poem a deep regret that Milton never carried out his expressed purpose of writing an epic on King Arthur, but he will always remember with pleasure the hale and hearty friend of genius — the *Diis dilecte senex.* He will pass on, too, to read the beautiful description of Manso's goblets in the "Epitaphium Damonis," and having finished the two noble poems, he will ever after find it impossible to speak of Milton's Latin verses without affection mixed with wonder.

CHAPTER III

"L'ALLEGRO" AND "IL PENSEROSO"

THE genesis of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," perhaps the best known and most heartily admired of all Milton's compositions, is involved in considerable obscurity. They were not printed before 1645, and they do not exist for us in the celebrated bound volume of Milton's Mss. in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, which contains the drafts of all the English poems written between 1633, probably, and 1645; we are therefore compelled, in the absence of other data, to rely upon inferences and internal evidence in determining their time and place of writing. The consensus of critical opinion gives 1632–33 as the time, and Horton as the place. Professor Masson assigns them to the latter half of 1632. There are, however, reasons to make one think that they should probably be placed earlier. The autumn of 1632 seems to be

selected because Horton is usually assumed as the place of composition, and Milton went to reside there in July, 1632. He would naturally, argue the critics, be so impressed with the charms of the spot that he would turn to verse, and "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," and the "Song on May Morning," which we have assigned to the Cambridge period, would be the outcome. But there is no proof that the poems were not written at Cambridge or in London as reminiscential tributes to the pleasures of a vacation spent in the country; and we know from a Latin prolusion or oration delivered, Masson thinks, either in the latter half of 1631 or the first part of 1632, that Milton spent "the last past summer . . . amid rural scenes and sequestered glades," and that he recalled "the supreme delight *he* had with the Muses." This vacation of 1631 may have been spent at Horton, for there is no proof that the elder Milton had not then acquired that property, and the young poet may have written his poems under the elms that so fascinated him, or have composed them on his return to college.

I incline to the former supposition. As we shall see, he was unquestionably supplied with hints for both his poems by Burton's "Anatomy," surely a likely book for such a student as Milton to take with him on a vacation. Again, no one can read the "Prolusion on Early Rising," almost certainly Milton's, without thinking that much of the raw material of the two poems was in his brain and being expressed during his university life; nor can one read the other prolusions without seeing that Orpheus, the music of the spheres, and Platonism were much in his thoughts. Besides, about 1630, the date of the "Epitaph on Shakspere," Milton was evidently to some extent occupied with his great forerunner, whose genius is honored in the poems, and a year later he was experimenting with the octosyllabic couplet in the "Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester." Finally, it was about this time that he was seriously weighing the reasons *pro* and *con* with regard to his choice of a profession, and it might naturally occur to him to contrast in poetic form the pleasures of the more or less worldly and the

more or less secluded, studious, and devoted life. He had made his choice by the autumn of 1632, and had therefore less cause for such poetical expression.

A minute analysis of the style and metre of the poems tends to confirm the view expressed above. It is obviously a transitional style when compared with that of the "Nativity Ode," and other earlier pieces. Scriptural ideas and subjects are occupying his mind less, and he has progressed toward a freer handling of his themes. He has become interested in contemporary English poetry, and while showing the influence of the classics, is not mastered by them. All this would indicate that the poems were written after 1631, though, as we have just seen, it is not unlikely that having in that year handled the octosyllabic couplet successfully, he should shortly be tempted to try it again. We thus have 1631 as a *terminus a quo;* 1633–1634, the years of "Arcades" and "Comus," are a *terminus ad quem* for the following strictly metrical reasons. The lyrical portions of "Arcades" and "Comus" appear to be less spontaneous

and more mature than "L'Allegro" and its companion poem. The metrical art displayed is more elaborate and self-conscious, and when one looks closer, as, for example, when one compares the invocation to Mirth in "L'Allegro" with the similar passage in "Comus" (ll. 102–122), one is struck with the fact that the verses of the anti-masque have lost the blithe sensuousness of the former poem, that thought is struggling with feeling, and that the lyric style of the poet is approaching its culmination in the elaborate and highly sustained art that has made "Lycidas" matchless. We conclude, therefore, that "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" are nearer to the "Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester" than they are to "Arcades"; and if any one should argue that the mature sentiment of the poems and their vigorous expression indicate a later, not an earlier, date, it must suffice to reply that youth takes itself more seriously than age, and that there is no sentiment or thought in either poem that Milton might not well have had as a student at Cambridge.

It has been stated already that Milton was

indebted for hints, if not for direct suggestion, to Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy." This famous book, the first edition of which appeared in 1621, was prefaced by a poem entitled "The Author's Abstract of Melancholy, Διαλογῶς," in which "Democritus Junior" analyzes his feelings in a way that foreshadows Milton's subsequent procedure. There are twelve stanzas of eight lines each, the last two verses of each stanza constituting a variable refrain, the measure being, however, the octosyllabic couplet. In one stanza the pleasures of a meditative man are given in a series of little pictures, while the next stanza presents the woes of the same personage when a fit of real melancholy is upon him. Milton could not have failed to be struck with the general effectiveness of the idea and its development, but his artist's instinct told him that this effectiveness would be enhanced if, instead of a dialogue in stanzas, he should write two distinct but companion poems, developed on parallel lines, in which the pleasures of a typically cheerful and a typically serious man should be described in pictures slightly more

elaborate than those of Burton. He abandoned the too glaring contrast of joys and woes, and succeeded also in avoiding the occasional dropping into commonplace that mars the "Abstract of Melancholy." But some pictures and even lines and phrases of the elder poem probably remained in his memory.

Another poem which may have influenced Milton is the song, "Hence, all you vain delights," in Fletcher's play, "The Nice Valour." This play was not published until 1647, but it had been acted long before, and the song had almost certainly become known before "Il Penseroso" was written. Tradition assigns the lyric to Beaumont, but Mr. Bullen with more probability gives it to Fletcher. It is an exquisite expansion of the theme expressed in its closing verse, "Nothing's so dainty-sweet as lovely melancholy," and it is pleasant to believe that it may have given Milton a hint, although it can scarcely have had as much influence upon his verses as his own two poems plainly had upon a stanza of Collins's "The Passions." There are naturally traces of other poets to be found in these produc-

tions of Milton's impressionable period, particularly of Joshua Sylvester, and to a less degree of Spenser, Browne, and Marlowe. Collins, too, was not the only eighteenth-century poet who had "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" ringing through his head, as any one may see who will take the trouble to examine Dodsley's well-known collection. Even Pope was not above borrowing epithets from them, and Dyer's best poem, "Grongar Hill," would not have had its being without them. Matthew Green, Thomas Warton, John Hughes, who actually wrote a new conclusion for "Il Penseroso," and other minor verse-writers were much affected by them, and Gray borrowed from them with the open boldness that always marks the appropriations of a true poet. But perhaps the best proof of their popularity during a century which is too sweepingly charged with inability to appreciate real poetry, is the fact that Handel set them to music. In our own century they have never lacked admirers, or failed to exert upon poets an easily detected influence. It may even be held with some show of reason that their

popularity, leading to a fuller knowledge of Milton, paved the way for the remarkable renascence of Spenser in the latter half of the eighteenth and the first part of the present century.

As their Italian titles imply, the subjects or speakers of Milton's verses are The Cheerful Man and The Thoughtful (Meditative) Man respectively. Our English adjectives do not quite adequately render the Italian they are intended to translate, which is perhaps the reason why Milton went abroad for his titles, since he had a striking warning before him in Burton's "Abstract" of the ambiguity attaching to such a word as "melancholy," which he might have used with one of his poems without exciting surprise. He has excited surprise with some modern critics through the fact that he wrote *Penseroso* instead of *Pensieroso*, but it has been seemingly shown that the form he used was correct and current when he wrote. His Italian titles, however, have not prevented much discussion as to the characters he intended to portray. Critics are quite unanimously of the opinion that Il

Penseroso represents a man very like the Milton we know, but they are divided as to the kind of man typified by L'Allegro. One editor, Mr. Verity, goes so far as to say that Milton "must have felt that the character of L'Allegro might, with slight changes or additions, be made to typify the careless, pleasure-seeking spirit of the Cavaliers and Court; the spirit which he afterward figured in Comus and his followers, and condemned to destruction." If this view be correct, one is forced to conclude that Milton had more of the true dramatist's power of creating characters other than himself than he has generally been supposed to possess; and it requires us to conceive the more sprightly poem as forming a hard mechanical contrast to its companion, which is the reverse of poetical. On the other hand, Dr. Garnett maintains that the two poems "are complementary rather than contrary, and may be, in a sense, regarded as one poem, whose theme is the praise of the reasonable life." It is easy to agree with this view, especially as Burton's poem obviously suggested the idea of contrasting two

well-marked moods of one individual character, rather than that of bringing into juxtaposition two radically different characters. L'Allegro may not be the Milton who meditated entering the Church and making his life a true poem, but he is rather the Milton who went to the theatre in his youth, and could in his mature age ask Lawrence

> "What neat repast shall feast us, light and choice,
> Of Attic taste with wine, whence we may rise
> To hear the lute well touched or artful voice
> Warble immortal notes and Tuscan air?"

than the typical Cavalier of Charles's court. Cavaliers did not usually call for "sweet Liberty" but for sweet License, nor did they greatly hanker after "unreprovèd pleasures." They were not particularly noted for their early rising; and if any one of them had watched the Bear out, in different pursuits from those of Il Penseroso, he would probably not have continued his morning walk after encountering the "milk maid singing blithe."

