MILTON'S
PARADISE LOST.
BOOKS VII. AND VIII.

JOHN MILTON

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BY THE LATE

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INTRODUCTION

LIFE OF MILTON.

MILTON'S life falls into three clearly defined divisions. The first period ends with the poet's return from Italy in 1639; the second at the Restoration in 1660, when release from the fetters of politics enabled him to remind the world that he was a great poet; the third is brought to a close with his death in 1674. *Paradise Lost* belongs to the last of these periods; but we propose to summarise the main events of all three.

John Milton was born on December 9, 1608, in London. He came, in his own words, *ex genere honesto*. A family of Miltons had been settled in Oxfordshire since the reign of Elizabeth. The poet's father had been educated at an Oxford school, possibly as a chorister in one of the College choir-schools, and imbibing Anglican sympathies had conformed to the Established Church. For this he was disinherited by his Roman Catholic father. He settled in London, following the profession of scrivener. A scrivener combined the occupations of lawyer and law-stationer. It appears to have been a lucrative calling; certainly John Milton (the poet was named after the father) attained to easy circumstances. He married about 1600, and had six children, of whom several died young. The third child was the poet.

The elder Milton was evidently a man of considerable culture, in particular an accomplished musician, and a composer whose madrigals were deemed worthy of being printed side by side with those of Byrd, Orlando Gibbons and other leading musicians of the time. To him, no doubt, the poet owed the love of music of which we see frequent indications in

the poems[1]. Realising, too, that in his son lay the promise and possibility of future greatness, John Milton took the utmost pains to have the boy adequately educated; and the lines *Ad Patrem* show that the ties of affection between father and child were of more than ordinary closeness.

Milton was sent to St Paul's School about the year 1620. Here two influences, apart from those of ordinary school-life, may have affected him particularly. The headmaster was a good English scholar; he published a grammar containing many extracts from English poets, notably Spenser; it is reasonable to assume that he had not a little to do with the encouragement and guidance of Milton's early taste for English poetry[2]. Also, the founder of St Paul's School, Colet, had prescribed as part of the school-course the study of certain early Christian writers, whose influence is said to be directly traceable in Milton's poems and may in some cases have suggested his choice of sacred themes[2]. While at St Paul's, Milton also had a tutor at home, Thomas Young, a Scotchman, afterwards an eminent Puritan divine—the inspirer, doubtless, of much of his pupil's Puritan sympathies. And Milton enjoyed the signal advantage of growing up in the stimulating atmosphere of cultured home-life. Most men do not realise that the word 'culture' signifies anything very definite or desirable before they pass to the University; for Milton, however, home-life meant, from the first, not only broad interests and refinement, but active encouragement towards literature and study. In 1625 he left St Paul's. Of his extant English poems[3] only one, *On the*

[1] Milton was very fond of the organ; see *Il Penseroso*, 161, note. During his residence at Horton Milton made occasional journeys to London to hear, and obtain instruction (probably from Henry Lawes) in, music. It was an age of great musical development. See "Milton's Knowledge of Music" by Mr W. H. Hadow, in *Milton Memorial Lectures* (1908).

[2] See the paper "Milton as Schoolboy and Schoolmaster" by Mr A. F. Leach, read before the British Academy, Dec. 10, 1908.

[3] His paraphrases of *Psalms* cxiv. cxxxvi. scarcely come under this heading. Aubrey says in his quaint *Life* of Milton: "Anno Domini 1619 he was ten yeares old, as by his picture [the portrait by Cornelius Jansen]: and was then a poet."

Death of a Fair Infant, dates from his school-days; but we are told that he had written much verse, English and Latin. And his early training had done that which was all-important: it had laid the foundation of the far-ranging knowledge which makes *Paradise Lost* unique for diversity of suggestion and interest.

Milton went to Christ's College, Cambridge, in the Easter term of 1625, took his B.A. degree in 1629, proceeded M.A. in 1632, and in the latter year left Cambridge. The popular view of Milton's connection with the University will be coloured for all time by Johnson's unfortunate story that for some unknown offence he "suffered the public indignity of corporal correction." For various reasons this story is now discredited by the best judges. It is certain, however, that early in 1626 Milton did have some serious difficulty with his tutor, which led to his removal from Cambridge for a few weeks and his transference to another tutor on his return later in the term. He spoke of the incident bitterly at the time in one of his Latin poems, and he spoke of Cambridge bitterly in after years. On the other hand he voluntarily passed seven years at the University, and resented strongly the imputations brought against him in the "Smectymnuus" controversy that he had been in ill-favour with the authorities of his college. Writing in 1642, he takes the opportunity "to acknowledge publicly with all grateful mind, that more than ordinary favour and respect, which I found above any of my equals at the hands of those courteous and learned men, the fellows of that college wherein I spent some years: who at my parting, after I had taken two degrees, as the manner is, signified many ways how much better it would content them that I would stay; as by many letters full of kindness and loving respect, both before that time, and long after, I was assured of their singular good affection towards me[1]." And if we look into those uncomplimentary allusions to Cambridge which date from the controversial period of his life we see that the feeling they

[1] *An Apology for Smectymnuus*, *P. W.* III. 111. Perhaps Cambridge would have been more congenial to Milton had he been sent to Emmanuel College, long a centre of Puritanism. Dr John Preston, then Master of the college, was a noted leader of the Puritan party.

represent is hardly more than a phase of his theological bias. He detested ecclesiasticism, and for him the two Universities (there is a fine impartiality in his diatribes) are the strongholds of what he detested: "nurseries of superstition"—"not yet well recovered from the scholastic grossness of barbarous ages"—given up to "monkish and miserable sophistry," and unprogressive in their educational methods. But it may fairly be assumed that Milton the scholar and poet, who chose to spend seven years at Cambridge, owed to her more than Milton the fierce controversialist admitted or knew. A poet he had proved himself before leaving the University in 1632. The short but exquisite ode *At a Solemn Music*, and the *Nativity Hymn* (1629), were already written.

