

THE SCEPTER

The aging king was restless as he sought a night's repose
From lengthy hours of business in his court of friends and foes,
From worry for his kingdom, his regrets in plans that failed,
Distrust of sworn allegiances in vassals when they hailed.
He felt his soul was on the rack, stretched tight to toss and turn,
With cares that robbed his mind of rest and drowned him with concern.

A fragrant breeze of summer gently slipped into the room
From open balconies above the garden in the gloom.
The curtains on the canopy that hung about his bed
Were slowly drawn aside, as by a ghostly hand that fled.
The monarch stared with wide-eyed fear and looked from wall to wall,
But only heard a bodyguard's loud coughing in the hall.

Again the king, with pillowed head, re-closed his weary eyes
And prayed a prayer for precious sleep before the sun would rise.
Then, suddenly, a whispered sentence echoed in his ears,
A proverb from the saints of old, a maxim known for years:
"There is no king who better rules his people or his land
Than one who serves the King of Kings and kneels to His command."

Arising from his royal bed, he searched to find from whom
The voice had come, but there was simply no one in the room.
When he approached a balcony, the moon broke through a cloud
And beamed about the countryside, of which he was so proud.
As he surveyed the realm he ruled with scepter strong and stern,
He felt the lust for power from his early days return.

"I've done my best," he said aloud, then thought, "They fear my hand."
The moonlit scene began to fade; the darkness, to expand.
At last, the growing gloom engulfed his soul in grim despair,
While stifling scents of musty ledgers seemed to haunt the air.
"I've done the worst," he said aloud, then thought, "I've been a slave.
All glories gained, all riches reaped, are severed by the grave."

He knelt and gazed out upward toward the clouds that clothed the night.
Again the moon broke through to cast about its silver light.
And whether 'twas a vision, or the play of mist and glare,
He saw the Savior's face up in the sky above him there.
He bowed himself, declaring, "I surrender! You are King!"
At once, with soul unburdened, he could feel his heart take wing.

The aging sovereign rose with joy and danced about with glee.
Two guards burst through the chamber doors. Their duty was to see
That all was well. "And all is well!" their king dismissed the pair.
Then shortly after lying down, he fell asleep in prayer.
He dreamt he was a simple priest, and could not understand
Why, when he woke, he held the royal scepter in his hand.

—*David L. Hatton, 3/27/1999*