Another point on which critics differ is, whether or not Milton intended to describe the events of a day of twenty-four hours.

Some claim that he merely sketches the general tenor of the life of his characters; others that he represents the events of an ideal day. The antagonists ought to be satisfied with the assurance that he intended to do both the one thing and the other. The careful and sequential division of the day that is apparent in each poem (even if "Il Penseroso" does begin with the nightingale and the moon) cannot be accidental, nor can the grouping of events and natural sights belonging to different seasons of the year be the result of ignorance or negligence.

It is, probably, a fad of criticism to call as much attention as is now done to the fact that Milton was not so accurate or so penetrating an observer of nature as some of his successors, like Tennyson, have been. In the first place, neither here nor in "Paradise Lost" will Milton be found to be much of a sinner in this regard if he be compared with his predecessors and contemporaries. In the second place, it is by no means certain that minute and accurate observation of nature is essential to the equipment of a great poet. A genuine love of nature, a power to feel and

impart something of her spirit, is doubtless essential; but as poetry on its pictorial side should be mainly suggestive, it is not yet clear that posterity will get more pleasure out of the elaborate and accurate pictures of some modern poets than out of the broadly true and suggestive, if sometimes inaccurate, pictures of Milton. It is not entirely unlikely that our recently developed love of detail-work has injured our sense for form, and that our grandchildren will take Matthew Arnold's advice and return to the Greeks — and Milton, in order to learn what the highest poetry really is like. Milton is nearer akin to Homer and Sophocles than he is to the modern naturalist or nature mystic, and it is well for English poetry that he is. He would probably have thought the picture of the sunbeams lying in the golden chamber, suggested by a few words in that exquisite fragment of Mimnermus beginning "Αἰήταω πόλιν," more in keeping with the requirements of a rational poetics than nine-tenths of the purple descriptive passages in English poetry since the days of Wordsworth.

Yet if editors and critics have had their

humors and fads, they have always ended by acknowledging the perennial charm of these poems. And the mass of readers has paid its highest tribute of culling many a phrase and verse for quotation to please the outer or the inner ear. The anthologist of our lyric poetry who should omit them from his collection would pay dearly for his indiscretion, and yet he could argue fairly that they are rather idylls than true lyrics, as Wordsworth did long since. But if they are, in fact, a series of little pictures, sometimes so loosely joined or so hastily sketched as to puzzle the careful critic,[1] these have been so fused into one organic whole by the delicate, evanescent sentiment that pervades each poem that even the purist will be willing to admit them to be lyrics of marvellous beauty and power, coming from the heart of the poet and going straight to the hearts of his readers.

With Milton's most popular poems it is convenient to group three short pieces that are little known. They are those entitled "At a

[1] There are three or four passages in the poems rendered very obscure by a looseness of syntax unusual with Milton. See "L'Allegro," ll. 45–48, 103–106, and "Il Penseroso," ll. 147–150.

Solemn Music," "On Time," and "Upon the Circumcision." The end of 1633 and the beginning of 1634 may be assigned as the probable period of composition, for reasons that need not be detailed here. The first poem seems reminiscential of a sacred concert, the second was intended as an inscription for a clock-face, the third forms, with the "Nativity Ode" and the stanzas on "The Passion," a somewhat belated member of a religious trilogy. All three pieces are very elaborate in style and are nearer to "Arcades," "Comus," and "Lycidas" than to "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso." All are full of high solemnity and of that mighty vision of eternal things that makes "Paradise Lost" so supreme in the world's poetry. The following lines from the first will illustrate the quality of the trio better than any description:—

"Where the bright Seraphim in burning row
Their loud uplifted angel-trumpets blow,
And the Cherubic host in thousand quires
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires
With those just spirits that wear victorious palms,
Hymns devout and holy songs
Singing everlastingly."

Such poetry ought to be better known for its intrinsic merits, but students of Milton should examine each of the poems carefully on account of the light it throws on the progress of Milton's metrical art. As Professor Masson has observed, they are proof that the poet was at this time engaged in making metrical experiments. The first two are a mixture of couplets and quatrains with one displaced rhyme; the last consists of two fourteen-lined stanzas that correspond with one another, but are exceedingly irregular in their internal structure. The most important point, however, is that in all three there is a combination of short and long lines that points forward to "Lycidas," and proves that Milton was varying the metrical experiments he had been making from his earliest youth. As late as "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," in which he had experimented with a combination of trimeters and pentameters as a fitting proem for the lighter octosyllabics that were to follow, his experiments were mainly, if not entirely, along English lines; after his residence at Horton had increased his reading of the Italian poets, his verse began to show

their influence, except in "Comus" and "Arcades," for which he had better models nearer home, although even in the former it may be perhaps detected. This is, of course, quite a technical matter, but it throws light upon Milton's bold yet painstaking character as an artist, and it may be used as a partial test in determining the dates of his unassigned compositions.

CHAPTER IV

"ARCADES" AND "COMUS"

MILTON had had some little experience in writing masques before he reached in "Comus" the supreme success possible in this form of composition, and he must have seen and read not a few. Although we cannot determine the exact date of "Arcades," it is reasonably certain that it preceded "Comus," and that it may be assigned to 1633. It formed only "part of an entertainment presented to the Countess Dowager of Derby at Harefield," but we may be sure that it was a part as important as it was beautiful, and that the poet's 'prentice hand was strengthened by writing it. He seems to have been induced thus to honor a lady whose praises Spenser had previously sung by the well-known musician, Henry Lawes, to whom he afterward dedicated a fine sonnet. Lawes (1595–1662)

was the chief English composer of his time, and must have known the Milton family for some years. His talents won him a position at court, and the friendship of the leading poets of the time, whose songs he set to music, receiving in return their poetical encomiums. He probably gained more money, however, by furnishing music for the then fashionable masques, so we find him collaborating in the performance of Shirley's "Triumph of Peace," and composing single-handed the music of Carew's "Cœlum Britannicum." He was also music tutor to the children of the Earl and Countess of Bridgewater, which seems to explain his assumed connection with "Arcades." These children would take part in the proposed entertainment to their grandmother, and would ask their instructor's help. He, knowing Milton well, would apply to him for the necessary verses, rather than to professional masque-writers, who would probably not care to undertake such a slight piece of work. Milton's success was so conspicuous that when another and more elaborate entertainment was contemplated by the Bridgewater family, Lawes would

again apply to him for poetical assistance. This is a simple, if meagre, account of the way the young Puritan poet was enlisted in the service of the distinguished Cavalier family, for Warton's statement that Milton's father was the Earl's tenant at Horton has not been substantiated.

With regard to the poetical merits of "Arcades" there can scarcely be two opinions. The speech of the Genius of the Wood, in heroic couplets, is a triumph of style, and the three songs have a lightness of touch that is rare in Milton's lyric work. The compliments that had to be paid the Dowager are turned with as much grace as if the Puritan had been an Elizabethan of the prime. Indeed Shakspere himself has hardly surpassed the exquisite song beginning

"O'er the smooth enamelled green,"

while he surely would have praised, though he need not have envied, such a divinely harmonious passage as the following:—

"But else in deep of night, when drowsiness
Hath locked up mortal sense, then listen I

To the celestial Sirens' harmony,
That sit upon the nine infolded spheres,
And sing to those that hold the vital shears,
And turn the adamantine spindle round
On which the fate of Gods and men is wound."

The occasion of the more elaborate celebration that led to the creation of "Comus" was the formal entrance of the Earl of Bridgewater upon his duties as Lord President of Wales in the autumn of 1634, at his official residence, Ludlow Castle, in Shropshire. Here there was quite a gathering of relatives and friends who would naturally think a masque to be peculiarly suitable to such a semi-royal function, especially as the three eldest children of the Earl, Lord Brackley, Mr. Thomas Egerton, and Lady Alice Egerton, had already acted in similar shows. The great hall of the castle would also be a most fitting place for the performance, and here it probably came off, on Michaelmas night (September 29), 1634.

In order to give time for the setting of the songs to music and the training of the performers, Milton must have been ready with his manuscript at least by the beginning of

the summer. Lawes probably gave him such personal details about the actors and the scene of the intended performance as would enable him to insert the proper compliments and to introduce Sabrina in honor of the river Severn. It may possibly be that Milton, like the majority of his countrymen, felt that Prynne had gone too far in his "Histriomastix," and that the young Puritan was not sorry to have an opportunity to show that religious sincerity has no necessary connection with a long face. He may, too, have been glad of an occasion to measure his strength with the greatest poets of the day; and, perhaps, he may have desired to air his philosophy. But this is all mere conjecture. What we know for certain is that Lord Brackley performed the part of the First Brother, Mr. Thomas Egerton of the Second Brother, Lady Alice Egerton of the Lady, and Lawes of the Attendant Spirit. We do not know who took the part of Comus, or who composed his rout and the company of dancing shepherds,[1] but in

[1] In the normal anti-masque the performers were hired actors.

all probability other children of the Earl and his friends or retainers filled the remaining parts. We are not even informed how the masque was received, or whether Milton saw it produced; but we know that Lawes's friends asked for copies, and that to save himself trouble he had an edition published in 1637 — probably from the acting copy. The name of the writer was omitted, the motto prefixed showing that his consent to publish had been given reluctantly. Neither in this nor in the editions of 1645 and 1673 was the title "Comus" employed, Milton preferring the simple designation — "A Mask." Lawes's edition was prefaced by a very complimentary letter "to the author" from the famous Provost of Eton, Sir Henry Wotton, which shows clearly what judicious critics must have thought of Milton and his work long before he became famous. In the edition of 1673 there was no need of such commendation, and the letter was omitted. It remains to add that "Comus" exists in Milton's handwriting among the Cambridge Mss., and that another copy, known as the Bridgewater Ms., is extant, which is supposed to be the

acting copy, in Lawes's handwriting. The textual variations are not specially important.