Milton's father had settled at Horton in Buckinghamshire. Thither the son retired in July, 1632. He had gone to Cambridge with the intention of qualifying for some profession, perhaps the Church[1]. This purpose was soon given up, and when Milton returned to his father's house he seems to have made up his mind that there was no profession which he cared to enter. He would choose the better part of studying and preparing himself, by rigorous self-discipline and application, for the far-off divine event to which his whole life moved.

It was Milton's constant resolve to achieve something that should vindicate the ways of God to men, something great that should justify his own possession of unique powers—powers of which, with no trace of egotism, he proclaims himself proudly conscious. The feeling finds repeated expression in his prose; it is the guiding-star that shines clear and steadfast even through the mists of politics. He has a mission to fulfil, a purpose to accomplish, no less than the most fanatic of religious enthusiasts; and the means whereby this end is to be attained are

[1] Cf. Milton's own words: "the church, to whose service, by the intentions of my parents and friends, I was destined of a child, and in my own resolutions" (*The Reason of Church Government*, *P. W.* II. 482). What kept him from taking orders was primarily his objection to Church discipline and government: he spoke of himself as "Church-outed by the prelates."

devotion to religion, devotion to learning, and ascetic purity of life.

This period of self-centred isolation lasted from 1632 to 1638. Gibbon tells us among the many wise things contained in that most wise book the *Autobiography*, that every man has two educations: that which he receives from his teachers and that which he owes to himself, the latter being infinitely the more important. During these five years Milton completed his second education; ranging the whole world of classical[1] antiquity and absorbing the classical genius so thoroughly that the ancients were to him what they afterwards became to Landor, what they have never become to any other English poet in the same degree, even as the very breath of his being; pursuing, too, other interests, such as music, astronomy[2] and the study of Italian literature; and combining these vast and diverse influences into a splendid equipment of hard-won, well-ordered culture. The world has known many greater scholars in the technical, limited sense than Milton, but few men, if any, who have mastered more things worth mastering in art, letters and scholarship[3]. It says much for the poet that

[1] He was closely familiar too with post-classical writers like Philo and the neo-Platonists; nor must we forget the mediæval element in his learning, due often to Rabbinical teaching.

[2] Science—"natural philosophy," as he terms it—is one of the branches of study advocated in his treatise *On Education*. Of his early interest in astronomy there is a reminiscence in *Paradise Lost*, II. 708—11; where "Milton is not referring to an imaginary comet, but to one which actually did appear when he was a boy of 10 (1618), in the constellation called Ophiuchus. It was of enormous size, the tail being recorded as longer even than that of 1858. It was held responsible by educated and learned men of the day for disasters. Evelyn says in his diary, 'The effects of that comet, 1618, still working in the prodigious revolutions now beginning in Europe, especially in Germany'" (Professor Ray Lankester).

[3] Milton's poems with their undercurrent of perpetual allusion are the best proof of the width of his reading; but interesting supplementary evidence is afforded by the Common-place Book discovered in 1874, and printed by the *Camden Society*, 1876. It contains extracts from about 80 different authors whose works Milton had studied. The entries seem to have been made in the period 1637—46.

he was sustained through this period of study, pursued *ohne Hast, ohne Rast*, by the full consciousness that all would be crowned by a masterpiece which should add one more testimony to the belief in that God who ordains the fates of men. It says also a very great deal for the father who suffered his son to follow in this manner the path of learning.

True, Milton gave more than one earnest of his future fame. The dates of the early pieces—*L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Arcades*, *Comus* and *Lycidas*—are not all certain; but probably each was composed at Horton before 1638. Four of them have great autobiographic value as an indirect commentary, written from Milton's coign of seclusion, upon the moral crisis through which English life and thought were passing, the clash between the careless hedonism of the Cavalier world and the deepening austerity of Puritanism. In *L'Allegro* the poet holds the balance almost equal between the two opposing tendencies. In *Il Penseroso* it becomes clear to which side his sympathies are leaning. *Comus* is a covert prophecy of the downfall of the Court-party, while *Lycidas* openly "foretells the ruine" of the Established Church. The latter poem is the final utterance of Milton's lyric genius. Here he reaches, in Mr Mark Pattison's words, the high-water mark of English verse; and then—the pity of it—he resigns that place among the *lyrici vates* of which the Roman singer was ambitious, and for nearly twenty years suffers his lyre to hang mute and rusty in the temple of the Muses.

The composition of *Lycidas* may be assigned to the year 1637. In the spring of the next year Milton started for Italy. It was natural that he should seek inspiration in the land where many English poets, from Chaucer to Shelley, have found it. Milton remained abroad some fifteen months. Originally he had intended to include Sicily and Greece in his travels, but news of the troubles in England hastened his return. He was brought face to face with the question whether or not he should bear his part in the coming struggle; whether without self-reproach he could lead any longer this life of learning and indifference to the public weal. He decided as we might have expected that he would decide, though some good critics see

cause to regret the decision. Milton puts his position very clearly in his *Defensio Secunda*: "I thought it base to be travelling for amusement abroad, while my fellow-citizens were fighting for liberty at home." And later: "I determined to relinquish the other pursuits in which I was engaged, and to transfer the whole force of my talents and my industry to this one important object" (i.e. the vindication of liberty).

