapes, only to be seized once more by the butchers! Tundale was horrified at this punishment.

'Deliver me from this terror!' he cried to the angel. 'I implore you! I have never seen anything like it! I will suffer anything else you want me to, anything at all!'

‘You think this torment is dreadful,’ replied the angel, ‘but, nevertheless, you are required to endure it, as you shall be many others, you will soon discover.’

The hideousness of this punishment gripped Tundale more than that of any of the others he had seen. But there was worse! For within the fire that raged inside this evil building Tundale caught sight of a terrifying dog. The sight petrified him. Tundale pleaded with the angel to let him escape from this frightening Hell. But the angel was unyielding.

Evil spirits approached Tundale with their grim tools and terrifying equipment, seized him and chopped him into little pieces. But he could not die and soon found that his body was restored once again. Tundale heard a cacophony of howling and groaning while he was there. The fire that he had seen streaking out from the building burnt up everything within and all the souls were ravenous with hunger for there was nothing to eat but dry ash. Tundale saw many in this place who had had their genitals eaten away and he saw clergymen who were riddled with parasites and vermin; their limbs were bitten and raw and there were grubs and parasites eating away inside them! Tundale personally recognized some of those who were there and knew that they had deserved this fate. But soon he found himself looking at the building from the outside once more. He did not know how he had escaped from it, but he was very happy to have done so! He next found himself standing in a dark place called the Cauldron of Dread. He could see nothing but his angel standing before him.

‘Alas!’ he said. ‘Where is the truth of the saying that God’s mercy surpasses all things? I have seen no sign of it!’

‘That saying deceives many,’ replied the angel, ‘and I will explain it to you. Although God is full of mercy, he is constrained to do the proper thing. But he forgives wickedness more often than ever he finds goodness and wisdom. The torments you have suffered here have been lenient compared to those you have deserved!’

Tundale knelt and thanked God that he had escaped so quickly!

‘Who would pay any heed to God,’ continued the angel, ‘if He were always to forgive a man his sins without any pain of punishment? A man would never need to do any good if this was the case. But those who are sinful and have done no penance but who are repentant shall receive no vengeance from God. Through His mercy they shall be saved. And yet

their souls shall feel pain for the sins they have committed. Often God will cause a man's possessions to be taken from him so that his pain can be reduced when he gets here. For if a man knows the benefit of poverty and thanks God for it, then his soul shall suffer the less when he dies and he shall soon say farewell to all pain and achieve everlasting Bliss. But there is no one in the world who is so good nor so perfect, not even a new-born baby, that he shall not have to endure some torment in Purgatory. But he who is eager to love God shall escape much of it, and certainly more than the man who is damned to Hell for his wickedness. The damned shall see such joy in Heaven that no greater comfort could be imagined but will not be able to experience any of it and this shall bring him more pain than all the terrors of Hell put together. But the priest who has been a palmer and whom you saw crossing the bridge, he saw all the punishments but had to experience none of them for he always loved God and served him well and has been rewarded. He shall not miss the joys of Paradise and he shall find exalted bliss!

When the angel had said all this to strengthen Tundale's heart, he led him forwards as Tundale followed hesitantly behind.

Soon, they came upon a hideous creature that filled Tundale with terror. It seemed more evil and dangerous than anything he had ever seen before, with two enormous black wings and with claws of iron and steel protruding from its feet. Its neck was long and slender but held a huge head in which burned two red eyes, set wide apart, and its mouth was wide and spat fire in a seemingly inextinguishable stream. Its nose was tipped with iron! The beast sat in the middle of a frozen lake swallowing terrified souls which burned inside its body until they were nearly wasted away, but then they were expelled from this horror in the creature's excrement and left until they had recovered and become whole once again. They were sorely bruised from this ordeal! They cried out in pain, just like a woman in childbirth. They suffered greatly for their sins. Then things began to bite at them from the inside, snakes and rats! When they understood what was happening, they made such a huge and terrified lamentation that the noise of it filled all of Hell! Never has such a noise been heard from men and women before! But the moment of unimaginable horror could not be avoided when the snakes prepared to emerge, not only from the private parts but from every limb, head, and foot, back and side! They slid through abdomen and chest, and through every joint. They made their exit all at once, sparing neither flesh nor bones. They were long with iron heads and tails with barbs! And when their tails became caught as they

pulled themselves from the holes that they had made, they turned their heads inward again and gnawed at the flesh and bone, exposing all the joints, and biting until all the insides had been consumed, thrusting their heads in and out. But still their tails were caught! The soul's whole body was alive with a writhing, gnawing, flaying, and tormenting such that the screams of terror might have risen up to Heaven itself, so hideous it all was. The souls cried in anguish and lamented their foolishness and their sins! But they were not delivered from this pain, the cycle was renewed, and they had to endure it again and again!

'Lord, this is a dreadful sight,' said Tundale to the angel. 'I think this is worse than anything I have ever seen.'