But we have dwelt sufficiently upon the external features of "Comus," and must now compare it with other productions of its kind. To do this thoroughly would require a somewhat detailed account of the development of the masque from its origin, as a spectacular feature of an Italian wedding feast, to its culmination in the entertainment which Ben Jonson, Inigo Jones, Ferrabosco, Thomas Giles, and the lords and ladies of the court labored to make worthy of the favor of their pedant king, James I. — an entertainment which gave scope to the amateur actor, the engineer, the painter, the sculptor, the architect, the musician, the poet — to say nothing of the dancing-master, the dressmaker, and the upholsterer. For such a sketch we have no space here, nor can we give an analysis of a typical masque with which the reader might compare "Comus," and thus judge of the deviations of the latter from the normal form.[1] We must therefore content

[1] The reader who is interested may find good accounts of the development of the masque in Ward's "History of English

ourselves with the statement that even in such an elaborate piece as William Browne's "Inner Temple Masque," which contains some delightful poetry, the chief emphasis was laid on the scenery, the costumes, the dancing, and the music, while in "Comus," on the other hand, Milton laid as little stress as possible upon externals, and concentrated his energy chiefly on the literary side of his work. Against Browne's 329 rhyming verses he gave 1023 lines, a large portion of which belonged to the metrical form appropriate to the regular drama rather than to the masque — to wit, blank verse. These variations have led, as we shall now see, to much confusion among the critics as to the real nature of "Comus."

There are, indeed, few poems in literature with regard to which critical opinion has been more hopelessly mixed, certainly on points of detail. Some time since much amusement was caused by the statement, afterward contra-

Dramatic Literature," Symonds's "Shakspere's Predecessors in the English Drama," and Masson's "Life of Milton," vol. i. Masson analyzes Shirley's "Triumph of Peace," and I give an analysis of Browne's "Inner Temple Masque" in my edition of the "L'Allegro," etc.

dicted, that a professor in a leading university had said to his class that for his own part he did not think "Comus" was "in it" compared with "The Faithful Shepherdess." One immediately set against this jaunty dictum Macaulay's well-known opinion that Milton's great masque — "the noblest performance of the kind which exists in any language" — "is as far superior to 'The Faithful Shepherdess' as 'The Faithful Shepherdess' is to the 'Aminta,' or the 'Aminta' to the 'Pastor Fido';" and those persons who had read the four pastoral dramas named felt that for once at least in his life Macaulay shone as a critic in comparison with some of his successors. Certainly the hypothetical modern critic went far beyond even the censorious Dr. Johnson, and his extravagance confirms the need of an inquiry into the reasons for the divergence of critical opinions on the subject of "Comus."

We must remember at the outset that most of the critics, sooner or later, save themselves from ridicule by acknowledging the greatness of "Comus" as a whole. Even Dr. Johnson, after affirming that the songs contained in the

masque were "harsh in their diction and not very musical in their numbers," was moved to say that "a work more truly poetical is rarely found." When a critic who was radically incapacitated for appreciating much that was best in Milton could say this of "Comus," it ought not to surprise us to find another Tory critic, Mr. Saintsbury, who can appreciate Milton, going astray in the opposite direction, and declaring that it is in "Comus" that "Milton's poetical power is at its greatest height." "Comus" is so good in parts that it is no wonder that Dr. Johnson forgot for a moment to be censorious, and Mr. Saintsbury to be entirely *bizarre*. But we are not warranted in judging a poem from the political and ecclesiastical views of its author, as Johnson practically did; or from the supreme beauty of certain of its passages, as Mr. Saintsbury seems to do. A poem must be judged as a whole, and it is just here that the critics have been most likely to go astray with regard to "Comus."

Some have insisted upon viewing it as a lyrical drama; others as an epic drama (what-

ever that may be); some have called it a philosophical poem; others have been pleased to dwell upon its allegorical and satirical content. Milton, however, called it a masque; and as a masque it must be judged, not as a regular drama, or as a poem, strictly so called. If now we compare "Comus" with the masques of Ben Jonson, Fletcher, Browne, and others, we shall agree with those critics who maintain that Milton has surpassed his competitors almost as completely as Shakspere has surpassed his rivals in the regular drama. "Comus" is by far the greatest English masque. But the masque, even in Milton's hands, is not the high and perfect work of art that the regular drama is in Shakspere's. It could not be, for it was a hybrid form of art, and had the defects of its qualities.

What Milton did was to take a species of courtly entertainment, of which, as we have seen, dancing, music, painting, architecture, and poetry were component parts, and eliminate, as far as he could, all of its elements save poetry. But he was compelled to retain enough of the discredited elements to keep

his audience in a good humor, and to preserve the character of his composition when it should be published. The unity of a true work of art was thus unattainable from the first; and there was a dangerous pitfall before him at which he was sure to stumble. In elaborating his plot and individualizing his characters more than was customary with his predecessors in masque-writing, and especially in making considerable use of a verse form characteristic rather of the regular drama than of the masque, he was making demands upon the interest and attention of his audience (to a less extent of his readers) that could not reasonably be responded to unless he should be able to impart to his masque more of dramatic action than even Jonson had been wont to introduce into the productions of which he was so proud. With less music, scenery, and dancing, there must be more action, or the characters would merely seem to be making long speeches. But, unfortunately, Milton was not a dramatic poet. He belonged to what Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton has happily denominated the class of poets "of relative

dramatic vision"—that is, poets who, unlike the true dramatist, cannot create characters that act and speak as flesh and blood individuals, different from their creator and from one another. The personality of these quasi-dramatists is always present in their characters, who seem like puppets speaking their creators' thoughts. When the quasi-dramatist is great, the puppet will, of course, be splendid; but nothing comparable to a living, breathing Priam, or Othello, or even a Wife of Bath. When now the quasi-dramatist becomes an epic poet, like Dante in "The Divine Comedy," or Milton in "Paradise Lost," and tells about his characters, the effect is so magnificent that it is only when we compare his work with the truly dramatic epics of Homer that we can see his limitations. But when he casts his work into more or less dramatic form, when his characters no longer have him to tell about them, but must act for themselves, their puppet nature becomes only too apparent. So it is that in "Comus" Milton is compelled, by the nature of his experiment upon the masque, to give us characters in action in

order to keep up our interest, and yet by the very nature of his genius must content himself with offering us noble puppets speaking his own lofty sentiments in language fit for a god, but no more capable of acting their parts like men and women than a troupe of marionettes.

This is what Dr. Johnson saw when he faulted "Comus" as a drama. But, say the critics with a charming unanimity, "Comus" is a masque and must be judged as a masque; therefore Dr. Johnson has blundered again with regard to Milton — let him be anathema! Precisely so. "Comus" must be judged as a masque, but this is just what the critics fail to do. If they would really compare "Comus" with other masques, and stop abusing Dr. Johnson, they would see that it is because Milton ignored the canons of masque-writing that he produced a work of art still more hybrid than a masque — a something between a masque and a drama which demanded for its complete success dramatic qualities that its author could not give it. If this be a correct statement of the facts in the case, it is no wonder that critics

have not known just what to say about "Comus" as a whole, or that such an admirer of Milton as Dr. Garnett can find it in his heart to call the Elder Brother a prig. But what are we to say of Mr. Saintsbury's extravagant statement that the author of "Paradise Lost" reaches in "Comus" his greatest height of poetical power? It is almost as *bizarre* as Mr. Pater's desire to see the Athens of Pisistratus rather than the Athens of Pericles.

Yet how are we to explain this anomaly, that a masque which is not a true masque surpasses all other masques, and has won for its author the plaudits of nearly every cultivated reader from Sir Henry Wotton's time to our own? The answer is simple — there is no masque that so impresses us by the nobility and beauty of its conception or execution. This nobility and beauty are so conspicuous in "Comus" as to outweigh all technical defects; besides, we are now compelled to judge masques in our closets, and are therefore prone to judge them merely by the poetry they contain. Perhaps, if we could have seen one of Ben Jonson's best masques presented at court with all its su-

perb accessories, we might not have been thoroughly disposed to acknowledge the supremacy of "Comus" as a fashionable entertainment. But if we had possessed true poetic discernment, Hallam's often-quoted remark would have applied to us — that only one performance of "Comus" ought to have been sufficient "to convince any one of taste and feeling that a great poet had arisen in England, and one partly formed in a different school from his contemporaries."

Yes, a truly great poet, differing from his predecessors and contemporaries, had arisen in England. Spenser had sung the praises of purity, but never with the masculine vigor and grace of Milton. Fletcher had employed his exquisite lyrical genius on the same theme, but had not struck Milton's clear seraphic note. Shakspere had, indeed, embodied perfect purity in Ferdinand and Miranda, but he had set them apart in an enchanted world. It remained for Milton, while he was compelled to use a similarly remote setting, to press home to us, with all the superb resources of "divine philosophy" and equally divine art, the splen-

did truth that purity of mind and soul and body is to be aimed at and attained in our daily life below. "Comus" may be a hybrid form of a hybrid species of composition; but it is none the less a supreme masterpiece, because it is the noblest tribute to virtue ever paid in verse.

In view of this fact many of the comments that have been made upon "Comus" by editors and critics seem to be trivial and impertinent. It matters little to any one save Milton's biographer, whether in this passage or that the poet was satirizing the court or otherwise showing his puritanical proclivities. It is always more or less interesting, however, to trace a poet's indebtedness to his predecessors, and we may therefore bring this chapter to a close by briefly discussing this point.