The summer of 1639 (July) found Milton back in England. Immediately after his return he wrote the *Epitaphium Damonis*, the beautiful elegy in which he lamented the death of his school friend, Diodati. *Lycidas* was the last of the English lyrics: the *Epitaphium*, which should be studied in close connection with *Lycidas*, the last of the long Latin poems. Thenceforth, for a long spell, the rest was silence, so far as concerned poetry. The period which for all men represents the strength and maturity of manhood, which in the cases of other poets produces the best and most characteristic work, is with Milton a blank. In twenty years he composed no more than a bare handful of Sonnets, and even some of these are infected by the taint of political *animus*. Other interests claimed him—the question of Church-reform, education, marriage, and, above all, politics.

Milton's first treatise upon the government of the Church (*Of Reformation in England*) appeared in 1641. Others followed in quick succession. The abolition of Episcopacy was the watchword of the enemies of the Anglican Church—the *delenda est Carthago* cry of Puritanism, and no one enforced the point with greater eloquence than Milton. During 1641 and 1642 he wrote five pamphlets on the subject. Meanwhile he was studying the principles of education. On his return from Italy he had undertaken the training of his nephews. This led to consideration of the best educational methods; and in the *Tractate of Education*, 1644, Milton assumed the part of educational theorist. In the previous year, May, 1643, he married[1]. The marriage proved unfortunate.

[1] His wife (who was only seventeen) was Mary Powell, eldest daughter of Richard Powell, of Forest Hill, a village some little distance from Oxford. She went to stay with her father in July,

Its immediate outcome was the pamphlets on divorce. Clearly he had little leisure for literature proper.

The finest of Milton's prose works, *Areopagitica*, a plea for the free expression of opinion, was published in 1644. In 1645[1] appeared the first collection of his poems. In 1649 his advocacy of the anti-royalist cause was recognised by the offer of a post under the newly appointed Council of State. His bold vindication of the trial of Charles I., *The Tenure of Kings*, had appeared earlier in the same year. Milton accepted the offer, becoming Latin[2] Secretary to the Committee of Foreign Affairs.

1643, and refused to return to Milton; why, it is not certain. She was reconciled to her husband in 1645, bore him four children, and died in 1652, in her twenty-seventh year. No doubt, the scene in *P. L.* x. 909—36, in which Eve begs forgiveness of Adam, reproduced the poet's personal experience, while many passages in *Samson Agonistes* must have been inspired by the same cause.

[1] i.e. old style. The volume was entered on the registers of the Stationers' Company under the date of October 6th, 1645. It was published on Jan. 2, 1645—46, with the following title-page:

"*Poems of Mr. John Milton, both English and Latin, Compos'd at several times. Printed by his true Copies. The Songs were set in Musick by Mr. Henry Lawes Gentleman of the Kings Chappel, and one of His Majesties Private Musick.*

'————*Baccare frontem*
Cingite, ne vati noceat mala lingua futuro. VIRGIL, *Eclog.* 7.

Printed and publish'd according to Order. London, Printed by Ruth Raworth for Humphrey Moseley, and are to be sold at the signe of the Princes Arms in Pauls Churchyard. 1645."

From the prefatory Address to the Reader it is clear that the collection was due to the initiative of the publisher. Milton's own feeling is expressed by the motto, where the words "*vati futuro*" show that, as he judged, his great achievement was yet to come. The volume was divided into two parts, the first containing the English, the second the Latin poems. *Comus* was printed at the close of the former, with a separate title-page to mark its importance. The prominence given to the name of Henry Lawes reflects Milton's friendship.

[2] A Latin Secretary was required because the Council scorned, as Edward Phillips says, "to carry on their affairs in the wheedling, lisping jargon of the cringing French." Milton's salary was £288, in modern money about £900.

There was nothing distasteful about his duties. He drew up the despatches to foreign governments, translated state-papers, and served as interpreter to foreign envoys. Had his duties stopped here his acceptance of the post would, I think, have proved an unqualified gain. It brought him into contact with the first men in the state, gave him a practical insight into the working of national affairs and the motives of human action; in a word, furnished him with that experience of life which is essential to all poets who aspire to be something more than "the idle singers of an empty day." But unfortunately the secretaryship entailed the necessity of defending at every turn the past course of the revolution and the present policy of the Council. Milton, in fact, held a perpetual brief as advocate for his party. Hence the endless and unedifying controversies into which he drifted; controversies which wasted the most precious years of his life, warped, as some critics think, his nature, and eventually cost him his eyesight.