'This torment is ordained for men of religion who have strayed from their profession,' replied the angel. 'Monks, clerics, priests and canons and other men and women of Holy Church who have indulged their carnal desires and enjoyed other such delights, ignoring the strictures of their order, and leading their lives as they wish. They shall suffer for this for eternity if they do not mend their ways before it is too late. And for the same crimes that you have committed, you shall suffer this as well.'

As the angel finished speaking, the fiends led Tundale inside the hideous creature and there he burned in a fierce heat for a long time and suffered dreadful torment.

But at last, the creature expelled Tundale, and he swelled up as though he would burst, he was so full of worms and snakes pressed tightly together inside him that only their hideous escape could release them. But then Tundale saw the angel standing patiently before him. The angel touched Tundale with his hand and brought him out of this nightmare.

'Come with me,' the angel said. 'And follow close behind, for it is required that you should witness still more pain.' They traveled onwards, and Tundale took no pleasure from the journey. He found himself traveling through darkness; it was unpleasant for there was nothing to see by at all, except for the light which the angel emitted. They continued their way without interruption for a long while and it was the worst journey that Tundale had ever taken, for the path was so difficult and it descended so steeply, down narrow steps as though into a gorge. The longer Tundale followed, the less sure he was that the path had any end to it at all. The air had become bad, and he began to fear for his safety.

‘Where does this path lead?’ asked Tundale nervously, with tears in his eyes.

‘I will tell you where this path leads and where it ends. It goes to the Place of Death.’ replied the angel.

‘How can this be?’ answered Tundale. In the Bible it is written that the road to Death is large and broad. This is a narrow path that you are leading me down.’

‘The Bible speaks of the way of uncleanness and debauchery,’ said the angel. ‘That road is easy to follow, but it is not the only way to everlasting death.’

And so, they continued along the dark and lonely path until at last they came to the bottom of the deep valley. Tundale stood aghast at what he saw! It was full of smithies. Evil-looking blacksmiths were holding great hammers in their hands and hot glowing tongs, casting distraught and weeping souls into the forges, and then taking them out again and beating them on the anvils with their hammers. The master of the smithy was the Roman god Vulcan, and, like all the others, smoke was coming from his mouth.

‘Look there!’ said the angel. ‘That devious fiend has lured many into sin! And for that they shall be tormented in this place when they die.’

‘Will I have to suffer here?’ asked Tundale.

‘I’m afraid so,’ replied the angel.

Tundale was led to the smithy. Two of the smiths came running up with glowing tongs and white-hot pokers in their hands; they grabbed at Tundale and led him into a place of grim torture. Tundale was thrown into a forge that was glowing white, orange, and blue. Air was blown from a great bellows until the furnace was hot enough to melt iron. Tundale began to burn, he and thousands of others for souls were cast into these flames a thousand at a time. Many were turned to steam, others to molten lead or to white-hot iron. Then with iron hammers the devils laid into them as though they were mad. They threw a thousand souls at a time into a long quenching trough just as men temper iron and steel, and that was a grisly pain to feel! This torment was very prolonged, and yet, they could not fully die. These fiends, black and dirty from the coal and the iron, each consulted with his fellows about how he could best inflict the most grievous harm – they did not tire of their work! Each ingot was

smashed open, and the souls released once again, and each passed into the next smithy. 'Have you taken from these souls all that you want?' they would cry. 'Throw them over here, then, and let me see what I can do with them!'

They roared and screamed and gesticulated, urging the souls to be handed over, receiving them with hooks and red-hot tongs. They thought they were not worked enough! The devils thrust them into and out of the furnace, burning them in hot flames until they were almost fully consumed.

After a while, Tundale was released from this terror, much to the displeasure of Vulcan and his fiendish blacksmiths. All the other souls, however, had to remain where they were.

When Tundale came away from this horror, he soon recovered and quickly heard the angel's voice again. The angel asked him how he was: 'And now you can see,' he said, 'how well your sins have served you. Great anguish lies in store for you for your follies and delights! All those who were there with you and who remain there still, they are those whom you followed and let their fate be a lesson to you!'

Tundale could not say a word but stood there, speechless.

'But take comfort from this thought,' said the angel. 'If you have witnessed suffering up to now and have been forced to taste some yourself, know that greater suffering still awaits you. But you shall survive it all. Some souls you see will not be so lucky and will lie in pain that lasts forever. Their misdeeds have caused them to be damned for all time and their cry is one of everlasting lamentation. Those who seek God's mercy are certain to avoid that fate.'

When the angel had said all this, he laid his hand upon Tundale. Then Tundale was healed and felt fully recovered. But yet, onwards they went.

Soon, a great darkness descended, a great blackness and the air suddenly became very cold, so cold that Tundale could scarcely walk. He was very nearly frozen to death! Frightened and in great and sudden pain, he trembled so much through cold and terror that he could feel his whole head shaking and his teeth chattering. All the agony he had ever felt before, he thought, had been nothing compared to this!