The often-repeated story that the masque was founded on an actual adventure that befell the Lady Alice Egerton and her brothers seems to rest on slight foundations, and is rather based on "Comus" than "Comus" on it. Putting this aside, the main sources about which critics are pretty well agreed are George Peele's

play, "The Old Wives' Tale," Fletcher's "The Faithful Shepherdess," the Circe myth as detailed in the classical authors and in Spenser and his school of poets, and finally, the "Comus" of Puteanus and Jonson's masque, "Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue."

With regard to Peele's play, which was printed in 1595, there can be little doubt that it stimulated Milton's imagination, and gave him the actual kernel of his plot. As to Fletcher's delightful pastoral comedy, of which at least three editions seem to have been published before "Comus" was acted, and which had been revived as a court-play in the winter of 1633–34, it is certain that Milton was more indebted to it than Fletcher was to Tasso and Guarini. The *motif* of the two poems is the same, the power of chastity to ward off evils, yet here Milton is much more plainly lord of his native province than Fletcher is. But the effect of Fletcher's exquisite lyrical style as seen in the latter portion of "Comus" is what most closely connects the two poets. It is impossible here to bring out this influence clearly, but the reader may be confidently re-

ferred to the elder poet's work to discover the extent and quality of the younger poet's indebtedness. Our author's literary obligations with regard to his use of the Circe myth are not very definitely traceable. He naturally had recourse to the "Odyssey," directly or indirectly, for that great poem is the fountain-head of romance. Ovid had previously drawn from the same source with regard to the same subject ("Metamorphoses," lib. xiv.), and minute critics have detected in "Comus" the influence of the Roman poet. Still more patent, however, is the influence of Spenser and the great romantic poets of Italy, who sang "of forests and enchantments drear." The Circe myth is also the subject of Browne's "Inner Temple Masque," and there are several touches in "Comus" that may possibly be traceable to this rival poem.[1]

[1] Milton was too young to have seen the masque performed, and I do not find any evidence in the latest edition of Browne's poems that his charming trifle was revived; still, more than one manuscript copy of it was in existence, and Milton is known to have been interested in "Britannia's Pastorals." A copy of the folio edition of the latter poem in Mr. Huth's library is even thought to contain annotations by him.

It will be remembered that Milton did not give his masque the name it now bears; perhaps he was actuated both by modesty and by a desire to avoid the confusion of his poem with a Latin play entitled "Comus," written by a professor at Louvain, Hendrik van der Putten, or, as he was known to the scholarly world, Erycius Puteanus. This "extravaganza in prose and verse," as Masson calls it, had been printed in 1608, and an English edition had appeared at Oxford in 1634. I have not been able to see a copy of it, but I gather from the editors that it is not unlikely that Milton had seen the book and taken a few hints from it. Ben Jonson, too, in his masque, "Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue" (1619), had introduced Comus as a character, but only as "the god of cheer or the Belly." Milton could have got little inspiration from this "first father of sauce and deviser of jelly," whose personal appearance, though resembling that of our great Comus, was plainly derived from the "Imagines" of the elder Philostratus. The Comus of Puteanus is said to be "a much subtler embodiment of sensual

hedonism"[1] than Jonson's belly-god, but all good critics are agreed that Milton's conception of the character is essentially his own, and that, in the words of his chief biographer, "he was bold enough to add a brand-new god, no less, to the classic Pantheon, and to import him into Britain." But it would seem that Puteanus ought at least to have the credit for having seen that the shadowy deity of the post-classical period could be developed into a figure of interest and importance.

We have now fairly described the extent of Milton's indebtedness to other writers, and it will be seen that he did no more than almost every other great poet has done — he appropriated and bettered. The plagiarist-hunter will therefore find little true profit in tracking him; but as this eccentric is usually harmless, it may be as well to amuse him by referring him not only to Spenser's description of "the Maske of Cupid" in the twelfth canto of the third book of "The Faërie Queene," but also to that stanza of the poem (II., xii., 56) in

[1] See Verity's introduction to his excellent edition of "Comus."

which a "comely dame" is represented as holding a cup of gold full of sappy liquor whereof

> "She used to give to drinke to each
> Whom passing by she happened to meet
> It was her guise all straungers goodly so to greet."

When these verses are compared with the passage in "Comus" containing the lines, —

> "Offering to every weary traveller
> His orient liquor in a crystal glass
> To quench the drouth of Phœbus," —

it ought to be as apparent that Spenser is the author of "Comus" as that Bacon is the author of the plays attributed to Shakspere.

But it is time to conclude, even though we must forego the pleasure of commenting upon particular passages of this exquisite poem. The reader who loves poetry will lose nothing through our silence, for such an one will need no critic to point out to him the abiding loveliness and beauty of the purest of English poems. "Comus" is great in the purity and beauty of its sentiments, in the depth and range of its underlying philosophy, in the nobility of its diction, and the fluidity of its

rhythmical movement. It is not great structurally, and could not have maintained the grand style at its height; but this is only another way of saying that in 1634 Milton could not have written "Paradise Lost." The imperfect of a higher species may, however, be worth much more to us than the perfect of a lower species. Gray's "Elegy" is more perfect as a work of art than "Comus," and is beautiful in itself, but Milton's masque obviously represents a far higher poetical achievement.

CHAPTER V

THE ELEGIAC POEMS

WHILE Milton as the author of "Lycidas" and the "Epitaphium Damonis" is assuredly the greatest English elegist, it does not follow that he is the most typical. That honor is reserved for Gray. Milton seldom or never fails to lay the tender and melodious flute aside for a moment to give us more inspiring strains upon the trumpet or the lyre. This fact has given some purists occasion for inept criticism — especially with regard to "Lycidas." They seem to think that because the strictly elegiac note of lament (*querimonia*) is not kept throughout, the poem ceases to be harmonious, and hence to be a work of art. They forget that there is such a thing as fusion of diverse elements in art as well as in chemistry. A mechanical mixture of inharmonious elements will certainly not produce a work of art; a mechan-

ical mixture of merely diverse but not necessarily inharmonious elements will certainly detract from, if not completely mar, a work of art. But a fusion of such diverse elements may, under favorable circumstances, produce a new form of artistic product, or modify an old and well-known form. The idyllists of Alexandria, while preserving the metre and some other features of the older and the newer epic, nevertheless, by the fusion of new elements, produced a separate and distinct form of poetry. The fusion of this form, the idyll, with the elegy, modified the older form, and produced what we know as the pastoral elegy. Whether now Milton was able to modify this last form and still preserve its artistic qualities and nature, is a question that must be discussed when we consider "Lycidas."

As we have seen, Milton's first elegiac was almost his first poetic effort. In the autumn of 1626, when he was not quite eighteen, his sister, Mrs. Anne Phillips, lost her first child, a daughter, and the young collegian lamented the event in the well-known poem, "On the Death of a Fair Infant, dying of a Cough." If it were

not for the fact that such contentions are always unnecessary, because always incapable of settlement, one might well maintain that this is the most remarkable poem ever written by a boy of equal age. It seems to be even better than Lamb's famous and admirable lines "On an Infant dying as soon as born," and it is certainly better than Lovelace's "Elegy" on the Princess Katherine, "born, christened, buried in one day"—with both of which poems one naturally compares it. If it has not the subtle tenderness of Lamb's lines, it has a dignity and elevation worthy of the Milton of riper years. This elevation warrants certain writers in treating the poem as an ode. It is, indeed, an elegiac ode, complete in eleven of those modified rhyme-royal stanzas that have been already described, and it is one of the best English poems of its kind, although manifestly inferior to Dryden's master-piece in the same class of composition, the splendid and imperishable "Ode to the Memory of Mrs. Anne Killigrew."

As has just been intimated, it is not difficult to trace in this youthful poem qualities that

were never to be absent from Milton's work. There is the wonderful mastery of language and rhythm, the high seriousness, the free and unpedantic use of classical allusion, that have distinguished Milton as an artist from all other English poets. There is, it is true, as in most of the early poems, a marked leaning toward the Fantastic School, yet there is so much stateliness of manner that the extravagances are overlooked. But a quotation or two will obviate the necessity for further comment:—

"O fairest flower, no sooner blown but blasted,
Soft silken primrose fading timelessly"—

are verses that any poet, even the greatest, might be proud to call his own. The elevation proper to the ode form appears plainly in the following stanza, the fourth:—

"Yet art thou not inglorious in thy fate;
For so Apollo, with unweeting hand,
Whilom did slay his dearly-lovèd mate,
Young Hyacinth born on Eurotas' strand,
Young Hyacinth the pride of Spartan land;
But then transformed him to a purple flower;
Alack! that so to change thee Winter had no power."

Certainly there was no other poet living in Jacobean England save Ben Jonson who could have paralleled this stanza, nor in the quarter of a century to follow was there to be one capable of equalling it, although it was to be a period of considerable activity in the composition of elegiac verse. Perhaps, however, an exception to this statement must be made in favor of the eight immortal lines in which the great Marquis of Montrose poured forth the passion and the anguish of his soul at the execution of his royal master.

But Milton was soon to use his elegiac powers to better purpose than in this poem, or in the Latin elegies that will be discussed later. In 1630 he composed his splendid epitaph on Shakspere, thus fairly measuring his strength against Ben Jonson in the latter's strongest point. Although it hardly seems that the epitaph on "the admirable dramatic poet," which was published anonymously in the Second Folio of 1632, is equal in human appropriateness and in perfection of workmanship to the best of Jonson's epitaphs, such as that on Philip Gray, or that it is as important

as a tribute to Shakspere's greatness as Jonson's famous memorial lines, still no one will deny that it is worthy to rank among the greatest of epitaphs and the greatest of tributes. It would be difficult to point out any verses of Dryden or Pope that excel in epigrammatic terseness and strength the closing couplet:—

> "And so sepúlchered in such pomp dost lie,
> That kings for such a tomb would wish to die."