Between 1649 and 1660 Milton produced no less than eleven pamphlets. Several of these arose out of the publication of the famous *Eikon Basilike*. The book was printed in 1649 and created so extraordinary a sensation that Milton was asked to reply to it; and did so with *Eikonoklastes*. Controversy of this barren type has the inherent disadvantage that once started it may never end. The Royalists commissioned the Leyden professor, Salmasius, to prepare a counterblast, the *Defensio Regia*, and this in turn was met by Milton's *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*, 1651, over the preparation of which he lost what little power of eyesight remained[1]. Salmasius retorted, and died before his

[1] Perhaps this was the saddest part of the episode. Milton tells us in the *Defensio Secunda* that his eyesight was injured by excessive study in boyhood: "from twelve years of age I hardly ever left my studies or went to bed before midnight." Continual reading and writing increased the infirmity, and by 1650 the sight of the left eye had gone. He was warned that he must not use the other for book-work. Unfortunately this was just the time when the Commonwealth stood most in need of his services. If Milton had not written the first *Defence* he might have retained his partial vision, at least for a time. The choice lay between

second *farrago* of scurrilities was issued: Milton was bound to answer, and the *Defensio Secunda* appeared in 1654. Neither of the combatants gained anything by the dispute; while the subsequent development of the controversy in which Milton crushed the Amsterdam pastor and professor, Morus, goes far to prove the contention of Mr Mark Pattison, that it was an evil day when the poet left his study at Horton to do battle for the Commonwealth amid the vulgar brawls of the market-place:

"Not here, O Apollo,
Were haunts meet for thee."

Fortunately this poetic interregnum in Milton's life was not destined to last much longer. The Restoration came, a blessing in disguise, and in 1660[1] the ruin of Milton's political party and of his personal hopes, the absolute overthrow of the cause for which he had fought for twenty years, left him free. The author of *Lycidas* could once more become a poet.

Much has been written upon this second period, 1639—60. We saw what parting of the ways confronted Milton on his return from Italy. Did he choose aright? Should he have continued upon the path of learned leisure? There are writers who argue that Milton made a mistake. A poet, they say, should keep clear of political strife: fierce controversy can benefit no man: who touches pitch must expect to be, certainly will be, defiled: Milton sacrificed twenty of the best years of his life, doing work which an underling could have done and which was not worth doing: another *Comus* might have been written, a loftier *Lycidas*: that literature should be the poorer by the absence of these possible masterpieces, that the second

private good and public duty. He repeated in 1650 the sacrifice of 1639. All this is brought out in his *Second Defence*. By the spring of 1652 Milton was quite blind. He was then in his forty-fourth year. Probably the disease from which he suffered was amaurosis. See the *Appendix* on *P. L.* III. 22—26. Throughout *P. L.* and *Samson Agonistes* there are frequent references to his affliction.

[1] Milton probably began *Paradise Lost* in 1658; but it was not till the Restoration in 1660 that he definitely resigned all his political hopes, and became quite free to realise his poetical ambition.

greatest genius which England has produced should in a way be the "inheritor of unfulfilled renown," is and must be a thing entirely and terribly deplorable. This is the view of the purely literary critic.

There remains the other side of the question. It may fairly be contended that had Milton elected in 1639 to live the scholar's life apart from "the action of men," *Paradise Lost*, as we have it, or *Samson Agonistes* could never have been written. Knowledge of life and human nature, insight into the problems of men's motives and emotions, grasp of the broader issues of the human tragedy, all these were essential to the author of an epic poem; they could only be obtained through commerce with the world; they would have remained beyond the reach of a recluse. Dryden complained that Milton saw nature through the spectacles of books: we might have had to complain that he saw men through the same medium. Fortunately it is not so: and it is not so because at the age of thirty-two he threw in his fortunes with those of his country; like the diver in Schiller's ballad he took the plunge which was to cost him so dear. The mere man of letters will never move the world. Æschylus fought at Marathon: Shakespeare was practical to the tips of his fingers; a better business man than Goethe there was not within a radius of a hundred miles of Weimar.

This aspect of the question is emphasised by Milton himself. The man, he says, "who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem, that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy[1]." Again, in estimating the qualifications which the writer of an epic such as he contemplated should possess, he is careful to include "insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs[2]."

Truth usually lies half-way between extremes. perhaps it does so here. No doubt, Milton did gain very greatly by

[1] *An Apology for Smectymnuus*, *P. W* III. 118.
[2] *The Reason of Church Government*, *P. W.* II. 481.

breathing awhile the larger air of public life, even though that air was often tainted by much impurity. No doubt, too, twenty years of contention must have left their mark even on Milton. In one of the very few places where he "abides our question," Shakespeare writes (*Sonnet* CXI.):

> "O! for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
> The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
> That did not better for my life provide,
> Than public means, which public manners breeds:
> Thence comes it that my name receives a brand;
> And almost thence my nature is subdued
> To what it works in, like the dyer's hand."

Milton's genius was subdued in this way If we compare him, the Milton of the great epics and of *Samson Agonistes*, with Homer or Shakespeare—and none but the greatest can be his parallel—we find in him a certain want of humanity, a touch of narrowness. He lacks the large-heartedness, the genial, generous breadth of Shakespeare; the sympathy and sense of the *lacrimæ rerum* that even in *Troilus and Cressida* or *Timon of Athens* are there for those who have eyes wherewith to see them. Milton reflects in some degree the less gracious aspects of Puritanism, its intolerance, want of humour, one-sided intensity; and it seems natural to assume that this narrowness was to a great extent the price he paid for twenty years of ceaseless special pleading and dispute. The real misfortune of his life lay in the fact that he fell on evil, angry days when there was no place for moderate men. He had to be one of two things: either a controversialist or a student: there was no *via media*. Probably he chose aright; but we could wish that the conditions under which he chose had been different. And he is so great, so majestic in the nobleness of his life, in the purity of his motives, in the self-sacrifice of his indomitable devotion to his ideals, that we could wish not even to seem to pronounce judgment at all.

