

## THE PRESIDENTIAL PSALM

by Mac E. Barrick

The parody of the Twenty-Third Psalm about which Gary Fine writes<sup>1</sup> is indeed an old one. Ray B. Browne collected a version of it from the 1930's:

Hoover is my shepherd and I am in want. He maketh me to lie down in park benches. He leadeth me besides free soup houses. He restoreth doubt in the Republican Party. He leadeth us in paths of destruction for his party's sake. Yea through the valley of the shadow of Starvation I fear evil, for they are against me. Thou preparest a reduction in salaries before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou annointest my income with taxes, my expenses over my income. Surely unemployment and poverty will follow me all the days of the Republican Administration, and I will dwell in rented houses forever.<sup>2</sup>

Variants of it have appeared frequently since then. Michael J. Preston recalls a similar Psalm in circulation during the 1958 (?) election, beginning, "Ike is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me lie down on park benches; he leadeth me beside stilled factories."<sup>3</sup> The following updated version was circulated in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, in November and December of 1970, a gubernatorial election year in the state:

## Nixon Psalm

Nixon is my shepherd, I am in want,  
He maketh me lie down on park benches,  
He leadeth me beside still factories,  
He guideth me in the path of unemployment,  
For the sake of his party.  
Yea, though I walk in the path of the soup  
kitchen, I am hungry---  
He anointeth my income with taxes,  
So my expenses runneth over my income,  
Surely poverty and hard living will follow me,  
All the days of the Republican Administration,  
And I shall live in a rented house forever.

5000 years ago, Moses said,  
"Pick up your shovels, mount your camel or  
your ass,  
And I will lead you to the promised land."

5000 years later, Rossevelt said,  
"Lay down your shovel, light up a camel,  
Sit on your ass,  
This is the promised land."

Now Boys, be careful---.  
 Today, Nixon will take your shovel,  
 Sell your camel, kick your ass,  
 And tell you there is no promised land.

Preston also published a variant of the Nixon Psalm obtained from a truck stop in Colorado:

#### Psalm of Nixon

Nixon is my shepherd I shall not want, he leadeth me beside the factories, he restoreth my doubts in the Republican Party, he guideth me to the path of unemployment for the party's sake.

I do not fear evil for thou art against me. Thou annointest my wages with freezes so that my expenses runneth over my income. Surely poverty and hard living shall follow the Republican Party and I shall live in a rented house forever.

5,000 years ago Moses said, "Park your camels, pick up your shovels, mount your asses and I shall lead you to the Promised Land."

5,000 years later F. D. Roosevelt said, "Lay down your shovels, sit on your asses, light up a Camel, this is the Promised Land."

Today Nixon will tax your shovel, sell your camel, kick your ass, and tell you there is no Promised Land.

J. Q. Public.

P.S. I am glad I am an American  
 I am glad that I am free,  
 But I wish that I was a little doggie  
 And Nixon were a tree.

The Promised Land references appearing in both Nixon Psalms and in the McGovern version already published by Gary Fine are usually included in a similar bit of political satire, which like the Psalm is generally circulated surreptitiously in typed or Xeroxed copies. This is the story of "The President's Statue." The satire usually takes the form of a letter appealing for funds to construct a statue of the then current President and generally resembles the following example collected by Alan Dundes in 1962:

Dear Friend:

We have the distinguished honor of being members of the committee to raise fifty million dollars to be used for placing a statue of John F. Kennedy in the Hall of Fame, Washington, D. C.

This committee was in quite a quandary about selecting the proper location for the statue. It was thought not wise to place it beside that of George Washington, who never told a lie, nor beside that of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who never told the truth, since John F. Kennedy can never tell the difference.

After careful consideration, we think it should be placed beside the statue of Christopher Columbus, the greatest New Dealer of them all, in that he started out not knowing where he was going, and in arriving, did not know where he was, and in returning, did not know where he had been, and managed to do it all on borrowed money.

The inscription on the statue will read:

"I pledge allegiance to John F. Kennedy and to the national debt for which he stands, one man, expendable, with graft and corruption for all."

Five thousand years ago, Moses said to the children of Israel, "Pick up your shovel, mount your camels and asses, and I will lead you to the Promised Land." Nearly five thousand years later Roosevelt said, "Lay down your shovels, light up a Camel, sit on your ass; this is the Promised Land." Now Kennedy is attempting to steal your shovel, raise the price of Camels, kick your ass, and tell you there ain't no Promised Land.

If you are one of those few with money left after paying taxes, we will expect a generous contribution from you for this very worthwhile project.

Sincerely,

The Committee

As Dundes notes, an early version of the story ends with Roosevelt, but the letter is being constantly revised to refer to Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson (see Time, May 19, 1967, p. 17) and Nixon.

Because of its structure, the Twenty-Third Psalm lends itself easily to parody. Fine has already cited the version by Alan Simpson and Robert A. Baker beginning "The Lord is my external-internal integrative mechanism." The following is offered as a historical oddity:

#### A MODERN DAVID

The Ford is my auto, I shall not want (another);  
It maketh me to lie down beneath it;  
It soreth my soul.  
It leadeth me into the paths of ridicule  
For its name's sake.  
Yea, though I ride through the valleys,  
I am towed up the hills.  
I fear much evil; my rod and my engines discomfort me.  
I annoint my tires with patches;  
My radiator runneth over;  
I repair my blowouts in the presence of mine enemies.  
Surely, if this thing follows me all the days of my life,  
I shall dwell in the bug-house forever.

## NOTES

1. "In Search of the Quadrennial Perennials," Folklore Forum, 7 (1974), 203-205.
2. "Parodied Prayers and Scripture," Journal of American Folklore, 72 (1959), 94.
3. "Xerox-Lore," Keystone Folklore, 19 (1974), 24.
4. "The President's Statue and the Promised Land," Journal of the Midcontinent American Studies Association, 4 (1963), 52-55.
5. See the example reproduced by Preston, art, cit., p. 23, which is virtually identical to that printed by Dundes, without the inscription but with the following postscript: "P.S. It is said that President Nixon is considering the changing of the Republican Party emblem from an elephant to a condom, because it stands for inflation, protects a bunch of pricks, halts production, and gives a false sense of security while one is being screwed."