About this time Milton wrote his humorous elegies on the death of Hobson, the Cambridge carrier, the well-known original of the expression "Hobson's choice." It is not easy to associate with Milton the idea of humor, at least of the fantastic sort displayed in these poems. But they do contain humor, although of a not very volatile kind. They are better than the somewhat similar verses written by Bishop Corbet on the manciple and butler of Christ Church, Oxford; but they are certainly not equal to Robert Fergusson's delightful elegy on John Hogg, porter to the University of St. Andrews.

In 1631 the young poet wrote an epitaph,

long enough to be an elegy, on the Marchioness of Winchester, who had been lamented by Jonson and others, and whose husband was to have the honor of an epitaph by Dryden. Singularly enough, as in the case of Chaucer and the Duchess of Lancaster, the poet was of exactly the same age as the subject of his verses — twenty-three. The epitaph, which is seventy-four verses long, is in that blending of seven- and eight-syllabled couplets which Milton borrowed from the Elizabethans like Barnfield, but of which he is so great a master. It is in many respects a true epitaph in spite of its length, and it has some of the characteristics of a requiem. As in the case of many other epitaphs of the period, the fact that the lady died in childbirth is given a prominence that seems unnecessary to our modern notions; but at least the poem is practically unmarred by conceits, although it is a typical product of the Cavalier muse of Milton's earlier years. The Puritan that was to be is foreshadowed, but only foreshadowed, in the exquisite comparison with Jacob's wife Rachel, and the classical touch is, of course, present also.

There is little in English poetry that marks a higher reach than the concluding verses; and the elegy as a whole, with all due regard to Mr. Swinburne's contrary opinion, is distinctly superior to Ben Jonson's lines upon the same lady.

Six years later, after the retirement at Horton had produced "Comus," Milton composed the crowning poem of his youth, the pastoral elegy "Lycidas."

The external facts relating to its evolution are ample on the whole, and easy to set forth. Among his friends at Christ's College had been two sons of Sir John King, long Secretary for Ireland. They were admitted during his third year, Roger, the elder, being sixteen, and his brother Edward two years younger. Nothing seems to be heard of them until four years later, when, to the surprise of every one, Edward King was chosen a Fellow of the College, in obedience to a royal mandate, which had doubtless been obtained through considerable political influence. Such royal interference was not usual or palatable, and it must have been especially galling to Milton,

who, as a Bachelor of two years' standing and "an acknowledged ornament of his college," to quote Professor Masson, had good reason to expect that the honor would have fallen to him. He seems, however, to have taken his disappointment gracefully, and to have shared the general liking for his brilliant and amiable college-mate, who, thanks to the pen of his disappointed rival, now lives in our memories even more freshly than his two greater fellow-students, John Cleveland, the Royalist poet, and Henry More, the Platonist. After Milton left Cambridge, King continued his academic career in an orthodox and successful way, proceeding M.A. in 1633, and filling the offices of tutor and prælector while preparing himself for active work in the Church. During the vacation of 1637, however, he sailed from Chester for Ireland, where he had been born and where he had relations and friends of high social standing. On the 10th of August his ship struck on a rock off the Welsh coast, and went down. Accounts vary as to the cause of the accident, and it is not known how many, if any, were saved. The

memorial volume shortly to be described states that he died in the act of prayer, which would imply that some of the passengers and crew escaped, but may be merely a touch of imagination.

When the news of King's death was received at Cambridge, it was at once felt that special steps should be taken to do honor to his memory, and at that time this laudable desire could be accomplished in no fitter way than by the publication of a volume of elegies inscribed with his name. The collection, when it finally appeared from the University Press, consisted of two parts, separately paged and titled, both bearing the date 1638. The first portion consisted of twenty-three poems in Greek and Latin, filling thirty-six pages. Both the learned languages figured in the title, which ran, *Justa Edovardo King naufrago ab amicis mœrentibus, amoris et μνείας χάριν*, or, as Masson once translated it, "Obsequies to Edward King, drowned by shipwreck, in token of love and remembrance, by his sorrowing friends" — which is only grammatically ambiguous. The second part consisted of thir-

teen English poems, filling twenty-five pages, and was entitled "Obsequies to the Memorie of Mr. Edward King, Anno Dom. 1638." Of the contributors we need note only Henry More, who naturally wrote in Greek; Henry King, Edward's brother; Joseph Beaumont, afterward author of a curious poem called "Psyche"; and John Cleveland, who subsequently showed his powers as an elegist when Charles I. was his subject, but here fell little short of the climax of absurdity.

"Lycidas" was, of course, included in Milton's 1645 edition of his poems, and the short prose argument which now precedes the verses was then inserted. No changes save orthographical were made in the edition of 1673; the version of 1645 is, therefore, the final form its author gave to his lyrical masterpiece. A comparison of the Cambridge Ms., the edition of 1638, and a copy of this edition, with corrections in Milton's handwriting, still preserved in the University Library at Cambridge, has enabled critics to trace the evolution of certain passages of the poem, and thrown much light upon Milton's habits of composition. Such investi-

gation furnishes technical proof of what every capable critic would have surmised, that the poet was a meticulous artist, careful of word and phrase, and sure to better whatever he changed.

But it is time to consider "Lycidas" in its higher relations as a contribution to the world's small stock of supremely excellent poetry, and first of the artistic category to which it belongs. Milton himself termed it a "monody," which it is, save in the last eight lines; but we cannot read far in it without discovering that it is a pastoral poem as well. We are, therefore, induced to class it as a pastoral elegy, and to rank it with the famous elegiac idylls of Theocritus, Bion, Moschus, and Virgil, to say nothing of their modern imitators. Perhaps Milton was induced to give his elegy this form through the influence of Spenser, who had thus lamented the death of Sidney; but it is more likely that he was affected by the example of the great Alexandrian poets. As the pastoral is now an out-worn form of verse, it follows that "Lycidas" has been pronounced to be artificial and insincere, Dr. Johnson being the most stento-

rian exponent of this view; it will therefore be necessary for us to vindicate the fitness of the form Milton chose for his tribute, before we can proceed with our discussion of the poem itself.

That pastoral poetry is more or less artificial in character does not admit of doubt. The goatherds of Theocritus were, indeed, to some extent worthy of the exquisite poetry put in their mouths, and Theocritus himself may be regarded as naturalistic in comparison with his followers. But that the Roman and the modern European pastoral is to any appreciable extent naturalistic, is a position that only a very rash critic will assume. It does not follow, however, that pastoral poetry, because it is artificial and not naturalistic, is therefore to be tabooed as a form of art. All art has its conventions, and those of pastoral poetry are exceptional in degree rather than in kind. It is a convention when the dramatist makes his hero soliloquize in blank verse and in tragic vein — it is equally a convention when the pastoral elegist forgets his sheep and proceeds to bewail in tender elegiacs his mate who has

passed to Proserpina's dark abode. But to preserve the well-recognized conventions of pastoral poetry, and at the same time refrain from stirring the reader's sense of the incongruous and the ridiculous, or from overtaxing his imagination and his sympathy by excessive artificiality, is an achievement that few poets have attained to. Yet that there have been successful pastoral poets and great pastoral poems is plain to any student of our literature who recalls the names of Spenser and Fletcher, and the titles "Lycidas" and "Thyrsis."

With regard now to the effect of the artificiality or conventionality of this class of poetry on the sincerity of the poet when he applies it to the expression of his personal sorrow, it is easy to see that a mediocre poet would either fail to write a true pastoral or else fail to show one spark of true feeling. A glance through the volumes of Chalmers will bring to light a number of frigid performances that will prove the truth of this assertion. But it often happens that a real poet succeeds best when the difficulties of his art-form are greatest. Hence it is that three of the finest of English

elegies, "Lycidas," "Adonais," and "Thyrsis," are pastoral elegies. Nor will this seem curious when we remember that the restrained grief at the death of a dear relative or friend, which is due to the conventionalities of society, is often far more impressive than the wild and unrestrained grief indulged in on similar occasions by mourners in the lower ranks of life. If, however, any one is still in doubt on this point, let him compare with "Lycidas" two simple, *i.e.* non-pastoral, elegies written on friends drowned at sea — to wit, George Turberville's "Epitaph on Maister Arthur Brooke," and Propertius's elegy on Pætus. Making all allowances for Milton's greater genius, we can hardly fail to perceive the superiority of the more complex over the more simple form of lament.