The last part of Milton's life, 1660—74, passed quietly. At the age of fifty-two he was thrown back upon poetry, and could at length discharge his self-imposed obligation. The early

poems he had never regarded as a fulfilment of the debt due to his Creator. Even when the fire of political strife burned at its hottest, Milton did not forget the purpose which he had conceived in his boyhood. Of that purpose *Paradise Lost* was the attainment. Begun about 1658, it was finished in 1663, the year of Milton's third[1] marriage; revised from 1663 to 1665; and eventually issued in 1667. Before its publication Milton had commenced (in the autumn of 1665) its sequel *Paradise Regained*, which in turn was closely followed by *Samson Agonistes*. The completion of *Paradise Regained* may be assigned to the year 1666—that of *Samson Agonistes* to 1667. Some time was spent in their revision; and in January, 1671, they were published together, in a single volume.

In 1673 Milton brought out a reprint of the 1645 edition of his *Poems*, adding most of the sonnets[2] written in the interval[3].

[1] Milton's second marriage took place in the autumn of 1656, i.e. after he had become blind. His wife died in February, 1658. Cf. the *Sonnet*, "Methought I saw my late espoused saint," the pathos of which is heightened by the fact that he had never seen her.

[2] The number of Milton's sonnets is twenty-three (if we exclude the piece "On the New Forcers of Conscience"), five of which were written in Italian, probably during the time of his travels in Italy, 1638, 1639. Ten sonnets were printed in the edition of 1645, the last of them being that entitled (from the *Cambridge* MS.) "To the Lady Margaret Ley." The remaining thirteen were composed between 1645 and 1658. The concluding sonnet, therefore (to the memory of Milton's second wife), immediately preceded his commencement of *Paradise Lost*. Four of these poems (XV. XVI. XVII. XXII.) could not, on account of their political tone, be included in the edition of 1673. They were published by Edward Phillips together with his memoir of Milton, 1694 (*Sonnet* XVII. having previously appeared in a *Life* of Vane). The sonnet on the "Massacre in Piedmont" is usually considered the finest of the collection, of which Mr Mark Pattison edited a well-known edition, 1883. The sonnet inscribed with a diamond on a window pane in the cottage at Chalfont where the poet stayed in 1665 is (in the judgment of a good critic) Miltonic, if not Milton's (Garnett, *Life of Milton*, p. 175).

[3] The 1673 edition also gave the juvenile piece *On the Death of a Fair Infant* and *At a Vacation Exercise*, which for some reason had been omitted from the 1645 edition.

The last four years of his life were devoted to prose works of no particular interest[1]. He continued to live in London. His third marriage had proved happy, and he enjoyed something of the renown which was rightly his. Various well-known men used to visit him—notably Dryden[2], who on one of his visits asked and received permission to dramatise[3] *Paradise Lost*.

Milton died in 1674, November 8th. He was buried in St Giles' Church, Cripplegate. When we think of him we have to think of a man who lived a life of very singular purity and devotion to duty; who for what he conceived to be his country's good sacrificed—and no one can well estimate the sacrifice—during twenty years the aim that was nearest to his heart and best suited to his genius; who, however, eventually realised his desire of writing a great work *in gloriam Dei*.

[1] The treatise on *Christian Doctrine* (unpublished during Milton's lifetime and dating, it is thought, mainly from the period of his theological treatises) is valuable as throwing much light on the theological views expressed in the two epic poems and *Samson Agonistes*. See *Milton Memorial Lectures* (1908), pp. 109—42. The discovery of the MS. of this treatise in 1823 gave Macaulay an opportunity of writing his famous essay on Milton, which has been happily described as a Whig counterblast to Johnson's Tory depreciation of the poet.

Milton's *History of Britain*, though not published till 1670, had been written many years earlier; four of the six books, we know, were composed between 1646 and 1649.

[2] The lines by Dryden which were printed beneath the portrait of Milton in Tonson's folio edition of *Paradise Lost* published in 1688 are too familiar to need quotation; but it is worth noting that the younger poet had in Milton's lifetime described the great epic as "one of the most noble, and most sublime poems which either this age or nation has produced" (prefatory essay to *The State of Innocence*, 1674). Further, tradition assigned to Dryden (a Roman Catholic and a Royalist) the remark, "this fellow (Milton) cuts us all out and the ancients too."

[3] See Marvell's "Commendatory Verses," 17—30, prefixed to the second edition (1674) of *Paradise Lost*.

PARADISE LOST.

We have seen that the dominating idea of Milton's life was his resolve to write a great poem—great in theme, in style, in attainment. To this purpose was he dedicated as a boy: as Hannibal was dedicated, at the altar of patriotism, to the cause of his country's revenge, or Pitt to a life of political ambition. Milton's works—particularly his letters and prose pamphlets—enable us to trace the growth of the idea which was shaping his intellectual destinies; and as every poet is best interpreted by his own words, Milton shall speak for himself.

Two of the earliest indications of his cherished plan are the *Vacation Exercise* and the second *Sonnet*. The *Exercise* commences with an invocation (not without significance, as we shall see) to his "native language," to assist him in giving utterance to the teeming thoughts that knock at the portal of his lips, fain to find an issue thence. The bent of these thoughts is towards the loftiest themes. Might he choose for himself, he would select some "grave subject":

> "Such where the deep transported mind may soar
> Above the wheeling poles, and at Heaven's door
> Look in, and see each blissful deity.
> . . . . . .
> Then sing of secret things that came to pass
> When beldam Nature in her cradle was."