'What is happening?' he stammered. 'My hands and feet won't work. I cannot walk!'

The angel said nothing.

Tundale wept and was very frightened. The angel moved away.

When Tundale could no longer see ahead of him, he tried to make his way forwards as best he could. He knew he was on the road to Hell.

Soon he began to hear the piteous cries of souls who were suffering eternal damnation for their sins and wickedness. Thunder cracked. No heart can conceive, and no tongue can tell, how hideous are the noises that he heard. The soul of Tundale stood in great dread, shooting his gaze nervously about, expecting every sharp crack to herald the fresh arrival of fiends coming to seize him. In the flash of the lightning, he could see that he stood beside a deep pit from which rose a flame that stank so much that it made him feel sick. He tried to move away from it but could achieve nothing now except to begin to discern that from out of the pit rose a tall round pillar that stretched high up into the sky towards Heaven. Flames were licking along its length on all sides and around the pillar were fiends and souls flying, low and high, up and down, like the sparkles from a bonfire in a wind. And when the souls were all burnt to ashes, they fell back into the pit. Here they recovered and made another attempt to fly up the pole; and in this way was their torture ever renewed. Tundale would far have preferred that the Earth could have returned again but out of his terror came the fear that he could not return; he could not move his legs, he could only stand there, crippled with cold and paralyzed with fear and nearly insane with dread; he tore at his own cheeks in distress and anguish at the thought that he could not go back to the world that he knew.

‘Alas!’ he cried. ‘What can I do? For now, I know that I am dead!’

The wicked spirits, as they flew about the pillar, heard Tundale’s cries of dismay and swept down upon him. They carried burning hooks that had been specially made to torment souls.

‘Ah, a fine wretch!’ they cried. ‘You have made a good journey to visit us, but where have you come from? Your foolishness and your wickedness certainly qualify you to burn in these fires! You have not yet felt real pain, for here we will destroy you properly and you shall dwell with us in everlasting hellfire. We will show you our ways! You shall burn in glowing flames forevermore! You can never escape! Do not nurture any hope of deliverance! You will stay in this place with us forever, in perpetual darkness. You will never again see the light. Nothing can save you! Wretched soul, we shall lead you to the very Gates of Hell, for you lived

your life wickedly enough! We will take you to see Satan, deep in the pit of Hell, and there you shall remain. Whoever persuaded you to come here did you no favors! He will be too late to rescue you now! Be certain that you shall never see him again.'

They conferred amongst themselves and came to a decision: 'We shall take this groaning wretch to Satan, to be swallowed whole!' they declared.

The fiends handled Tundale roughly and told him what they intended to do; their eyes burned like lamps, and they made a hideous noise, their teeth were long and black, and they had tusks! - they had the bodies of dragons and the tails of scorpions! Each of their claws was hooked like a ship's anchor and it was as hard and as sharp as though it was made of steel. With huge black wings they could fly wherever they pleased. They narrowed their eyes and bared their teeth and Tundale looked on in heart-stopping terror.

Then the angel returned, and the fiends fled quickly away.

'Tundale,' said the angel, 'let your fear melt away and turn into joy. Your pain shall soon explode into light! From now on you are safe, through God's mercy. God has granted that you shall experience no more torture, so be glad, although you shall see more suffering. Come with me quickly and I will show you your mortal enemy, the greatest enemy that mankind has ever known, the creature who tries to tempt every person into wrongdoing.'

They went a little further and came to the very gates of Hell itself. Here Tundale saw a great pit. 'Come here,' said the angel, 'and see something truly terrifying. Stand at the edge and look down. It is pitch black down there but are you able to see all the demons and souls? They are all so racked in torture that they will not see you staring down at them. And you will shortly see Satan himself, bound to the floor of the pit of Hell.'

Tundale did as he had been asked; he stood at the edge of the huge and cavernous excavation and looked down into it with awe, because there he could see Satan tied to the floor of the pit. Never before had he seen such a hideous sight! So ugly was that loathsome creature and surrounded by such suffering and distress that, were a man to have a hundred heads and mouths and each mouth a hundred tongues and every tongue the ability to impart the wisdom and intelligence and experience of all the finest minds that live, still it would not be enough to describe the pain that Tundale was looking at now on the floor of the pit of Hell. Tundale gazed

intently at Satan and tried to frame words that could describe the grim spectacle that he saw but could come up with nothing. The bound creature was more horrible than any Tundale had ever seen. Satan was huge and as black as pitch; he had the shape of a man but must have been a hundred and fifty feet in length! His shoulders were thirty feet across and his chest rose to fifteen feet above the floor of the pit, and when he opened his mouth he swallowed a thousand souls at a time. From his body came a thousand arms and hands and each hand had twenty fingers and each finger was fifty feet long with nails as hard as iron, sharp and longer than the lances that knights use in war. With a terrifying array of teeth, he chewed the souls that came into his mouth before swallowing them down, and with a long tail that was full of hooks and barbs he caught and impaled the souls that were to serve as his next mouthful! He lay upon black burning coals and iron that glowed red-hot, attended by a company of fiends armed with bellows. So many souls were swarming around that Tundale was amazed that the world could have brought forth so many! Satan was bound in iron chains surrounded by molten brass. The souls that he caught in his long fingers he tore to pieces as he brought them to his mouth as a man would a handful of grapes. When he had crushed them and digested them, he expelled them back into the fire; and yet, they revived and were put to renewed torture! Tundale saw and heard how Satan cried out in anguish at his binding and constraint and with each tormented exhalation a thousand souls were breathed back out into the fire. Soon they were scattered all around him, but this torture was still insufficient, and when he breathed in again all the scattered souls were swallowed down again along with the fumes of pitch and sulphur. The souls that managed to escape from his grasp fell into the hot coals and were burned; but they revived and were caught by the hooks in Satan's tail once more! And so, the torture continued, both to the souls and to Satan himself.

Because the more pain that Satan gave to the souls that were brought to him, the more was his own pain, it is a pain from which he can never escape.

'Here is the heart of suffering!' exclaimed the angel. 'Satan, this ugly fiend whom you have not abhorred enough, was the first creature that God made in his own image. He fell from Heaven through his pride into this deep pit. He is tied up and shackled, as you can see, and will remain so until Doomsday, for if the iron failed and he was released, he would wreak havoc throughout Heaven and Earth. Of the devils that are with him,

some trace their descent from Adam and others are angels that fell out of Heaven when he did. All of them are damned for eternity. And many more shall arrive here before Doomsday; those who forsake God and will not recognize His truth nor acknowledge His works but love sin, both common men and clergy. These souls have suffered all the torments you have seen on your journey and now they have been thrown to Satan. Whoever is brought here shall remain for eternity. Powerful men who have caused the poor to suffer, who impose their authority unjustly and take whatever they want from those who are weaker than themselves; these princes of wickedness shall suffer unendurable torment, inflicted by fiends, who now have power over them.'

'Sir, God's will shall be done,' replied Tundale, instinctively. 'But one thing puzzles me, and I would like to know the answer. Why, on Earth, doesn't God give at least as much power to those who are good and would be a guide to their fellow men as he does to those who are wicked?'

The angel replied: 'Sometimes a district or a nation gets the rulers it deserves, because the people need to be punished, and sometimes God is keen not to let the good people of this world have too much wealth because it would harm their chances of going to Heaven. But all the things that you have seen up until now are reserved for the purgation of misdemeanors and are nothing compared to the horrors you now see before you. It is not for nothing that this fiend is called the Prince of Darkness.'

'I can believe you!' replied Tundale, 'And I feel more dread and awe standing here than I have of anything up until now. Please let me go from this place. I can see some of my friends and associates here; their home is now this pit and I renounce all my admiration of them and all my friendship for them. This will be my fate too, if Jesus does not have mercy upon me – I shall be forced to stay here for eternity!'

'I can call you a blessed soul,' replied the angel mildly, 'because you have passed through all of your punishments. All these things that you have seen and suffered with courage you need have no further fear of. You have seen the wicked suffer for their misdeeds and now you shall see the bliss that lies in wait for those whom God has chosen. So be glad! Come now and follow me!'

Tundale went with the angel as he had been instructed. The air began to lighten and soon it was as clear as day. Tundale's heart, too, became

brighter. He was happy! He gladly followed the angel's footsteps and gave thanks to God!

When they had traveled for quite a little while they came to a wall. It seemed to be enclosing something and it was very high, but nevertheless, the angel led Tundale easily inside. All around him were men and women who seemed to be unhappy and full of grief. Soon it became clear that they were all hungry – they were cold and hungry because they had been traveling a long while without rest. They needed food and clothes but instead were walking around naked, like animals. Tundale found it hard to see what exactly the matter with them was, except that they seemed to be short of the things they might have liked to have had.

‘These people,’ explained the angel, ‘are all saved, but they still have to receive a little more penance. They lived honestly for the most part but offended God by not giving away enough of their wealth to feed and clothe the poor. And therefore, God has sent them wind and rain, hunger and thirst. But afterwards they shall find peace.’

The angel would say no more, but carried on walking and Tundale followed him until they came to a gate. Beyond it was a field full of flowers; the meadow was speckled with every color imaginable and smelt as sweet as a summer morning. The sun shone brightly above and Tundale was enraptured. It was a beautiful place. Fruit trees stood everywhere and from within their branches came the sweet sound of bird song. People were everywhere, people who had been cleansed of every kind of sin and everybody looked very happy. In the middle of the field was a spring, a beautiful pool, and from it ran many little streams of crystal-clear water.

Unable to prevent himself from laughing, Tundale turned to the angel and said: ‘This is a beautiful place! Let’s end our journey here!’

‘We cannot stay,’ replied the angel. ‘The souls that you can see have all suffered for their sins but through God’s grace they have been cleansed and now reside here. But they cannot yet be taken into the bliss of Heaven. Although they have been washed clean of all sin, they must stay here in order to await God’s will. The spring of clear water that you can see is called, by those who know, the Well of Life. Whoever drinks from it shall feel no hunger and suffer no thirst. If he is old, it will cause him to be young again!’

The angel strode onwards and Tundale followed breathlessly behind until they came to a place where there were many men blocking their way.

Tundale recognized some of them and two in particular were kings who had once been very powerful men. They had lived by war and slaughter but had been honest rulers. One was called Conchobar mac Diarmada O'Brien, who had been King of North Munster in the south of Ireland for a period during the first half of the twelfth century, and the other, Donogh MacCarthy, who had ruled briefly over South Munster during that same era. Tundale turned to the angel and said: 'What is this? These two kings were men of great power a short while ago. Both were courageous and energetic but not at all quick to show any mercy. And they hated each other! I must say that I find it very strange that they should both be thought worthy to come to this delightful place. I should rather have thought that they deserved to be in the pit with Satan!'

The angel saw that it was necessary to dispel Tundale's perplexity and so explained to him how things stood. 'It is important,' he said, 'that you understand why God has had mercy upon them. Before they died, each had the opportunity to repent. When Conchobar fell ill, he opened his heart to God and made a vow to yield himself to Him and, if he recovered, to spend the rest of his life in penance. Donogh McCarthy was in prison for a long time before his death and gave away all his possessions to the poor in return for their prayers. He lived afterwards as a penniless prisoner and so, although both of them were once powerful men, they both died in poverty. And therefore, God did not abandon them but allowed them a route into Heaven. They have confessed all their sins and so they are entitled to mercy.'

Tundale was impressed by the great joy that he saw there, and yet the angel led him ever onwards.

They came to a wonderfully built and richly furnished hall where the walls seemed to be of solid gold set with precious stones and the roof was crystal. There were no doors or windows but there were wide entrances on every side so that none who wanted to enter would ever find themselves unable to do so. Inside, the light seemed as bright as that of a summer's day. The walls were large and circular, and the floor was paved with precious stones. There was no central pillar and the building seemed to have been built without any regard to cost. The sun shone inside as well as out.

Tundale looked around and his eye chanced upon a throne of gold and enamel. Silk and cloth-of-gold was spread upon it and sitting upon this throne was King Cormac MacCarthy, brother of Donogh MacCarthy and

King of South Munster for most of the fifteen years before his brother's second period of kingship. Tundale could plainly see that it was King Cormac, and he was dressed in all his finery. Many people were seeking an audience and carrying fine gifts to give to him. They all seemed very happy to be there and very pleased to be in the king's presence. Tundale stood nearby and watched closely, noting the worshipful attention that King Cormac received, the man who had once been his own renowned lord, for Tundale had served King Cormac and for this reason he was puzzled. There were many deacons and other clergymen, priests, and clerics all around him preparing to sing Mass in all their finery. The king seemed pleased to receive them all and around him were cups and chalices, sensors of silver and gold, gold basins and ornately decorated tables. Tundale thought that if he could only share in the joy and happiness that he could see in this hall, he would have all the bliss he could ask for. Everybody was kneeling before the king and saying: 'May happiness surround you and do so forever, and the fruits of your own generosity we now present to you here.'

Tundale turned to the angel and said incredulously: 'All these people I see, I do not recognize any of them! None of them were ever at court while I was there!'

The angel answered politely: 'I know that none of the people you can see here were ever part of King Cormac's retinue. But some are renowned pilgrims who received charity from King Cormac, and others were men of Holy Church whom he was never unwilling to support and therefore Almighty God deems it appropriate that his gifts should be received through their hands.'

'Has he received no punishment since leaving the world?' asked Tundale.

'He has suffered a great deal,' replied the angel, 'and shall suffer still more, as you shall see.'

Suddenly, the light in the building dimmed until it was as black as night and all the people melted away into the darkness. The king rose from his throne and moaned, then cried out loudly in anguish. Tundale followed him and came to where many men were kneeling upon the floor, their hands clasped in prayer, saying: 'Good Lord, if it is your will, have mercy upon this man.'

Then Tundale saw the king thrust up to his waist into a great fire and over his back a coarse hair shirt was fitted.

‘This is the punishment ordained for him,’ explained the angel. ‘It happens once a day, every day, for having relationships with other women after he was married and for breaking his marriage vows. Justice decrees that he should have his genitals burnt every night in a fire up to his waist for this. And for the murder of an earl beside the church of Saint Patrick he shall wear a hair shirt that is coarse and tangled and hurts him where the knots are. For everything else he has paid his penance.’

‘How long shall he suffer this for?’ asked Tundale.

‘For three hours every day,’ replied the angel, obtusely. ‘And for the remaining twenty-one hours he shall have the enjoyment and the company of his friends.’

And with this the angel led Tundale quickly onwards.

Soon they came to a high wall built of solid silver. Tundale looked but could see no doorways or entrances in it. Nevertheless, he soon found himself inside, although he had no idea how the angel had managed to gain entry for them both. But they found themselves in a delightful place, full of happiness and comfort. All around them were men and women singing merrily, extolling the praises of God Almighty without end. ‘May God and Son and Holy Ghost exist in eternal bliss,’ they sang. Their clothes were new and finely made, and as white as freshly-fallen snow. They were full of joy and joked and laughed and sang together, never tiring of praising the Holy Trinity and singing in such perfect harmony together that it was beautiful to hear. Such honesty and beauty could last, it seemed, forever; and there did, indeed, seem to be no sickness here and all of them lived in a perfect desire to exist together in love and charity.

The smell of this place surpassed all the sweetest perfumes of the world!

‘This joy,’ explained the angel, ‘is reserved for married men who have honored their marriage vows and for those who have supported the poor with almsgiving and for those rulers who have instilled into their subjects a love of God, and punished to the fullest extent of their power those who did wrong and who lived wicked lives. And to those also who help to support Holy Church, this place is ordained. And those who have lived well shall hear at Doomsday the voice of Jesus saying: ‘Come near my Father, blessed children, and receive my kingdom as I shall receive it, reserved for mankind since the beginning of the world.’

Tundale begged the angel to let him stay; the angel gave no answer but prepared to continue the journey.

They traveled still further, though with little effort, until they came to a man who bowed to Tundale as though he knew him and called him by his name, and they embraced each other. All those around were very happy to see Tundale and thanked Almighty God that he had been brought to them and cried: "May love and honor go to the Lord of pity and happiness who would prefer to see, not the death of sinful men but that they turn from their wicked ways and live again. Through His mercy He has ordained that this soul shall be taken from Hell's torment and delivered to this joyful place.

The angel led Tundale further onwards. Tundale looked attentively about him and saw that they were approaching another wall, and one that was considerably higher than the others had been. It seemed to be made of solid gold! A brighter gold than is ever seen here on Earth. Tundale could only gaze upon it in wonderment; its beauty held him in awe and submerged all his other thoughts.

Soon, as before, they found themselves, somehow, on the other side of this wall. Tundale found pleasure in looking at the most beautiful place he had ever seen. It was more beautiful than any earthly man can describe. There were golden thrones set with precious stones and draped in silk and cloth-of-gold. Holy men and women sat upon them in fine regalia. There were rich ornaments everywhere and the great brightness of the face of God illuminated them. It was brighter than the sun. Rays of light played upon the crowns of holy men and women like threads of gold wire and the crowns themselves were so encrusted with precious jewels that the men and women looked like kings and emperors, finer than kings and emperors! Before them lay books upon golden lecterns and from all of them the sound of 'Alleluia' was sweetly sung. Tundale thought the singing so beautiful that it displaced and surpassed everything he had seen so far. 'These men,' explained the angel, 'are holy men whom God loved and who were willing to live a chaste life and to accept martyrdom and to wash their clothes in the blood of the Lamb. They did not drink wine and were always truthful and are therefore dear to God and have been brought to this joy.'

Tundale found a place where there were shining pavilions made out of purple cloth and expensive furs and silver coins! The ropes were of gold and silver and silk all entwined together, and from them hung musical

chimes and instruments of all description that emitted a sweet sound in every register, from treble to bass, and filled the air with such a beautiful music that no man has ever heard the like, not by a hundred-thousandth part!

Many people were singing in perfect harmony within the shining white pavilions and the happiness they generated with their voices no Earthly imagination can fully conceive. Tundale had never experienced such bliss! Then the angel spoke to the soul of Tundale.

‘These people,’ he said mildly, ‘were all religious folk who lived their lives well. Friars, monks, priests, nuns, they all sustained their professions with integrity and were diligent in their attendance to God, serving Him day and night, eagerly and energetically fulfilling his commandments, and loving God and keeping a clear conscience through strict obedience and living a chaste life. They spoke only when it was necessary to speak and preferred silence to idle chatter, loving God above all else.’

‘Sir,’ said Tundale, ‘can we go in so that I can hear the music and experience this joy close at hand?’

‘You may stand here and listen,’ replied the angel, ‘for entry into this pavilion is not granted to you. And you may not see the Trinity in all its glory, but you may witness it from here. For all the people in this place have lived a chaste life on Earth and remained virgins until they died and lived a good life, through God’s grace, and have now been given the reward of remaining forever with the saints and the angels and having a clear view of God upon his throne.’

They went along a lovely path surrounded by men and women who seemed to Tundale to be like angels. The aroma was pleasant beyond description and sweet ethereal music filled the air to such an extent that Tundale forgot everything he had seen before and could only immerse his soul in the beauty around him. Voices sounded from lips that did not move and instruments harmonized without any hands to play them - there was all the music that can be imagined, and from above, the light played down in beams of gold, as though chains of golden thread and enameled silver were threaded through the air. No earthly light was like it. Around these golden beams hung priceless objects, jewels and bells and cups of gold, and among the objects and the beams flew angels with shining golden wings. No earthly man had ever witnessed such a sight. There was

such joyous music and melodious singing and such glorious wealth that no one on Earth could guess it, nor be able to describe it if they could.

Tundale was so enchanted that he could have stayed there forever. But the angel turned and said: 'Now you must come with me!'

Tundale followed the angel and came to where a huge tree stood; it was higher than any he had ever seen before, very broad at its base and within its leaves and branches hung every sort of fruit than a man might care to pick. There were flowers of every kind to be seen up in the foliage and of every sort of color, white, red, yellow and blue, herbs of every description and all the costly spices known to man, sweetly smelling and flourishing there among the leaves. Many colorful birds were sitting there among the fruits and the flowers, perched upon branches, and singing merrily, each with its own distinctive voice. It was a beautiful sound. Tundale listened attentively and laughed for sheer joy!

Underneath the branches, at the base of the tree, were small solitary dwellings in which sat men and women shining with a natural radiance. They were clothed in gold, wore crowns of precious jewels upon their heads and gave thanks to God for the gifts that they had received. In their hands they held scepters, as though they were kings and queens. No king or emperor on Earth has ever been so richly adorned.

'This tree could be likened to Holy Church,' said the angel turning to Tundale, 'and the people who live at its base are those who, through their devotion to God, built monasteries and convents and caused men to be diligent in the service of God and who founded churches and maintained the high virtues of the clergy and caused Holy Church to be supported, both in lands and in income, and who forsook the world in order to live a life of virtue and contemplation. They are, as you can see, reigning as one brotherhood and sisterhood, and shall have rest and peace for evermore, and joy that shall never end.'

The angel urged Tundale onwards and soon they came to yet another high, shining wall. It was more beautiful than any that Tundale had seen so far and, pausing to try to determine what it was made of, he saw that it was composed entirely of rare gemstones and minerals and the interlocking crystals seemed to burn with a fire; there were crystals of beryl, sapphire, emerald, topaz, garnet, ruby and diamond in such a blaze of sparkling light that Tundale had never imagined that such a thing could possibly exist.

‘Tundale,’ said the angel, ‘come and see what lies within.’ And they climbed to the top of this wall and looked down over everything. And the great joy that they could see was greater by far, a thousand times greater, than any joy that they had seen so far. For no words from any mouth, however intelligent and informed, even if it distilled the sum total of the world’s wisdom could tell – and no ear could hear and no eye see and no intellect comprehend – the joy that was there, and the bliss that God had ordained for his own. They looked down upon the nine orders of angels, shining as brightly as the sun and living among holy spirits. They could hear secrets that no man has ever heard.

‘Open your ears,’ urged the angel. ‘Listen and commit to memory everything you hear. God, who lives forever and shall have no end, will turn to you and be your friend. Look here at the joy and the happiness that will last for eternity for those whom you see.’

Tundale found still more to be seen among the angels; he glimpsed the Holy Trinity, saw God himself sitting in all his majesty. He gazed upon the sweet face that shone over everything and saw the angels basking in the glory and the radiance and the beauty of a face that shone more brightly than seven suns. This sight of God was food to the angels and was all the sustenance they required, as it was to all the spirits that lived there.

And from where they were standing the angel and Tundale could see every place they had visited, every place of joy and every place of torture and torment – in fact they could see the whole of creation, the whole cosmos, and every creature that God had made, every region of the Earth that basks in the bright beams of the sun. There is nothing of this world that can be concealed from someone who has seen Almighty God.

Standing on the top of that wall, Tundale and the angel had such power of comprehension that nothing was hidden from them, however far away it might be. Everything around them was visible, for three hundred and sixty degrees, all was shown to them at once when they looked. There are things that Tundale saw which I shall not speak of. He needed no book now to tell him the truth.

Suddenly, Saint Ruadan approached them; he welcomed Tundale happily and took him into his arms and hugged him.

‘My son, your arrival here is blessed indeed,’ he said, and they stood together. ‘From now onwards, while you live in the world you can look

forward to a good end to your life. I was once your patron saint and in your worldly life you should be willing to show me some generosity and to kneel, as you well know, in my presence.’

When Saint Ruadan had fallen silent, Tundale looked happily about him and saw Saint Patrick of Ireland, dressed in shining robes alongside many bishops decked out in their finest regalia. They were all joyful and there was no sound of any sighing! Among that blessed company Tundale could see four bishops whom he recognized. They were all good men; one of them was Saint Cellach, a former archbishop of Armagh, who did much good for the sake of Our Lord. Another was Malachias O’Moore, who had become archbishop of Armagh after him and gave everything that he had to the poor. He founded a large number of churches and collages, as many as forty-four in all, endowed them with land and rents and so allowed many men of religion to serve God devotedly, although he hardly retained enough for himself to live on.

The third bishop that Tundale recognized was Malachias O’Moore’s brother, the former bishop of Clogher, a wealthy but a retiring man. The fourth whom he recognized was Nehemiah O’Morietach, bishop of Cloyne and Ross, a just man while he lived and by far the most intellectual of the four. Beside them was a brightly shining seat which nobody was sitting upon. Tundale asked whom the seat was for. Malachias O’Moore replied:

‘This seat has been prepared for one of our dearest brothers. He shall sit upon it when he arrives, but he is still living in the world, and it shall remain unused until he comes.’

Tundale was delighted with the seat and as he gazed at it joyfully the angel approached him and said excitedly:

‘Do you like it here, then? You have certainly seen many a beautiful sight!’

‘That I have!’ said Tundale and laughed. ‘I have seen joy enough! Dear lord, I ask you, have the grace to let me stay! I would like never to have to leave this place but to remain here forever!’

‘Your request,’ replied the angel, ‘cannot be granted. I’m afraid you must return to your body. Hold in your memory what you have seen, though, and remember well what you have heard.’

Tundale was crestfallen and wept.

‘Lord, what have I done,’ he begged, ‘that I must return again so soon to my wretched body and leave all the joy that is here?’

‘None may dwell here,’ replied the angel, ‘except for those who have practiced holy celibacy and kept their bodies clean and lived as virgins and for the love of God Almighty have wholly forsaken the world and given themselves to God with all their mind and all their will. Such a state could not in any way describe you when you were living in your earthly body. You would not bow to God’s will in the least bit, and you would not listen to me either. You are not worthy to dwell here. In no way are you worthy! Go again into your body and clean out the filth from your heart! Abstain from sin! You shall have my council and my help at all times, should you wish to receive it, and if you do so you shall not fail to achieve everlasting bliss.’

When the angel had said this, they turned away and left all that joy and happiness behind them.

He suddenly felt very heavy and Tundale perceived the presence of his body around him, a weight that he could not throw off. He opened his eyes and could see through them, found that he could draw his arms up to his face and move his legs. Before saying a word, he let out a great sigh. Those around him were astonished; they were filled with wonder and perplexity and those who loved him felt great happiness that he had come back to life when they had thought that he was dead. He lifted himself up into a sitting position, sighed and then wept as he cried out: ‘Lord Jesus Christ! Mercy! None worse than me has ever been born of woman! But now, while I still have time, I shall amend my life, with the help and the grace of God, who suffered pain and died upon the cross for me. May it please Him not to condemn my soul!’

Then he muttered to himself, things that sounded like: ‘Wretch! Why have you lived such a wicked life? I have been such a wicked man!’

He admonished himself in a fit of regret and anger, remembering everything that the angel had shown to him, and it looked for all the world as though he was showing repentance. All those beside Tundale were astonished to see such a change in him, for they knew his fierce and unyielding character.

One of those who was standing beside him asked if he would like a priest to hear his confession and give him the Eucharist.

‘Yes,’ he answered. ‘I would like a priest to come and speak with me in private and to give me the safety of absolution. Please find me one so that I may take the Eucharist, for I renounce all my evil ways.’

A priest soon arrived with his wafers and when Tundale had confessed, he meekly received the Host.

‘Oh Lord,’ said Tundale then, ‘may You receive the highest love as you deserve, for Your mercy and Your goodness surpasses all of men’s wickedness. Although sins may be great, Your mercy and Your forgiveness is greater still.’

By now a large number of men and women had gathered about him. And he told them all where he had been and what he had heard and what he had seen. Everything that he had experienced was safely stored in his memory; he was able to recall it all. And Tundale warned everybody who feared torture to improve their lives here on Earth before they died. He advised them all to lead a holy life and to abandon their wicked ways, urged them to embrace Almighty God and to serve Him devotedly, preached words of God that had never been heard before. And he comforted the good by recalling the joy and happiness that he had seen.

And while he lived, from thenceforth he led a virtuous life. He paid no regard to this world but lived in penance, giving away all his wealth to the poor so that they might pray for him. He desired only poverty. And when the time came for him to pass on, as God’s will decreed, his soul departed from his body and went to heaven to dwell with Almighty God. More joy is there than any tongue can tell. He who made heaven, Earth and all things, brought Tundale at last into eternal happiness.

All of you who have heard my story, say ‘Amen’ for charity!

‘Here ends the story of Tundale,’ writes Richard Heeg. ‘Be it true or be it false, I wrote it as the copy was.’