But the critics frequently shift their point of attack from the capabilities of the pastoral form to express emotion to the sincerity of the grief felt by Milton himself. "Lycidas," they say, lacks sincerity, and hence fails to make a true appeal, because it has not and could not have had the note of personal sorrow that is

found in such a poem as "In Memoriam." Arthur Hallam was Tennyson's bosom friend; Edward King had been promoted over Milton's head at college, and the latter did not even mention the sad drowning in the Irish Sea in two contemporary familiar letters to Diodati. But surely one does not need to be intimate with a man in order to be sincere in mourning his premature taking-off. Milton knew of King well enough, and he was aware that the latter was just the kind of man that was needed for the ministry of the Church. "Lycidas" itself is proof sufficient of the interest Milton took in that ministry, and of the scorn he had for its unworthy representatives; the poem is equal proof of the sincere grief its author felt for the loss of one whom he had known and admired, and whom he had believed destined to do a great work within the Christian fold. There was therefore in the relations of the two men scope for personal emotion of a high and pure kind, and this emotion was fused by Milton's artistic skill into a poem which, after a wide course of reading in the class of poetry to which it belongs, I have little hesitation in pro-

nouncing to be the noblest elegy in any of the greater literatures. If it is not sincere, then I am at a complete loss to account for the true ring of such supremely flawless verses as —

"For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer,"

or

"But, oh! the heavy change now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone and never must return,"

or

"Ay me! I fondly dream
'Had ye been there,' . . . for what could that have done?"

or

"It was that fatal and perfidious bark,
Built in the eclipse, and rigged with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine,"

or, finally, the whole passage beginning

"Ay me! whilst thee the shores and sounding seas
Wash far away"

and ending

"And, O ye dolphins, waft the hapless youth."

It may be, indeed, merely my own imagination that discovers in these verses a note of personal sorrow. Read casually they perhaps

strike one as being beautiful only, but read and re-read, and studied word by word, they reveal that deep, underlying sincerity that must be the basis of all perfect art. Grief worked up for the occasion, or the general concern one feels at hearing of the death of a brilliant college-mate, never inspired such verses or such a poem. I could as soon be persuaded that Shakspere did not, partially at least, "unlock his heart" in his divine sonnets as that Milton did not unlock his heart in the equally flawless and divine verses I have just quoted. Flawless art, I repeat, presupposes the deepest sincerity, and I am bold enough or eccentric enough to maintain that there are verses in "Lycidas" in which Milton has, consciously or unconsciously, struck as deep a note of personal sorrow as has ever been struck by an English poet. One can naturally no more prove such an assertion than one can prove that the late Professor Minto was mistaken in his theory that the second series of Shakspere's "Sonnets" represents a sort of satiric fancy rather than a genuine passion for a fascinating woman. All one can say is, that if flawless art "plays such

fantastic tricks before high heaven," it is indeed enough to make the angels weep.

Turning now to the question of the particular poems that may have influenced Milton in writing "Lycidas," we must give the first place to the three great pastoral elegies of the Alexandrians — to the "Song of Daphnis" in the First Idyll of Theocritus, to the "Song of Adonis" of Bion, and the "Lament for Bion" by Moschus. To these should be added the Fifth and Tenth Eclogues of Virgil.

I cannot see that Propertius's beautiful elegy on Pætus or Ovid's on Tibullus was at all in Milton's mind. Critics have cited such modern pastorals as the "Alcon" of the Italian poet Castiglione as having been drawn on for imagery, but I can discover nothing that both poets could not easily have derived from their common sources of inspiration. This seems to be true of Marot's pastoral on the death of Louise of Savoy, and of the eclogue that Spenser modelled on it. The latter poet's "Astrophel" may have had a slight stylistic influence; but even this much can hardly be said of Ludovick Bryskett's poor pastoral on

Sidney, in spite, as we shall see presently, of the claims put forward for it by Dr. Guest. Nor can I think that the pretty elegies and dirges of William Browne of Tavistock were specially in Milton's mind when he wrote, although more than one critic has traced the influence of Browne. It is true that Milton was a reader of Browne, and it is also true that Browne lamented in a touching way the death of a drowned friend; but these facts do not prove conscious imitation. Turberville's epitaph on Arthur Brooke, the translator of "Romeo and Juliet," who perished by shipwreck in a way that reminds one strikingly of the death of King, has, in spite of a certain crudity, more in common with "Lycidas" than Browne's laments have. The stanza with the pathetic invocation to Arion's dolphin brings up immediately one of the finest lines in "Lycidas," but it would be rash to affirm that the stanza gave birth to the line. In short, it is easy to conclude that "Lycidas" is unique among modern elegies, whether preceding or following; for it would be hard to trace any marked influence exerted by it on "Adonais" or "Thyrsis."

But while we can easily dismiss Milton's relations to modern pastoral poets, we should say a word here about the way he treated his Alexandrian masters. In the first place, he followed Virgil in dropping the refrain. Secondly, he made little or no attempt in "Lycidas" to paint any of those pretty but elaborate little pictures that gave idyllic poetry its name. For the beautiful invocation to the nymphs (ll. 50–62) he was indebted to Theocritus rather than to Virgil's Tenth Eclogue; but his substitution of British for classical names was a proof at once of his patriotism and of his invariable habit and power of bettering what he condescended to borrow. Unlike Moschus, he saw no reason to reserve to the last the expression of his personal sorrow, and it is needless to say that the hopelessness of the Greek in the presence of death found no place in his verses.

The influence of his classical models on particular lines and phrases of "Lycidas" is too apparent to require much notice. The name "Lycidas" itself and those of Damœtas, Amaryllis, and Neæra are, of course, borrowed

from these sources. The references to the hyacinth "inscribed with woe," to the grief of the flowers for Lycidas's death, to the mournful echoes of the caves, all suggest the Alexandrian idylls; and Milton himself confesses the source of much of his inspiration by his invocation to "fountain Arethuse" and "smooth-sliding Mincius," and by his expression "Doric lay." Minute commentators have even shown that he has been misled into making the Hebrus a swift river through his reliance upon a phrase in Virgil which is supposed to be a misreading. But "Lycidas" has a beauty and passion unknown to its Alexandrian predecessors, and it has not a touch of their oriental effeminacy and licentiousness.

Something must now be said about the marvellous rhythm of the poem. The iambic pentameter is the prevailing line, but trimeters and tetrameters are irregularly introduced throughout with exquisite effect. The rhythm is varied, and flows now in leaping waves, now in long rolling billows that carry all before them, like the surging periods of "Paradise Lost." There is probably no short poem in the

language the rhythm of which has been more deservedly praised and studied, or more despaired of by other poets. Milton's mastery of rhythm, remarkable from the first, almost culminated in "Lycidas," in spite of the fact that he was there subjected (practically for the last time) to what he afterward called "the troublesome and modern bondage of riming." There is nothing in the unrhymed (or rhymed) portions of "Comus" that, to my ear, at all equals in majesty and splendor of rhythmical movement the passage in "Lycidas" that begins

"Ay me! whilst thee the shores and sounding seas"—

and perhaps there is nothing in "Paradise Lost" that excels it. But it is the rhymed structure of "Lycidas" that has attracted most attention, because it is almost unique. Three of its notable peculiarities may be pointed out. In the 193 verses there are 10 that have no rhyming relations with others in their vicinity. There is no fixed order of rhyme, and where, as often happens, two adjacent verses rhyme, they sometimes fail to form a couplet in the

strict sense of the word. There is a paucity of rhymed endings (only about 60 in the poem) which shows that one sound and its related rhymes do duty for several verses; *e.g.* ll. 2, 5, 6, 9, 12, 14, end respectively with "sere," "year," "dear," "peer," "bier," and "tear." Other peculiarities, such as the use of assonance, might be dwelt upon, but the reader may observe these for himself, for the main question that concerns us here is, How did these peculiarities originate? This question was long ago indirectly answered by Dr. Johnson, when, in the course of his famous "Life," he casually remarked on the fact that Milton's "mixture of longer and shorter verses, according to the rules of Tuscan poetry," proved his "acquaintance with the Italian writers." Later Dr. Guest tried to show that an irregularly rhymed pastoral by Ludovick Bryskett on the death of Sidney (which made no use of verses without rhyme or of varying length) had been in Milton's mind when he wrote "Lycidas"; but that our great poet was influenced by the Italian masters, both in his arrangement of rhymes and in his alterna-

tion of shorter and longer verses, will be apparent to any one who will take the trouble to analyze the choruses of the "Aminta" or "Il Pastor Fido," or to examine a treatise on Italian metres.[1]

The reader will already have gathered that there has been much difference of opinion with regard to the merits of "Lycidas." Dr. Johnson wound up his curiously inept criticism by remarking: "Surely no man could have fancied that he read 'Lycidas' with pleasure had he not known the author." The cold and judicious Hallam wrote on the other hand: "It has been said, I think very fairly, that 'Lycidas' is a good test of real feeling for what is peculiarly called poetry."[2] Mark Pattison practically regarded "Lycidas" as the greatest poem in the language. Dr. Garnett dissents from this view, holding that the

[1] Mr. Verity notes that Landor also saw Milton's metrical obligations to Tasso and Guarini, and refers to the English critic's collected works (1876), iv., 499.

[2] "I have been reading 'Comus' and 'Lycidas' with wonder, and a sort of awe. Tennyson once said that 'Lycidas' was a touchstone of poetic taste." — EDWARD FITZGERALD to Fanny Kemble, March 26, 1880.

beauties of the poem are exquisite rather than magnificent, and that as an elegy it has been surpassed by "Adonais." It seems hard to justify this criticism. Both poems contain exquisite passages, and both contain magnificent passages, but I know of nothing in "Adonais" that is so exquisite as the flower passage in "Lycidas," or so magnificent as the speech of St. Peter, or the picture of the corpse of Lycidas washed by "the shores and sounding seas." Then, again, it seems plain that Milton understood better than Shelley the nature of the art form in which they purposed to cast their thoughts. Shelley's mind was too hazy to enable him to reproduce the pellucid beauty of his Greek originals, and his personifications, though not wanting in power, were far from clear-cut. This is not saying, of course, that the "Adonais" is not a great poem, or that it has not a greater historical interest than "Lycidas," and after all any literature may well be proud of possessing two such elegies.