But recognising soon that such matters are inappropriate to the occasion—a College festivity—he arrests the flight of his muse with a grave *descende cælo*, and declines on a lower range of subject, more fitting to the social scene and the audience. This *Exercise* was composed in 1628, in Milton's twentieth year, or, according to his method of dating, *anno ætatis* XIX. It is important as revealing—firstly, the poet's consciousness of the divine impulse within, for which poetry is the natural outlet; secondly, the elevation of theme with which that poetry must deal. A boy in years, he would like to handle the highest 'arguments,' challenging thereby comparison with the *sacri*

vates of inspired verse, the elect few whose poetic appeal is to the whole world. A vision of Heaven itself must be unrolled before his steadfast eagle-gaze: he will win a knowledge of the causes of things such as even Vergil, his master, modestly disclaimed. Little wonder, therefore, that, filled with these ambitions, Milton did not shrink, only two years later (1629—30), from attempting to sound the deepest mysteries of Christianity—the Nativity and the Passion of Christ; howbeit, sensible of his immaturity, he left his poem on the latter subject unfinished[1].

The *Sonnet* to which reference has been made deserves quotation at length:

"How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!
My hasting days fly on with full career,
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.
Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth,
That I to manhood am arrived so near;
And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
That some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.
Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
It shall be still in strictest measure even
To that same lot, however mean or high,
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven;
All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great Task-Master's eye."

Mr Mark Pattison justly calls these lines "an inseparable part of Milton's biography": they bring out so clearly the poet's solemn devotion to his self-selected task, and his determination not to essay the execution of that task until the time of complete "inward ripeness" has arrived. The *Sonnet* was one of the last poems composed by Milton during his residence at Cambridge.

[1] A passage in the sixth *Elegy* shows that the *Nativity Ode* (a prelude in some respects to *Paradise Lost*) was begun on Christmas morning, 1629. *The Passion* may have been composed for the following Easter; it breaks off with the notice—"This Subject the Author finding to be above the years he had when he wrote it, and nothing satisfied with what was begun, left it unfinished." Evidently Milton was minded to recur to both subjects; see later.

The date is 1631. From 1632 to 1638 was a period of almost unbroken self-preparation, such as the *Sonnet* foreshadows. Of the intensity of his application to literature a letter written in 1637 (the exact day being Sept. 7, 1637) enables us to judge.

"It is my way," he says to Carlo Diodati, in excuse for remissness as a correspondent, "to suffer no impediment, no love of ease, no avocation whatever, to chill the ardour, to break the continuity, or divert the completion of my literary pursuits. From this and no other reasons it often happens that I do not readily employ my pen in any gratuitous exertions[1]." But these exertions were not sufficient: the probation must last longer. In the same month, on the 23rd, he writes to the same friend, who had made enquiry as to his occupations and plans: "I am sure that you wish me to gratify your curiosity, and to let you know what I have been doing, or am meditating to do. Hear me, my Diodati, and suffer me for a moment to speak without blushing in a more lofty strain. Do you ask what I am meditating? By the help of Heaven, an immortality of fame. But what am I doing? πτεροφυῶ, I am letting my wings grow and preparing to fly; but my Pegasus has not yet feathers enough to soar aloft in the fields of air[2]." Four years later we find a similar admission—"I have neither yet completed to my mind the full circle of my private studies...[3]."

This last sentence was written in 1640 (or 1641). Meanwhile his resolution had been confirmed by the friendly and flattering encouragement of Italian *savants*—a stimulus which he records in an oft-cited passage[4]:

"In the private academies[5] of Italy, whither I was favoured

[1] *P. W.* III. 492. [2] *P. W.* III. 495.
[3] *P. W.* II. 476.
[4] *The Reason of Church Government*, *P. W.* II. 477, 478; a few lines have been quoted in the *Life* of Milton. A passage similar to the concluding sentence might be quoted from the pamphlet *Animadversions*, published the same year (1641) as the *Church Government*; see *P. W.* III. 72.
[5] He refers to literary societies or clubs, of which there were several at Florence, e.g. the Della Crusca, the Svogliati, etc.

to resort, perceiving that some trifles[1] which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabout, (for the manner is, that every one must give some proof of his wit and reading there,) met with acceptance above what was looked for; and other things[2], which I had shifted in scarcity of books and conveniences to patch up amongst them, were received with written encomiums, which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps; I began thus far to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intense study (which I take to be my portion in this life), joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die."

It was during this Italian journey (1638—39) that Milton first gave a hint of the particular direction in which this ambition was setting: at least we are vouchsafed a glimpse of the possible subject-matter of the contemplated poem, and there is that on which may be built conjecture as to its style. He had enjoyed at Naples the hospitality of the then famous writer Giovanni Battista Manso, whose courteous reception the young English traveller, *ut ne ingratum se ostenderet*, acknowledged in the piece of Latin hexameters afterwards printed in his *Sylvæ* under the title *Mansus*. In the course of the poem Milton definitely speaks of the remote legends of British history—more especially, the Arthurian legend—as the theme which he might some day treat. "May I," he says, "find such a friend[3] as Manso,"

[1] i.e. Latin pieces; the *Elegies*, as well as some of the poems included in his *Sylvæ*, were written before he was twenty-one.

[2] Among the Latin poems which date from his Italian journey are the lines *Ad Salsillum*, a few of the *Epigrams*, and *Mansus*. Perhaps, too, the "other things" comprehended those essays in Italian verse which he had the courage to read before a Florentine audience, and they the indulgence to praise.

[3] i.e. a friend who would pay honour to him as Manso had paid honour to the poet Marini. Manso had helped in the erection of a monument to Marini at Naples; and Milton alludes to this at the beginning of the poem. From Manso he would hear about Tasso.

"*Siquando*[1] *indigenas revocabo in carmina reges,*
Arturumque etiam sub terris bella moventem,
Aut dicam invictæ sociali fœdere mensæ
Magnanimos heroas, et (*O modo spiritus adsit*)
Frangam Saxonicas Britonum sub Marte phalanges!"

This was in 1638. In the next year, after his return to England, he recurs to the project in the *Epitaphium Damonis* (162—71), his account being far more detailed:

"*Ipse*[2] *ego Dardanias Rutupina per æquora puppes*
Dicam, et Pandrasidos regnum vetus Inogeniæ,
Brennumque Arviragumque duces, priscumque Belinum,
Et tandem Armoricos Britonum sub lege colonos;
Tum gravidam Arturo fatali fraude Iögernen;
Mendaces vultus, assumptaque Gorlöis arma,
Merlini dolus. O, mihi tum si vita supersit,
Tu procul annosa pendebis, fistula, pinu,
Multum oblita mihi, aut patriis mutata Camœnis
Brittonicum strides!"

Here, as before, he first glances at the stories which date from the very dawn of British myth and romance, and then

[1] "If ever I shall revive in verse our native kings, and Arthur levying war in the world below; or tell of the heroic company of the resistless Table Round, and—be the inspiration mine!—break the Saxon bands neath the might of British chivalry" (*Mansus*, 80—84). His Common-place Book has a quaint reference to "Arturs round table."

[2] "I will tell of the Trojan fleet sailing our southern seas, and the ancient realm of Imogen, Pandrasus' daughter, and of Brennus, Arviragus, and Belinus old, and the Armoric settlers subject to British laws. Then will I sing of Iogerne, fatally pregnant with Arthur—how Uther feigned the features and assumed the armour of Gorlois, through Merlin's craft. And you, my pastoral pipe, an life be lent me, shall hang on some sere pine, forgotten of me; or changed to native notes shall shrill forth British strains." In the first lines he alludes to the legend of Brutus and the Trojans landing in England. *Rutupina* = Kentish. The story of Arthur's birth at which he glances is referred to in the *Idylls of the King*. The general drift of the last verses is that he will give up Latin for English verse; *strides* is a future, from *strido* (cf. *Æneid* IV. 689).

passes to the most fascinating of the later cycles of national legend—the grey traditions that cluster round the hero of the *Idylls of the King*, the son of mythic Uther. And this passage, albeit the subject which it indicates was afterwards rejected by Milton, possesses a twofold value for those who would follow, step by step, the development of the idea which had as its final issue the composition of *Paradise Lost*. For, first, the concluding verses show that whatever the theme of the poem, whatever the style, the instrument of expression would be English. Just as Dante had weighed the merits of the vernacular and Latin and chosen the former, though the choice imposed on him the creation of an ideal, transfigured Italian out of the baser elements of many competing dialects, so Milton —more fortunate than Dante in that he found an instrument ready to use—will use that "native language" whose help he had petitioned in the *Vacation Exercise*. An illustration of his feeling on this point is furnished by the treatise on *Church Government*. He says there that his work must make for "the honour and instruction" of his country: "I applied myself to that resolution which Ariosto followed...to fix all the industry and art I could unite to the adorning of my native tongue; not to make verbal curiosities the end (that were a toilsome vanity), but to be an interpreter and relater of the best and sagest things among mine own citizens throughout this island in the mother dialect. That what the greatest and choicest wits of Athens, Rome, or modern Italy, and those Hebrews of old did for their country, I, in my proportion, with this over and above, of being a Christian, might do for mine[1]; not caring to be once named

[1] *P. W.* II. 478. Reference has been made so frequently to this pamphlet on *The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelaty*, (1641), that it may be well to explain that the introduction to the second book is entirely autobiographical. Milton shows why he embarked on such controversies, how much it cost him to do so, what hopes he had of returning to poetry, what was his view of the poet's mission and of his own capacity to discharge that mission. His prose works contain nothing more valuable than these ten pages of self-criticism.

abroad, though perhaps I could attain to that, but content with these British islands as my world." Here is a clear announcement of his ambition to take rank as a great national poet. The note struck is patriotism. He will produce that which shall set English on a level with the more favoured Italian, and give his countrymen cause to be proud of their

"dear dear land,
Dear for her reputation through the world[1]."

To us indeed it may appear strange that Milton should have thought it worth while to emphasise what would now be considered a self-evident necessity: what modern poet, with a serious conception of his office and duty, would dream of employing any other language than his own? But we must remember that in those days the empire of the classics was unquestioned: scholarship was accorded a higher dignity than now: the composition of long poems in Latin was still a custom honoured in the observance: and whoso sought to appeal to the "laureate fraternity" of scholars and men of letters, independently of race and country, would naturally turn to the *lingua franca* of the learned. At any rate, the use of English—less known than either Italian or French—placed a poet at a great disadvantage, so far as concerned acceptance in foreign lands; and when Milton determined to rely on his *patriæ Camœnæ*, he foresaw that this would circumscribe his audience, and that he might have to rest content with the applause of his own countrymen.