The mention of the speech of St. Peter reminds us, however, that it and the other

"higher mood" concerned with Apollo and true fame have given the critics much trouble because they do not seem to be in keeping with the plaintive tone of the normal elegy.

The question therefore arises — "Was Milton necessarily committing an artistic blunder when he introduced into his pastoral elegy elements that at first sight seem foreign to it?" This question had practically been answered long before by Virgil and those of his successors who had used the pastoral for political and other similar purposes, but we may answer it for ourselves after a brief discussion of the two passages in "Lycidas" that have excited so much animadversion.

With the first, beginning

> "Alas! what boots it with uncessant care,"

less fault has been found. The transition is not too abrupt, and the nobility and beauty of the verses would almost justify their insertion, even if they did not follow naturally on the mention of Orpheus — the son of the muse — who perished at the hands of the ignoble throng. They are not, it is true, the soft complaints of a courtly

lover masquerading as a shepherd, nor are they the exquisite wail of a jaded, *fin-de-siècle* balladist who has retired from the world to lament in disgust the interest men take in everything except his fragile poetry. They are rather the last deep sigh that Milton's noble bosom will permit itself before, in the consciousness of a high and pure purpose, it is bared to the assaults of an alien and pitiless world. But to ask that an elegist shall not sigh so deeply is like insisting that no greater poet than a Tibullus shall ever touch the elegiac flute, and proclaiming that there is no room in our poetic hierarchy for a Propertius.

It is the second exalted passage introducing St. Peter mourning over the degeneracy of the English Church that has caused our solicitous critics most pain. The introduction of Triton, the message of Æolus, even the episode of the river Cam were allowable enough in such a pastoral; but why, ask the critics, should the bucolic poet turn preacher? Why should he blend with his shepherd's pipe the trumpet of the prophet, even though he blow it with the might of an archangel? Perhaps the fact that

Milton himself saw no incongruity in his procedure will seem a sufficient answer to those of us who believe that what Shakspere or Milton have joined together no man should lightly put asunder. But objectors will not be satisfied with this; so we may tell them that by his infusion of passion and scorn Milton, like Shelley in "Adonais," has given an intensity of tone to his elegy which even Moschus failed to give to his heartfelt lament for Bion. He has given it a higher spiritual significance than Propertius, with all his sincerity and power, could give to his lines on Pætus. He has broken loose from the restraints of the pastoral form just where one direct passionate outburst was needed to give the proper contrast, and so to heighten the effect, just as the single sigh or groan that escapes from a strong, self-contained mourner is supreme in its effect, and appears to emphasize, not only the grief he is enduring, but also the strength with which, except for one bare instant, he has controlled that grief. The passage is another crowning proof of Milton's power of blending the characteristics of Greek and Hebrew, and it is

natural enough when the conditions of the time are taken into account. If Cambridge could be represented as mourning in person the death of King as a scholar, surely St. Peter could mourn with equal propriety the death of King as an intended priest. With regard to the details of the speech put into St. Peter's mouth, there cannot be two opinions. For concentrated scorn, and awful, mysterious power and import, the speech has no equal. It is to be noted further that Milton successfully adapts pastoral language to his high purposes, and that he manages the transition from the higher to the lower "moods" with consummate felicity. If these claims are justified, we are in a position to assert that Milton, by his fusion of the intensity of the true ode with the idyllic beauty and tender pathos of the pastoral elegy proper, has modified and improved an old and established form of art. But one could write about "Lycidas" forever and not exhaust the subject, so it will be as well to cry a halt and to pass to a brief consideration of the Latin elegies that culminate in the "Epitaphium Damonis," leaving to one side the two sonnets

of an elegiac cast, which cannot well be considered apart from their companion poems in this specially elaborate verse-form.

The Latin elegies will not demand much attention because, with the exception of the "Epitaphium Damonis," they do not differ in quality from the youthful exercises already examined. Two poems in the "Elegiarum Liber" are true elegies — viz. the second written at the age of seventeen on the death of the Cambridge beadle, and the third written about the same time on the death of the Bishop of Winchester. Even if they had been done in English, they would have been remarkable as the work of a schoolboy; in their flowing Latin they are even more remarkable, although obviously academical in tone and matter. It is not a little curious that the future Puritan should in his youth have celebrated the deaths of two prelates in apparently sincere effusions. The tribute to the Bishop of Winchester contains a short description of the flight of the angels bearing the soul of the bishop to heaven which suggests comparison with Cowley's similar verses with regard to Crashaw. The advantage lies with Cowley,

but the boyish dream of St. Cuthbert touches us more than the vision of either poet.

The first poem of the collection entitled "Sylvarum Liber" is an ode in alcaics lamenting the death of the Vice-Chancellor, a physician. It too was written in Milton's seventeenth year, and is creditable to his genius in spite of its classical commonplaces. The next poem but one of the same collection is the second of the prelatical elegies, being an ode in iambic trimeters on the death of the Bishop of Ely. This tribute was written shortly after that to the Bishop of Winchester, and in it the Prelate himself makes a long speech which contains a good description of the passage of his soul through the stars.

But it is the last of Milton's Latin elegies, the famous "Epitaphium Damonis," that alone demands serious consideration.

This is a pastoral following the Alexandrian pattern more closely than does "Lycidas," and, as was natural, it is a tenderer poem than the latter. In poetic beauty it ranks above all Milton's elegiac verse except "Lycidas"; and, indeed, above most of the elegies ever written

by Englishmen. It has been frequently pointed out that the great merit of Milton's Latin verse, when at its best, lies not in its technical skill, although that is great, but in the fact that the foreign medium cannot obscure the intense feeling of the poet. This is abundantly shown in the "Epitaphium Damonis," which is so great a poem that one can but regret, with Mr. Pattison, that being in Latin it is unfortunately "inaccessible to uneducated readers."

Like its Alexandrian and Roman models it is written in hexameters, and not in the elegiac couplet. It has the refrain

"Ite domum impasti, domino iam non vacat, agni."[1]

It begins by invoking the Sicilian nymphs, and by recalling the elegies on Daphnis and Bion. It abounds in classical names and allusions, and is minutely pastoral in its language and incidents — much more so than "Lycidas." Lastly, and especially, it follows its models by showing the proper idyllic touch

[1] Thus rendered by Cowper: —

"Go, seek your home, my lambs; my thoughts are due
To other cares than those of feeding you."

—the imitation of the Alexandrian pictorial masters in the exquisite description of the goblets ("pocula") given to the poet by his Neapolitan friend Manso. The strain of personal loss is present throughout, especially in the pathetic lines in which Milton's visit to Rome is deplored because it kept him from the bedside of his friend; and although there are no such rises to "higher moods" as in "Lycidas," we are gratified by such auto-biographical touches as the lines that tell us of the contemplated abandonment of Latin verse as a vehicle of expression, and of the proposed Arthurian epic mentioned also in "Mansus," which, alas! was never written. In fine, the "Epitaphium Damonis" is a great pastoral elegy, in which Milton fused his love and knowledge of the classics with his love for Diodati and England, and with his noble sense of his own high mission, into a poem which ought to be studied even if one has to learn Latin in order to read it. "Fictitious bucolicism" the poem may exhibit, but, in the words of Mr. Pattison, this "is pervaded by a pathos which, like volcanic heat, has fused into a new

compound the dilapidated débris of the Theocritean world."

Particular criticism is probably unnecessary, but I may suggest a comparison of the closing lines descriptive of Diodati's reception in Paradise with the similar close of "Lycidas," and I cannot forbear pointing out the pathos and felicity of these verses: —

> "Vix sibi quisque parem de millibus invenit unum,
> Aut si sors dederit tandem non aspera votis,
> Illum inopina dies, qua non speraveris hora,
> Surripit, æternum linquens in sæcula damnum."

These have been Englished by Cowper as follows: —

> "We scarce in thousands meet one kindred mind,
> And if the long-sought good at last we find,
> When least we fear it, Death our treasure steals,
> And gives our heart a wound that nothing heals."

But the only man to translate these lines properly was Milton himself.

The "Epitaphium Damonis" was not only Milton's last important Latin poem; it was also, as we have seen, his last real elegy. In the turmoil of public and the sorrows of

private life, his mighty spirit was to find other and higher work to perform for "the great Task-master's eye." That work will be spoken of in the chapters that follow; here the hope may be expressed that no reader will suffer himself to be so dazzled by the splendor of the poetical achievements of Milton's old age (and dazzled he will be if he approach it with a mind trained in the principles of sound criticism and unaffected by the shallow and uncultured revolt against classical standards of excellence that is so rife at present) as to be blind to the charm, the blended grace and power that mark the noble poems of his youth. Great even to sublimity is the Milton of "Paradise Lost,"

> "from the cheerful ways of men,
> Cut off."

Great, too, and matchless in charm is the Milton of "Lycidas,"

> "With eager thought warbling his Doric lay."

CHAPTER VI

THE PROSE WORKS

QUITE recently Mr. Gosse, in his admirable short history of English literature, has expressed a doubt whether people really can admire Milton's prose. Some years ago Mr. Lowell declared that his prose had "no style, in the higher sense"; that his sentences were often "loutish and difficult"; that he was careless of euphony; that he too often blustered, *et cetera*. Nearly all critics have admitted the splendor of his best passages, but have hastened immediately to qualify their praises by animadverting upon his clumsy syntax, his lack of coherence, his coarseness, his malignity, his want of humor, and the like. Most of these charges have, indeed, a basis of truth, which makes them difficult to refute; but like much other current criticism they do their object gross injustice. In reality Milton is a great prose

writer, perhaps the greatest in our literature; but his greatness will never emerge from criticism that is chiefly negative. It may be a rash claim to make, yet I will be bold enough to maintain that, when all allowances are made, the prose works of Milton contain the noblest and most virile English that can be found in our literature, and that this is true, not merely of detached passages of the "Areopagitica" alone, but of the mass of his writings. Such a claim cannot, of course, be made good here or elsewhere; but it will be disputed with a positiveness inversely proportional to the disputants' study of Milton's controversial tracts.[1]

The phrase just used contains in itself many of the reasons for Milton's failure to take his proper rank as a prose writer. As a rule Milton wrote as a prose pamphleteer and advocate, and neither his matter nor his manner is calculated to please readers whose minds, indurated by preconception and prejudice, cannot play about the subjects he discusses. A partisan of

[1] Unless, of course, the critic has a theory to prove, as was Mr. Pattison's case, who, in his treatment of the prose works, is distinctly biassed.

the Stuarts, a devotee of liturgies, a reader of over-delicate sensibilities, will be almost certainly unable to judge Milton fairly. Even those who agree with him in religious and political matters will be generally incapable of getting rid of the effects of their present environment and dealing with him with that sympathy which is absolutely indispensable to all true criticism. As manners have improved, controversy has ceased to please; therefore it requires considerable effort to shake off our prepossessions sufficiently to get the proper æsthetic effect of Milton's writings. If, however, we can imagine ourselves fighting for an ideal state and an ideal religion, rejoicing in overcoming a doughty adversary, advocating liberty of thought and expression, promulgating a new system of education,—in short, if we can make ourselves ideal partisans of some great cause, we shall then be able to delight, not merely in Milton's exalted passages, but in the general vigor of his style, in the weight and dignity of his learning, in his thunderous wrath, in the sharpness of his satire, in the marvellous variety and abundance of his vocabulary, and in

the thoroughly direct and masculine tone of his thought. In other words, we must steep ourselves in the Miltonic spirit before we can begin to realize how far Milton surpasses all competitors in strength and nobility as well as how far he possesses other qualities of style, such as charm and lucidity, usually denied him. We shall surely not comprehend him if we attempt to judge him from the "Areopagitica" or from a volume of specimens; yet it is to be feared that this is what many critics have unhesitatingly done.

The prose writings divide themselves naturally and easily into four groups. First, the five anti-prelatical tracts of 1641–1642; secondly, the four divorce tracts of 1643–1645; thirdly, the political pamphlets from 1649–1660, eleven in number unless the "Areopagitica" be added to make the full dozen; fourthly, the miscellanies, including the letters, state and private, the Grammar and the Logic, the histories of Britain and Muscovy, the "De Doctrina Christiana," and another ecclesiastical pamphlet, the letter to Hartlib on Education, and one or two short and unimportant publications.

These four groups we may now characterize briefly.

The titles of the ecclesiastical tracts are not alluring, running as they do: "Of Reformation touching Church Discipline in England," "Of Prelatical Episcopacy," "Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence against Smectymnuus," "The Reason of Church Government urg'd against Prelaty," "Apology against a Pamphlet called A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions, etc." The form in which their author gave them to the world is no more alluring. They will always be heavy pamphlets, for even the resources of the modern printer cannot prevail against long paragraphs and defective chapter divisions. Yet it may be doubted whether seven more glorious paragraphs can be found in literature than those that close the first tract, or whether there is extant a more superb autobiographical passage than that contained in the preface to the second book of the "Reason of Church Government urg'd against Prelaty."

It is obviously impossible to analyze these pamphlets here, but it may be remarked that a

careful study of them reveals the fact that Milton is more at home in historical and scholarly disquisitions than in the practical application of his principles, which are always of a root and branch order. Being an idealist, he cannot compromise; being Milton, he is absolutely regardless of consequences. But he is none the less a weighty and well-girt reasoner. Even when he is dealing with such a scholar as Archbishop Usher, he proves himself no mean antagonist in his use of patristic learning, and against Bishop Hall he is actually nimble to the point of indecorousness in his movements. He ascends and descends all the grades of partisanship from that of the prophet to that of the scolding fishwife; but perhaps only in one instance, that unfortunate one of the episcopal hose, does he cease entirely to be the powerful advocate of a dignified cause.

That cause — the cutting off of episcopacy and the approximation of the English Church to that of Geneva — may not appeal to many of us now, but has little to do with the power of Milton's style. The subject is at least as interesting as that of Bossuet's most famous funeral

oration, and if the style is great and we are lovers of style, we should surely take the time to read the tracts. But what of the style?—for we may discuss it as fittingly in connection with these pamphlets, which exhibit it fully, as we should be able to do on completing the total body of the prose writings.

As we have seen, many of the charges brought against Milton's prose style must be partly admitted. He is turgid, but he is also past master of the potent phrase. Not only his sentences, but often his paragraphs, are loose because he does not pay sufficient attention to such an elementary matter as the unity of subject. But this general looseness of structure corresponds, of course, with Milton's looseness of thought, which in turn is due not to his lack of logic or power of cogent reasoning—he can be as logical and cogent as he pleases—but to the fulness of his erudition and to the main purpose of his controversial writings, *i.e.* to his design to overwhelm his adversaries and sweep away his readers by the mass and volume of his utterance. It is a great mistake to suppose that Milton did not know how to use

the short sentence, or that he was unacquainted with the advantage of the English over the Latin idiom for the purposes of the writer who aims at a swift and strong expression of his ideas. Much of his prose is anything but the stiff, splendidly brocaded texture that many of the critics lay stress on; much of it is anything but the loose, interminably flowing robe with which many of us imagine that he continually enfolded himself. The fact is that Milton's prose structure, like his poetic, constantly impresses the student with its variety and mobility. His diction, too, is at times far from stiff, pedantic, and Latinistic, although his profound Latin studies plainly influenced it. I know of no English writer, unless it be Shakspere, who gives one such a sense of a copious, nay, inexhaustible, vocabulary. Perhaps this is due, as critics have remarked, to rapidity of circulation rather than to the actual quantity of different words employed; but it is the effect, not the cause, that concerns us, and the effect is that of an almost unbounded affluence of words. From the lowest grade of the scurrilous and vulgar, up to the most technically erudite and po-

etically sonorous of terms, his range is free and sovereign. He can scold like a shrew, he can discourse like an archangel; and if he indulges too much in the first rôle, owing to the temper of his times, and often to the nature of his task and the character of his adversary, we should never forget that he is the only mortal man who has ever been able to bear the weight of the second. This, I think, is his chief distinction — whether in his prose or in his poetry he is the noblest of writers. I will go farther and say that in his prose he is the most overwhelmingly strong of writers, and that I am bound to prefer superlative nobility and strength to all other qualities of style, or the sum of them. Critics like Mark Pattison may set Hooker above him for one reason and Bacon for another; but neither Hooker, nor Bacon, nor Jeremy Taylor, nor Sir Thomas Browne (whom Lowell avouches in this connection), nor any subsequent writer of English, gives me the sense of sublime power and variety and nobility — of eloquence in its highest meaning, that possesses me when I read the prose of Milton. Regular it is not, in the way that we properly

demand of modern prose with its multiplicity of duties; it has not the clarity, the neatness, the precision of the French; it does not combine subtle charm and picturesqueness and brilliancy as does the prose of a writer like Châteaubriand; but it is better than all this, better than the stately periods of De Quincey or the regal march of Gibbon, better than the vigor of Macaulay or the beauty of Ruskin or the quiet force of Newman — it is either the utterance of a demigod or the speech of an angel.[1]

[1] It is not to be expected that the above praise will be deemed less than dithyrambic by any reader who has not fairly soaked himself in Milton's prose; neither is it to be expected that I should analyze the prose writings here in order to try to prove my point, or that readers who desire to investigate for themselves will be easily induced to study them in their present unattractive and almost inaccessible or rather *inabordable* form. Under these circumstances I shall resort to the expedient of referring in this lengthy note to certain passages of the tractate "Of Reformation," which more or less bear out some of the contentions made above.

The twentieth paragraph of Book I. contains six short sentences with the cumulative effect Macaulay used to aim at. It should be noticed in this connection that Milton's wide use of the relative is one of the chief syntactical reasons for his obscurity, and that frequently his sentences are long only because of faulty punctuation. A little familiarity with his style will, however, speedily minimize the effects of these hindrances.

The matter of Milton's second group of tracts is probably as little attractive to most people as that of his first, nor is his manner

That Milton could use vigorous, unpoetic, nay, unacademic English when he chose, is plain from such sentences or portions of sentences as these: —

The bishops "suffered themselves to be the common stales, to countenance with their prostituted gravities every politic fetch that was then on foot."

"It was not of old that a conspiracy of bishops could frustrate and fob off the right of the people."

"So have they hamstrung the valor of the subject by seeking to effeminate us all at home."

Such sentences could be multiplied indefinitely, but not more so than noble passages. The close of the whole tract has been referred to in the text, but one never knows when Milton is going to break out into a sublime strain, or indeed into some exquisite collocation of sounds like the following, which makes one smile at Mr. Lowell's remark about the lack of euphony: "But he [God], when we least deserved, sent out a gentle gale and message of peace from the wings of those his cherubims that fan his mercy-seat." The New England critic might, one would think, have hesitated to set up his ear against Milton's, if only in gratitude for the following sentences about his ancestors: —

"Next what numbers of faithful and free-born Englishmen, and good Christians, have been constrained to forsake their dearest home, their friends and kindred, whom nothing but the wide ocean, and the savage deserts of America, could hide and shelter from the fury of the bishops. O sir, if we could but see the shape of our dear mother England, as poets are