Again, these lines in the *Epitaphium* give us some grounds of surmise as to the proposed form of his poem. The historic events—or traditions—epitomised in the passage were too far separated in point of time, and too devoid of internal coherence and connection, to admit of dramatic treatment. Milton evidently contemplated a narrative poem, and for one who had drunk so deep of the classical spirit a narrative could scarce have meant aught else than an epic. Indeed thus much is implied by some sentences in *The Reason of Church Govern-*

[1] *Richard II.* II. I. 57, 58.

ment, which represent him as considering whether to attempt "that epic form whereof the two poems of Homer, and those other two of Virgil and Tasso, are a diffuse, and the book of Job a brief model...or whether those dramatic constitutions, wherein Sophocles and Euripides reign, shall be found more doctrinal and exemplary to a nation[1]."

But 'dramatic' introduces a fresh phase; and as the first period of the history of *Paradise Lost*, or rather of the idea which finally took shape in that poem, closes with the *Epitaphium* (1639), it may not be amiss to summarise the impressions deduced up to this point from the various passages which we have quoted from Milton. We have seen, then, Milton's early resolve; its ambitious scope; his self-preparation; the encouragement he received in Italy and from friends at home; his announcement in 1638, repeated in 1639, that he has discovered a suitable subject in British fable—more especially, in the legend of the Coming and Passing of Arthur; his formal farewell to Latin verse, in favour of his native tongue; his desire to win recognition as a great national *vates*; and his selection of the epic style.

In respect of chronology we have reached the year 1639—40. The second period extends from 1640 to 1642. We shall see that some verses of *Paradise Lost* were written about 1642: after 1642, up till 1658, we hear no more of the poem—proof that the idea has been temporarily abandoned under stress of politics. Therefore 1642 may be regarded as the ulterior limit of this second period. And it is not, I think, fanciful to consider that *Paradise Lost* entered on a fresh stage about 1640, because between that year and 1642 Milton's plans underwent a twofold change by which the character of the poem was entirely altered.

First, the subject for which he had shown so decided a bias is discarded: after 1639 no mention is made of King Arthur. We have no hint of the cause which led Milton to drop the subject; but it may well have lain in his increasing republicanism. He could not have treated the theme from an

[1] *P. W.* II. 478, 479.

unfavourable standpoint. The hero of the poem must have been for him, as for the Milton of our own age, a type of all kingly grandeur and worth; and it would have gone sore against the grain with the future apologist for regicide to exercise his powers in creating a royal figure that would shed lustre on monarchy, and in a measure plead for the institution which Milton detested so heartily. Only a Royalist could have retold the story, making it illustrate "the divine right of kings," and embodying in the character of the blameless monarch the Cavalier conception of Charles I. Perhaps too he was influenced by discovering, after fuller research, the mythical character of the legend. So much is rather implied by some remarks in his *History of Britain*. Milton with his intense earnestness was not the poet to build a long work on what he had found to be mainly fiction. Be this as it may, Milton rejected the subject, and it finds no place in a list of one hundred possible subjects of his poem.

Secondly, from this period, 1640—1642, dates an alteration in the design of the contemplated work. Hitherto his tendency has been towards the epic form: now (1640 or 1641) we find him preferring the dramatic. Shall he imitate Sophocles and Euripides? Shall he transplant to English soil the art of the "lofty grave tragedians" of Greece? The question is answered in a decided affirmative. Had Milton continued the poem of which the opening lines were written in 1642 we should have had—not an epic but—a drama, or possibly a trilogy of dramas, cast in a particular manner, as will be observed presently. This transference of his inclinations from the epic to the dramatic style appears to date from 1641. It is manifested in the Milton MS. at Trinity College.

When the present library of Trinity College, the erection of which was begun during the Mastership of Isaac Barrow, was completed, one of its earliest benefactors was a former member of Trinity, Sir Henry Newton Puckering. Among his gifts was "a thin folio MS. of less than thirty leaves," which had served Milton as a note-book. How it came into the possession of Sir

Henry Puckering is not known. He was contemporary with, though junior to, Milton, and may possibly have been one of the admirers who visited the poet in the closing years of his life; or perhaps there was some family connection by means of which the MS. passed into his hands. But if the history of the note-book be obscure, its value is not; for it contains the original drafts of several of his early poems: notably of *Arcades*, *Lycidas* and *Comus*, together with fourteen of the Sonnets, and memoranda relating to his great work. And the bulk of the MS. (forty out of forty-seven written pages) is in Milton's autograph.

It is known that the little volume was rebound in 1736, by which date some of the leaves had got loose, and there is some uncertainty as to the correctness of the order of just the last few pages. But as regards pages 1–42, there seems no reason to doubt that the MS. exists exactly as Milton used it and that we have in all essentials the order in which its contents were entered by him. They cover a long period (1633—1658), from *Arcades*, with which the MS. begins, to the last of his Sonnets—"Methought I saw." It is rather more than half way through the MS. that we light on the entries which have so direct a bearing on the history of *Paradise Lost*.

These are notes, written by Milton himself (probably in 1641), and occupying seven pages of the manuscript, on subjects which seemed to him suitable, in varying degrees of appropriateness, for his poem. Some of the entries are very brief—concise jottings down, in two or three words, of any theme that struck him. Others are more detailed: the salient features of some episode in history are selected, and a sketch of the best method of treating them added. In a few instances these sketches are filled in with much minuteness and care: the 'economy' or arrangement of the poem is marked out—the action traced from point to point. But, *Paradise Lost* apart, this has been done in only a few cases—a half dozen, at most. As a rule, the source whence the material of the work might be drawn is indicated. The subjects themselves, numbering just one hundred, fall, in a rough classification, under two headings—Scriptural and British: