of reasoning much more convincing. In his "Of Reformation" he had been guilty of arguing that because St. Martin had, after his elevation to the episcopate, complained of a loss of spiritual power, therefore God plainly had taken a "displeasure" at "an universal rottenness and gangrene in the whole [episcopal] function." In his divorce tracts he was capable of arguing for almost unlimited freedom of divorce, with scarcely a mention of the evils that would ensue to the family thus broken up. Yet neither in his precipitant inference from one particular to the general, nor in his selfish presentation of the divorce question from the man's point of view alone, was Milton other than his impetuous, whole-souled

wont to give a personal form to what they please, how would she appear, think ye, but in a mourning weed, with ashes upon her head and tears abundantly flowing from her eyes to behold so many of her children exposed at once, and thrust from things of dearest necessity, because their conscience could not assent to things which the bishops thought indifferent."

Do we not here, and in countless other passages, find Milton standing, to make use of his own noble words, on "one of the highest arcs, that human contemplation circling upwards can make from the globy sea whereon she stands"?

self. He was incapable of intellectual dishonesty of any conscious kind. He merely saw certain phases of his subject and pressed them home. He believed thoroughly in the depravity of bishops, and he felt deeply the need of some greater freedom in marriage, hence it never occurred to him that his methods of arguing could be pronounced disingenuous or misleading. He was a zealous Protestant, and therefore an individualist, that is, a more or less strenuous but not very cautious reasoner. Yet it is idle to maintain the attitude of those critics who seem to think that Milton's reasoning in ecclesiastical, social, and political matters was chiefly "sound and fury," or that it is impossible for latter-day readers to comprehend and sympathize with the positions taken by him. It would be truer to say that his positions are always intelligible, if not always sound, that his power as a writer is almost beyond praise, and his character one that none can comprehend without respect and admiration.

The best of the divorce tracts is the first, "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce."

The second, "The Judgment of Martin Bucer concerning Divorce," consists mainly of translations from the Latin of this eminent Protestant divine of the age of Edward VI., and of Milton's comments thereupon. "Tetrachordon," as its name imports, is a commentary on the four chief passages in Scripture treating of marriage and its annulment, while "Colasterion" is likewise self-explanatory in its title, as it is devoted to excoriating certain persons who had been rash enough to censure Milton for his "licentious" opinions. The two last-named pamphlets may be safely passed over by the general reader, for the first, although calm and dignified, is dry through the nature of the subject and the method of its treatment; and the second does not afford a fair measure of the vigor with which Milton could expound his principles, although it does give a fair idea of his ability to hector an adversary. But the reader who fails to read the first tract will fail to understand Milton in his capacity as an ideal reformer regardless of consequences. His motives were much less likely to be misunderstood in the episcopal controversy and in the Royalist muddle than in his attack upon indissoluble marriages; but Milton was of all men who ever lived the most resolute to follow his mind whithersoever it might carry him. He never went so far as to doubt the prime necessity of Scriptural warrant, or to cease to rely upon ancient, especially classical, precedents; but this fact, while it necessarily militates against the present currency of his ecclesiastical and political writings, should not blind us to the further facts, that for his time he was a most liberal thinker, and that no age has ever produced a more ideal one. It is this bold ideality that forms a basis, as it were, to his eloquence, which from now on prompts him to appeal in clarion tones either to the Parliament or the English people or the world at large. These appeals, whether in prefaces, as is the case with the first two divorce tracts, or in a special plea like the "Areopagitica," or in scattered passages, as frequently in the political works, furnish in the main the noble prose on which we have laid such stress; the strong prose is furnished by the body of nearly every book or pamphlet that proceeded from his pen.1

The ideality of the divorce tracts, which is seen not merely in Milton's fearless plea for individual liberty, but in his constant assertion that in marriage the mind counts for more than the body, is manifested just as strikingly in the nobly suggestive if impracticable "Of Education," and in the far more effective "Areopagitica," which through the irony of fate is almost the only thing that keeps him alive as a prose writer. The latter tract, superb as it is, does not contain his noblest work; nor perhaps does it represent his hammering vigor, his impetuous flow, as well as "The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates" and the "First Defence" do, or his compact strength as well as "Eikonoklastes" does. Still, it is so splendid that one is almost content, as is the case with Gray's "Elegy," not to attempt to disturb the public in a prepossession so creditable to it.

In addition to the prefaces the reader should study also Chapters III. and VI. of the "Doctrine and Discipline." Chapters VIII. and XVII. show how subtle Milton's reasoning could be at times.

Passing now to the more specifically political tracts, it must suffice to say of the "Tenure" that it is admirably sincere and straightforward, - that it fairly throbs with the heartbeats of an ideal son of liberty, — but that it might well be more succinct in its logic and more true to the promise of its title. Milton does not show that it is lawful "for any who have the power" to put a tyrant to death, but he thunders splendidly against tyrants and turncoat Presbyterians, though not personally abusing Charles I., and gives ample proof of his own sincerity and courage. In "Eikonoklastes" he undertakes a harder piece of work, but one in which he is far more successful, in my judgment, than most critics have allowed. He had to answer, chapter by chapter, a book believed by thousands to have been written by a martyred king—a book which was practically a last will and testament. He is usually represented as having done it in a "savage" manner, - even Professor Masson allows himself to use the term, -but this is quite questionable. It would be idle to argue that Milton treated Charles

gently, but I am inclined to think that he held himself in — a hard task — and that his general treatment of the king and his book was little more than warrantably sarcastic and severe, it being of course impossible for him then, or for some of us now, to look upon Charles as other than an evasive and dangerous foe. Milton was practically a republican, and most of his subsequent critics have been tinctured with monarchical prepossessions, hence his attitude toward Charles has seldom been fairly presented. Probably Richard Baron, who reissued "Eikonoklastes" in 1756, went too far in his praises of it, but it is certainly a performance of remarkable vigor and level strength - perhaps on the whole the most uniformly powerful of Milton's prose works. The arrangement as a commentary mars the modern reader's pleasure, and some of the arguments are both tedious and weak, but it was no credit to Milton's contemporaries that the book had so little temporary or permanent effect.1

¹ The general vigor of style and matter is seen clearly in Section VIII. Section X. contains some excellent sarcasm. Milton, it may be remarked, may not have lambent humor, but

The pamphlet devoted to the treaty made by the Earl of Ormond with the Irish rebels hardly deserves our notice, although the Presbytery of Belfast must have wished in their secret hearts that Milton had been otherwise employed than in writing it; but we cannot afford to be so summary in our treatment of the Reply to Salmasius and the two treatises that grew out of it. The moral grandeur displayed by Milton in preferring to lose his sight rather than that his beloved and then to him glorious England should go undefended, has been sufficiently praised elsewhere. It may be as well, however, to remark that this sacrifice of Milton's is not a figment of the imagination of his worshippers, but is attested to

he possesses an abundance of the thunder-bolt order. For grim, strong, hitting-the-mark shafts of scorn he has few or no rivals. Section XXIV. is an example of the effects of that weakness which almost invariably attends strong prejudices. Section XXV. toward the close shows a lack of charity distressing to modern notions; but Sections XXVII. and XXVIII., which conclude the book, are strong and dignified. It is worth while to notice that the so-called attack on Shakspere in Section I. has been entirely misread, and that, except when he engages in virulent personal controversy, there is little occasion for Milton's readers to fault the taste displayed in the prose works.

by himself in that splendid autobiographical passage which gives "The Second Defence of the People of England" its chief value. As for the general qualities of style and matter to be discovered in the "First Defence" or Reply to Salmasius, in the "Second Defence," and in the more specific attack on Morus entitled "Authoris Pro Se Defensio," it must be confessed that the general vigor with which the political arguments are pressed home is matched by the scorn with which both Salmasius and Morus are overwhelmed. It is idle to object to this or that special bit of pleading, or to urge that no decent man, much less a Christian, ought so foully to insult another. It is equally idle to claim that Milton had no right to reject the testimony as to Morus's at least partial innocence of the authorship of the "Regii Sanguinis Clamor," with its scurrilous abuse of Milton. This criticism is idle simply because it is beside the point. Milton, like every other controversialist of his time, was aiming to overwhelm his adversary. His weapon was a club, or at most a battle-axe, not the rapier Pope afterward

used. He meant to fell Salmasius and Morus, and he did it by means of his superior learning, his thorough belief in the justice of his own cause, his equally thorough contempt of his adversaries, his marvellous power of writing Latin as though it were a living tongue, and finally the vibrating vigor and frequent nobility of his thought. Of their kind, then, these political broadsides, at least the first two, for it is permissible to wish that the second attack on Morus had been withheld, are masterpieces, whether the present age cares for such literary performances of vigor and scurrility or not. We need neither read them nor imitate them; but to pick flaws in them in accordance with modern notions, or to deny their greatness after their own kind, is to be distinctly unjust.

The answer to Salmasius suffers, as does so much of Milton's writing in answer to books and pamphlets, from the fact that he has to keep track of his adversary and to indulge in much antiquarian discussion. This is less the case in the "Second Defence," which is consequently much oftener quoted,

though one could wish that at least the close of the answer to Salmasius, with its splendid warning to the People of England, were as well known as the hyperbolical praise of Christina of Sweden in the "Second Defence" is. Milton could have given other reasons for his praise of that sovereign besides the favor she had shown his retort to her protégé Salmasius, and he could also be proud of the fact that his noble praise of Cromwell had closed with full as noble a warning. He could likewise feel that if he indulged in a retrospective glance at his own life in reply to Morus's, or rather Du Moulin's, foul charges, he did it in a way that would make posterity his debtor, and the just pride of even Horace and Shakspere seem almost a matter of slight consequence in comparison. He could hardly with justice have looked back with such contentment on any passage in the "Pro Se Defensio," but he may be excused if he chuckled grimly over the picture he drew of Bontia's scratching the cheeks of her clerical seducer.

But perhaps it will be well to dismiss this subject of the political works—for the small

tracts on the "Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes," on "The Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church," and the "Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth," while interesting as throwing light on Milton's broad though not fully complete notions of toleration, his preference for an unpaid ministry, and his aristocratic hankering for a permanent Council of State, composed of the best men, are not of prime importance—by giving in outline his own defence of his habit of indulging in strenuous personalities in the course of his controversies. This defence can be found in the prefatory remarks to the "Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence against Smectymnuus," and although made early in his career, will apply with full force to his later works.

The defence in question indicates, perhaps, that some mild remonstrance against his vehemence had been made to Milton by discreet friends rather than that his own conscience had been troubled in the matter. When he was defending his principles, Milton's conscience was always serene, such divine confiscience was always serene, such divine confiscience

dence did he have in his own integrity of purpose and sureness of vision. But the defence he does condescend to make of his manner of conducting a controversy is, on the whole, strong and well put, his critics being called upon to explain "why those two most rational faculties of human intellect, anger and laughter, were first seated in the breast of man," if they were not to be used against a "false prophet taken in the greatest, dearest, and most dangerous cheat, the cheat of souls." The critics might have replied, indeed, that certain faculties must be kept under by the Christian apologist or the prudent publicist, and that a debater ought not to begin by begging the question; but on the whole a majority of Milton's readers probably felt that he had defended himself well, if, in fact, many of them in that age of rough-and-ready controversy thought that he needed any defence. And we, remembering the fact that he defended none but great causes against men whom he was bound to regard as "false prophets," may surely forgive him all his errors of taste, because, in his own words, he unfeignedly loved "the souls of men, which is the dearest love and stirs up the noblest jealousy."

With regard now to the miscellaneous works we can afford to be very brief. The Logic and the Latin Grammar are of pedagogical interest merely. The state letters and papers and the small amount of private correspondence, together with the academical prolusions, are all stately, and full of historical or biographical interest, but are still minor compositions. "The History of Muscovy" is but a well-written compilation, and the "History of Britain" - most of which was probably written during his schoolmaster days—is more important, not because it has any real historical or philosophical value, but because it unfolds the early legends of British history and the chief events of the Anglo-Saxon annals with a literary power that is quite remarkable. Milton had erudition and wisdom enough to have made a great historian, at least for his times; but events determined that he should write only a picturesque and partly satiric narrative. The tract "Of True Religion, Heresy, Schism, Toleration" is chiefly noticeable as

indicating that even the Milton who in 1660 made his forlorn plea for some sort of republic was forced to accommodate himself to his times, and plead for a toleration not comprehending Roman Catholics as the only one practicable at the period, or indeed sorting with his own political principles. But the treatise "Of Christian Doctrine" is of more importance. By a curious chain of events it remained in concealment until 1823. Two years later its publication at the expense of King George IV. gave Macaulay an opportunity to write his famous essay, but produced little effect upon Anglican theology. Milton had worked upon the book for many years, developing his ideas from a most minute study of the Bible, whose ultimate authority he respected as much as he was careless of the theological opinions currently derived therefrom. Those critics are doubtless right who maintain that had the treatise been published during Milton's lifetime it would have created quite a stir. Coming to light about a century and a half later, and being almost totally devoid of eloquence and charm, it has proved of little interest save in so far as it has confirmed the impression derived from "Paradise Lost" that Milton was more or less of an Arian, and has shown that he was bold enough to oppose Sabbatarianism and to tolerate polygamy (nowhere condemned in Scripture) and the doctrine of the sleep of the soul between death and the resurrection. Had Milton's high-church and Royalist opponents but suspected him of such heresies, they might have rendered him still more obnoxious to certain not over-intelligent classes of readers, but fortune was kind to him at least in this particular, and his book is not sufficiently read now to endanger him with any one. Dr. Garnett has practically said the last word about the matter by observing that "if anything could increase our reverence for Milton, it would be that his last years should have been devoted to a labor so manifestly inspired by disinterested benevolence and hazardous love of truth."

"Disinterested benevolence and hazardous love of truth"—these are indeed the characteristic notes of Milton the man, just as strength and nobility are of Milton the writer. They

emerge from any careful study of his works, but as this can be expected of but few in our fast-reading age, it is fortunate that they emerge also from many a quotable passage. Where in English, or any other literature, we may well ask, can the strength and nobility that emerge from this paragraph be matched or even approximated?—

"Then, amidst the hymns and hallelujahs of saints, some one may perhaps be heard offering at high strains in new and lofty measures, to sing and celebrate thy divine mercies and marvellous judgments in this land throughout all ages; whereby this great and warlike nation, instructed and inured to the fervent and continual practice of truth and righteousness, and casting far from her the rags of her old vices, may press on hard to that high and happy emulation to be found the soberest, wisest, and most Christian people at that day, when thou, the eternal and shortly expected King, shalt open the clouds to judge the several kingdoms of the world, and distributing national honors and rewards to religious and just commonwealths, shalt put an end to all earthly tyrannies, proclaiming thy universal and mild monarchy through heaven and earth; when they undoubtedly, that by their labors, counsels, and prayers, have been earnest for the common good of religion and their country, shall receive above the inferior orders of the blessed, the regal addition of principalities, legions, and thrones into their glorious titles, and in supereminence of beatific vision, progressing the dateless and irrevoluble circle of eternity, shall clasp inseparable hands with joy and bliss, in over measure for ever." 1

For such prose what words of mortal praise are adequate? Organ-music the critics call it—the prose of a poet rather than strictly poetic prose—sublime, magnificent, unrivalled—all these phrases and epithets have been applied to it, and justly—but I can compare it only with something I never heard save through Milton's own mouth in "Paradise Lost," the speech of Raphael, the archangel of God.

^{1&}quot; Of Reformation in England," Book II., next to last paragraph.

CHAPTER VII

THE SONNETS

ALTHOUGH the entire sonnet-work of Milton is not equal in value to that of Shakspere, or perhaps even to that of Wordsworth, if the latter's failures be overlooked, there are reasons for maintaining that he is the most masterly of all English sonneteers. For melodious sweetness, for power to analyze and express every phase of the passion of love Shakspere, with his exquisite quatorzains, is unsurpassed; but Milton is equally so in his command of the stricter sonnet forms, in his ability to extract noble music out of them, and in his adherence to the canon that the sonnet is a short poem adapted to an occasional subject. In other words, Milton uses the sonnet more regularly and at the same time more nobly than any other English poet does, yet he has also shown his originality by imparting a special movement of

his own to the stanza by omitting the pause after the eighth line that is necessary to the strict Petrarchan form. Furthermore, it is to be observed that none of Milton's sonnets is poor, that at least two-thirds are great, and that two, if not more, are grand—as grand perhaps as a short poem can ever be. It is almost needless to say that these two sonnets are the XVIIIth, "On the Late Massacre in Piedmont," and the XIXth, "On his Blindness."

Counting the Italian sonnets and the elongated sonnet colla coda, "On the New Forcers of Conscience," we have just twenty-four pieces, to which the Italian canzone may be added as a twenty-fifth. They were written at odd times from 1630 to 1658, the first ten (or eleven, counting the canzone), as usually printed, appearing in the edition of 1645, the remainder adorning that of 1673, save numbers XV., XVI., XVII., and XXII., which were suppressed for political reasons until 1694, when Edward Phillips gave them to the world along with the life of his uncle. Their occasional composition is plain proof that Milton used them as a means of giving a brief relief to his overcharged emotions, espe-

cially during the twenty busy years when he was cut off from elaborate poetical labors.

The first eight pieces, counting the canzone, are obviously to be classed as juvenilia so far as anything of Milton's can be thus classed. The first, "To the Nightingale" (1630?), is characterized mainly by charm, and hardly deserves Mr. Pattison's censure for the "conceit" that it contains. Any poet might have used the tradition about the cuckoo and the nightingale without danger of becoming a Marinist. But we must not forget to be grateful to Mr. Pattison for calling attention to the contrast Milton offers to most previous (and subsequent) sonneteers by his noble directness of phrase, his total avoidance of quip and quirk. This straightforward quality, both of expression and of feeling, is fully apparent in the second sonnet, "On His Being arrived at the Age of Twenty-three" (1631), which is as nobly autobiographical as any of the famous prose passages.

The five Italian sonnets and the canzone probably date from the continental journey and the shadowy Bolognese love affair. They are

all addressed to some unknown lady save one, and that tells Diodati how much she has enslaved him. It is hard to say how sincere they are, but those of us that are romantically inclined will prefer to think that they represent a genuine, if transitory, attachment. Competent Italian critics have detected idiomatic faults in them, which was to be expected. Even an amateur can notice that in the pauses and the arrangement of rhymes in the sestet, Milton has not followed the most impeccable models, since three out of the five sonnets end in the eschewed though not prohibited couplet. But in their general spirit and matter, these sonnets are no mere exercises in a strange tongue; they are real poems by a student of Petrarch who has caught not a little of that master's subtle charm.

Sonnets VIII., XI., XII., XV., XVI., XVII., XVIII., XVIII., XXIII., and the sonnet colla coda, group themselves as especially concerned with Milton's life under the Commonwealth. The splendid petition bidding "Captain, or Colonel, or Knight in arms" not to lift "spear against the Muses' bower," serves as a prelude to the

noble encomiums on Fairfax, Cromwell,¹ and the younger Vane; the sonnet on the "Massacre of the Vaudois" is the trumpet note of the collection; while the second sonnet to Cyriack Skinner is the proud appeal of the defeated champion of liberty from fickle humanity to an all-seeing and all-powerful God of Righteousness. Is there a nobler passage in literature than these lines?—

"What supports me, dost thou ask?

The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied

In Liberty's defence, my noble task,

Of which all Europe talks from side to side.

This thought might lead me through the world's vain mask

Content, though blind, had I no better guide."

Compared with these verses the three satirical sonnets in defence of his divorce tracts represent a much lower plane of thought and execution, but even these are fine in their way, and are proofs of Milton's astonishing mental and moral vigor.

Leaving out the grand sonnet "On His Blindness," which is too well known to require

¹ Compare the great prose tributes in the "Second Defence."

comment and is perhaps the best single illustration of the sublimity of Milton's character to be found in his works, we have in the remaining seven sonnets a series of domestic tributes to friends, two of them being elegiacal. That to a "Virtuous Young Lady," who is still unknown, is so full of charm that it ought to be quoted whenever Milton is attacked for his supposed indifference to women. Much the same thing may be said of the more highly sustained address to Lady Margaret Ley. The sonnet to Lawes on his book of Airs reminds us of "Comus," and of the fact that Milton would not let politics interfere with friendship. That to Mr. Lawrence shows us not only that Milton loved and understood young men, but that his puritanism concerned itself with the spirit of life, not with such externals as eating and drinking. The first sonnet to Skinner is perhaps fuller of moral wisdom than any other of the collection, save that on the blindness that must have fostered the wisdom.

The two elegiac sonnets are both on women, one on a hardly identified Mrs. Catherine Thompson, the other on his second wife, Cath-

erine Woodcock. Although the sonnet form has been often used for elegiac purposes since the days of Surrey, its elaboration scarcely sorts with the partial abandon required of the elegy, and is better adapted to encomiastic or memorial purposes. Milton had in view both these purposes in the first sonnet, and he therefore succeeded excellently. In the second, for which he probably had, as we have seen and as Hallam long ago told us, an Italian model in a sonnet of Bernardino Rota's, affection was naturally mingled with praise; but his object was rather to impart a note of noble pathos to his poem than to abandon himself to the typical elegiac lament. Hence in this case also the elaborate sonnet form suited him admirably and he produced one of the greatest and at the same time the most affecting of his poems.

Space is wanting for any careful discussion of the sonnets from a metrical point of view, but the reader can easily get this elsewhere. It should be remarked, however, that while Milton is very careful of the rhyme arrangement of his octave, he is not over-meticulous about his sestet. Only five have the best Pe-

trarchan sestet arrangement of three rhymes, eight run on two rhymes, regularly interlaced, and the rest are more or less irregular. This implies a free spirit which is confirmed by the innovation of allowing no pause at the end of the octave, an innovation which has practically given us a Miltonic sonnet. The carrying on of the sense and the gathered volume of sound that result, if they take away from the grace native to the verse form, add a compensating unity and dignity, and produce a true trumpet note. It is probably to the fact that his subtle ear taught Milton to make this slight change in certain of his sonnets that we owe the further fact that the sonnet on the "Massacre" is the grandest in our literature.

With the sonnets we may conveniently group, as Masson does, the miscellaneous translated poems. The rhymeless version of Horace's "Quis multa gracilis" is famous, and deservedly so. It is neither a trifle, as Masson thinks, nor "overrated," as Sir Theodore Martin opined, for it is one of the few successful examples in English of unrhymed stanzas that charm. But what shall be said of the translations of Psalms

Milton in 1648, or of the versions in various metres attempted in 1653? Simply, with all due respect to his memory as a consummate artist, that it is a pity he ever undertook to rival Sternhold and Hopkins, Rous, and Barton. He surpassed the framers of the "Bay Psalm Book," but he also furnished the single instance of his poetic life in which the Hebrew element of his genius was not balanced by the Greek. Of the few blank-verse translations scattered through the prose writings none seems noteworthy, although there is a touch of the true Milton in one of the versions from Geoffrey of Monmouth.

CHAPTER VIII

"PARADISE LOST"

WE have already seen that Milton's masterpiece, begun in 1658, was probably completed by 1663, but not published on account of the Plague and Fire, until 1667. In view of the fact that its composition had to proceed by blocks of lines which would be retained in memory until some amanuensis or chance friendly visitor could jot them down, it cannot be said that slow progress was made, especially when it is remembered that Milton's genius seems to have been sluggish during the warmer seasons. If the presumption hold that books and maps had to be consulted by auxiliary eyes, the period of five years seems almost short; but it is not clear that even the erudition apparent in "Paradise Lost" or the traces of other authors to be discovered in it, might not have been imparted, without the interven-

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tion of books, by Milton's well-stored mind. It is indeed highly probable that much of the study that went to make the great epic was done from 1640 to 1642. There are extant four drafts of a drama upon "Paradise Lost" that date from this period, as well as a list of about a hundred subjects for epic or dramatic treatment with the theme of man's fall at their head. Thus we see that about eighteen years before he devoted himself to his masterpiece, Milton had given up the subject of King Arthur and had felt drawn to the larger topic, and we know from the splendid passage in "The Reason of Church Government" (1641) that he was engaged in study and select reading, and ordering his life chastely and nobly, that he might the better succeed in his great undertaking. There is even evidence that he had begun its composition, and that the lines in Book IV. (32-41), in which Satan apostrophizes the sun, date from about 1642. But Providence willed that the training given by study and reflection should be supplemented by that which can be obtained only from public affairs, and Milton had to become the

spokesman of Liberty and England before he could be permitted to accomplish, under most grievous personal disabilities and disturbing domestic circumstances, what is seemingly the most marvellous single literary performance since "The Divine Comedy."

The English public realized more speedily than is now generally believed, what an immense boon Milton had bestowed upon it. Dryden, then high in popular favor, paid his memorable tribute, and when Addison in the next century wrote his famous critiques, he rather fanned than kindled the flame of popular interest. People already knew that Milton was sublime, that he was the most erudite of poets, that somehow out of an unfamiliar measure he had evoked harmonies hitherto unsurpassed. They knew also that if Satan was not technically the hero of the poem, he was its most interesting personage, and they doubtless saw, as we do, in his indomitable pride, a reflection of the spirit of his nobly unfortunate creator. They must have felt also, as we do, that the imaginative power that kept Milton aloft in the very heaven of

heavens, that enabled him to explore the depths of hell and gave him support even in formless chaos, was something that had been absent from English poetry since the days of Shakspere. The pure charm of the scenes in Eden must likewise have seemed to them the revelation of another world of poetry than that to which they were accustomed. But are not these sensations ours? Indeed it is likely that not since "Paradise Lost" was published has there been any serious doubt about these points which are after all the only vital ones when the poem is considered as a work of art. A sublime and unique style, a powerful imagination conducting marvellous personages through the most important actions conceivable by man, a charm commensurate with the grandeur displayed, - in short, unsurpassed nobility of conception and execution, — these are features of "Paradise Lost" that no competent reader has ever failed to recognize. But our ancestors had an advantage over us in that considerations not germane to the poem as a work of art did not affect them as they do us, because Milton's theology and cosmogony were more or less theirs as well. We who have been steadily veering away from the Puritan's and even from the reformer's view of life, not only need an apparatus of theological and cosmogonical explanations, in order to understand the poem, but when we do understand it, fail in many cases to sympathize with it, fancying that we have said the last word about it when we have called it a "Puritan Epic." About this point we must be somewhat explicit.

It is quite clear, from an attentive reading of the poem, or of the criticisms that have been passed upon it, that there are weak spots in its construction which furnish persons who do not like Milton the man, with plausible grounds for attacking Milton the poet. Milton's Protestantism and his republicanism have made him obnoxious to many of his countrymen besides Dr. Johnson, and have, as a rule, limited the power and disposition of foreigners to comprehend him; hence a certain amount of harsh criticism of himself and his works has been more or less constant, and his admirers have been obliged to defend him, — a proced-

ure which, while it has not cost him his position as a supreme classic, has certainly limited his appeal. But the most unfortunate feature of the matter is that most of the objections raised are not germane to the discussion of a work of art, and yet seem to be most important to the persons that raise them, while such as are germane ought not to bear upon the poet, since the faults stressed were inherent in the subject-matter of the poem.

For example, it is perfectly true that Adam ought to be the hero of the epic; yet it is equally true that Satan, being the more powerful personage, and having suffered more, had to absorb more of the interest, not merely of the poet, but of the reader. It is equally true that, being the real hero, — for all attempts to prove that he is not are factitious and ineffectual, — he ought not to pass out of the action so early as he does; yet this, again, was necessitated by the theme, which demanded that the expulsion of Adam and Eve should end the poem, and yet be preceded by an elaborate setting forth of the scheme of ultimate salvation for the human race. Thus Books XI.

and XII.—it will be remembered that originally the poem consisted of ten books, and that the present arrangement was effected by dividing Books VII. and X.—necessarily let the interest down almost to the lowest level at which Milton's genius could fly. Yet interest is not a primary essential of a work of art, and it may be questioned whether Milton does not deserve as much credit for extricating himself out of a difficult situation as he has received blame for a condition of things which he did not create.

Again, it is easy enough to point out the lack of humor involved in making the angels wear armor and fight with cannon; but the ability to discover the humorous quality inherent in these conceptions is purely modern. Milton could not have had it, any more than Raphael. And if we are determined to fault the incongruous in poetry, why do we not fall foul of Shakspere for making the ghost of Hamlet's father revisit the glimpses of the moon clad in complete steel? Nor could Milton have foreseen a time when men would doubt whether God would ever have allowed Satan to ruin

the innocent first pair, when they would question the propriety of representing Death as the child of Satan and Sin, when they would subject the speeches of God the Father to nice metaphysical examination, based on the acquired knowledge of two additional centuries, and would demand of the angels conduct similar to that of human beings under similar circumstances. He could hardly have thought that he would ever be taken to task for making Adam wrangle with Eve, when he was only following Scripture, which he could no more have doubted or deserted than he could have doubted the existence of a personal God warring with a personal devil. He could, indeed, depart from orthodox Protestantism so far as to become a semi-Arian; but he could not desert anthropomorphism, or develop into a pantheist on the score of Copernicanism, however much he might be in sympathy with the latter. He was the child of his age, and, as Dr. Garnett well contends, is all the greater because he is representative. Finally, at least, Milton could not have foreseen that an age that had abandoned, in large part, his theology and cosmogony would ever be unjust enough not to make the same allowances for him that it makes willingly for Dante and Homer. In other words, he could never have fancied that a day would come when the critic would cease to be a judge, and would become a chameleon.

It may, then, be concluded that a majority of the defects that critics have pointed out in "Paradise Lost" are inherent in the subject or in the age and country of which the poem is representative. But they are obviously far more than counterbalanced by merits, partly belonging to the poet and his art, partly to his subject and period. Milton's style is his own, also his rare learning, which has enabled him to enrich his poem with treasures gathered from every age and clime; his own, too, is his mighty imagination, which carries him so easily to the heights of the sublime, as well as his tremendous power of invention, technically speaking, which enables him to arrange and to expand his multifarious materials. His theme and his age counted, nevertheless, for much. No mere terrestrial action could have given scope for the almost superhuman grandeur of his poem;

no age and country not Protestant could have infused into it so much mighty energy. The mediæval and Catholic Dante, as critics have pointed out, was more truly an inventor than Milton was; but he could not have invented a theme of such compelling power. In "Paradise Lost" the theme, the age, and the poet conspired as they have rarely done in the history of the world's literature; and if the result is not a universal poem like the "Iliad,"—that is, a poem covering so many phases of our finite life that it seems to us universal,—it is at least the sublimest work of the imagination to be found in any language.

But here, again, fortune has been somewhat unkind to Milton. Not only has his Puritanism alienated many modern readers from him, especially extreme latter-day Anglicans, but the highest quality of his work, its sublimity, has militated against its becoming truly popular. Human nature, whatever its merits and capacities, rarely loves the heights and cannot long remain upon them. It is this failing in his readers, rather than the fact that he is the most learned of poets, and thus often difficult to com-

prehend, though that also counts, that chiefly limits the number of Milton's lovers to-day. It also leads otherwise competent critics to commit the blunder of maintaining that Milton is greater as a poet in youthful works like "Comus" and "Lycidas" than in his noble epic. This is like maintaining that a man in his prime is inferior, in the totality of his powers, to what he was when he was a charming youth. They simply mean in the last analysis that charm and beauty fused with budding strength attract them more than grandeur and sheer sublimity; though they would do well to observe that in the Eden portions of "Paradise Lost" charm and beauty, fused with a strength which is absolutely sure of itself, are present in full measure. Where, for example, in "Comus" or "Lycidas" shall we find a passage fuller of the true richness of poetry than this from the fourth book of the epic (ll. 246-256)? —

"Thus was this place,

A happy rural seat of various view:

Groves whose rich trees wept odorous gums and balms;

Others whose fruit, burnished with golden rind,

Hung amiable — Hesperian fables true,

If true, here only — and of delicious taste.

Betwixt them lawns, or level downs, and flocks
Grazing the tender herb, were interposed,
Or palmy hillock; or the flowery lap
Of some irriguous valley spread her store,
Flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose."

It would be, perhaps, rash to say that no such matchlessly charming effect as the close of the last verse of this passage can be found in "Comus" or "Lycidas"; but, after having edited both poems with some care, I cannot recall one.

Still it is obvious that sublimity is a rarer quality of genius than charm; or, to express it concretely, that "Lycidas" has more rivals in literature than "Paradise Lost" has. But judgment tells us that that which is rare and at the same time positively powerful deserves the highest admiration we can give, and on this verdict of judgment depend not only the hierarchies of art, but also the central truths of religion.

If now it be asked how a reader can overcome his limitations and learn to appreciate "Paradise Lost" with something like justice, a fairly satisfactory answer can at once be given. He must learn, in the first place, that a work of art should not be made the object of his religious or scientific or other preconceptions or prejudices; this is only to say that he should observe toward a poet the courtesy that the rules of good society teach him to observe in intercourse with his neighbors. He must not stand ready to do battle for his opinions on religion, politics, and the like until they are vitally assailed, which hardly ever happens in connection with a true work of art. Even in "Paradise Lost" the passages in which Milton can be justly charged with seeking positively to inculcate Puritan principles and opinions and to attack the tenets of others are few and far between; yet, if one were to judge from the way the critics talk, one would think that the great poet was forever coming down from the Aonian Mount in order to ascend the pulpit.

In the second place, the reader must, as far as possible, make his own imagination assist that of the poet, or at least, as Mark Pattison says, he must check all resistance to the artist's efforts. The resistance that the lower stages of culture always oppose to the higher

must be minimized by a recourse to the aids given in abundance by commentators and editors, especially to such metrical aids as will enable us to comprehend the wonderful technique of the blank verse, without a knowledge of which half the glory of "Paradise Lost" will be forever obscured to us.

Finally, the tendency to shirk contact with the sublime must be subdued in the only possible way, by the resolute endeavor to live with the eye fixed on the heights. The best way to learn to appreciate "Paradise Lost" is to read it and re-read it. Like all great works of art, it yields its choicest pleasures only to its patient students and lovers. One might as well expect to exhaust the Mona Lisa's charm and meaning at a glance as to appreciate Milton's great epic at one reading. It is only through reading and re-reading that the full harmony of the periods will be borne upon the ear; that the majestic involution of the diction will become a help rather than a hindrance to the imagination; that the spirit will breathe freely in the courts of heaven or amid the conclaves of hell; that the pride and subtlety of the Fiend, the majestic

innocence of our first parents, the single-hearted loyalty of the angels, and the ineffable purity of the Son of God will become clearly revealed to us; that, finally, the tremendous import of the drama and the marvellous and entire adequacy of the poet to its handling will hold us spell-bound yet not dazed, and make the mighty poem our possession for always, our $\kappa \tau \hat{\eta} \mu a \epsilon i s$ $a \epsilon i$.

But, some one may say, though we may be willing to grant that foreigners have been, with few exceptions, unjust to Milton from the days of Voltaire's "Candide" to those of M. Scherer's essay, seemingly overpraised by Matthew Arnold, and though we may grant that Milton is a great poetic artist and that he made the most of his theme, we are not prepared to accept Schopenhauer's contention that interest is not a prime necessity of a work of art and we find "Paradise Lost" dull. What reply is one to make to this frank confession and avoidance? The only reply I can make is that I do not see how a powerful presentation of the story of man's fall and its attendant events can fail to be interesting

to a Christian believer or even to any one who has concerned himself with man's origin and the chief explanations that have been given of it, except on the supposition, which I fear to be a true one, that men and women of certain classes are developing a growing habit of putting everything that pertains to the theory or the contemplation of religion to one side, whether it is to be taken up on one day out of seven or not at all. That such a habit exists among cultivated Anglo-Saxons, especially in this country, will not be denied, I think, by any competent observer. In spite of recent efforts to improve and increase the study of the Bible, that book is being less and less read by sophisticated people, who are, in my judgment, precisely the readers that find Milton dull. But if theology and the Bible, and talk or thought on religious subjects, are put aside for one day in the week or for good and all, it is no wonder that readers should find the theme of "Paradise Lost" dull. And if scientific views of the universe have on many minds the effect of alienating them from poetry, as they confessedly had on Darwin's, the case of Milton, who holds both by theology and by poetry, appears to be well-nigh hopeless. If he seems dull because we have relegated his subject-matter to the care of professional preachers, just as we have relegated the common and statute law to professional lawyers, or if he seems dull because his theory of the universe is childish in our eyes, then there is no way of rehabilitating him except first rehabilitating his readers.

And yet on no other suppositions than those just made can one readily or fairly account for Milton's seeming dull. Certainly for any one who accepts Christian teaching with regard to the fall and redemption of man, the superbly poetical and powerful presentation of the council of the fiends, of the war in heaven, of the bliss of our first parents and of their temptation, must possess a permanent interest unless our acceptance of these great themes be a purely conventional one. This means that at least three-fourths of the poem ought to possess permanent interest, which is a proportion that we shall find few epics exhibiting, even though we throw to

the winds Poe's theories with regard to the proper length of poems. On the other hand, just as large a portion of the poem ought to prove interesting to the reader who approaches it as he does the "Iliad" with a disengaged mind. Thus, when all is said, the admirer of "Paradise Lost" is not obliged in its support to fall back upon the contention that interest is not a matter of primary concern in a work of art. It will indeed be well for any reader to develop his taste so that the rhythmical, descriptive, and structural beauties of a poem will be his first concern; but there is no reason why he should not enjoy "Paradise Lost" long before he has attained this consummation. If, however, he indulges his analytical faculties as M. Scherer and so many other critics have done, he will be certain to put it out of his power to enjoy Milton to the full. Indeed, I am simpleminded enough to fail to perceive why such analysis does not kill nearly all poetry; for it is an analysis that starts out with the assumption that a thing should be what it obviously could not have been. A certain amount

of seventeenth-century Protestant theology was absolutely necessary to Milton's epic; but with the theology went along a theme of transcendent human interest and compelling power for all who accepted the theology then, or for all who are willing to realize it imaginatively now. Yet our critics, French and English, fall foul of this necessary element and rend it and then prance off proudly as a dog does with his bone. And they actually expect us to applaud them. But enough of this.

We must now pass to a brief consideration of what Milton borrowed from other poets in order to adorn "Paradise Lost." As might have been expected, he has been often charged with plagiarism, although no one since Lauder has been bold enough to forge his proofs to sustain the charge. With regard to the Bible and the classics little need be said. They are the open property of modern poets, and Milton drew from them whenever he wished. It is very difficult to tell how much he borrowed from his more immediate predecessors. According to Masson's count the number of the books that are suspected of having given him hints is so large as

to be positively ridiculous.1 The fall of man was naturally a sufficiently attractive subject to have been treated time and again in literature before he wrote. He had heard enough and read enough about it before he finally chose it as a theme, to have managed it much as he did without the aid of a single author during the period of actual composition; but it is not unlikely that, student as he was, he deliberately, at one time or another, turned over many old books or had them read to him in order that he might learn how other writers had treated the subject. From this reading he may consciously or unconsciously have received hints for his own work; but this is largely a matter of conjecture. It is likely enough, since "Paradise Lost" was first conceived as a drama, that the Scriptural play of the Italian, Giovanni Battista Andreini (1578-1652), entitled "Adamo" (1613), may, as Voltaire first suggested, have turned Milton's thoughts to

¹ Many of the works here referred to have been inaccessible to me, so that I have been forced to rely on Masson's treatment of the topic of Milton's indebtedness and on my own experience in investigating similar topics. I am inclined to be sceptical in nine out of ten cases of supposed plagiarism. I have investigated the Vondel charges.

the subject, although there seems to be not a great deal of proof that it did. Or he may have known the "Adamus Exul" of Grotius or some Latin verses by Barlæus, or any number of other now-forgotten performances. It is not at all likely that he knew anything definite of his English predecessor, the pseudo-Cædmon, first printed in 1655, when Milton was thinking chiefly about that far less savory character, Alexander Morus. It is not improbable, according to Dr. Garnett, a safe authority, that he got a hint for the idea of his diabolical conclave from the Italian reformer Bernardino Ochino. Yet after all an infernal council was a most natural starting-point for the poem, and Milton, Ochino, and Vondel might all have made Beelzebub second in command to Satan without the slightest indebtedness to one another.

The mention of the Dutch poet, Joost van den Vondel, reminds us, however, that he is the author to whom modern critics seem mostly determined to make Milton indebted. More than one book and essay have been written to prove the obligations of "Paradise Lost" to the drama "Lucifer," published in 1654, and prob-

ably more will be unless critics learn — an improbable supposition — that while tracing the literary obligations of a great poet is a harmless and interesting pursuit, it not infrequently tends to become fatuous. It is not yet proved, although it is, perhaps, probable, that Milton had Vondel's "Lucifer" read to him; it is still less clear that the verbal correspondences between the epic and the drama — most of which exist only in the shaping imaginations of the critics — are either conscious or unconscious obligations on the part of the later writer. Even the idea expressed in the famous line,

"Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven,"

may have been in Milton's mind long before he ever heard Vondel's couplet expressing the same notion. So, too, with the splendid lines in Book IV. (977–980) describing the movement of the angelic squadron which have been paralleled in "Lucifer." But granting that Milton consciously borrowed from Vondel and other poets, it would require the height of stupidity to deny that he bettered what he borrowed; and he himself has rightly contended that such appropria-

tion is entirely admissible. The main point, however, to be remembered in this connection is that the chances are always against a poet's checking the flow of his creative impulse in order consciously and deliberately to fit into his verses an idea or image borrowed from any source whatever. If the idea or image has been assimilated by him, it may be unconsciously reproduced; but surely a want of psychological knowledge characterizes those critics who argue from every striking correspondence of thought or expression the obligation of one writer to another. In the sense that he reproduced what he had assimilated, Milton may perhaps be said to owe more to his fellows than most great poets; but in the sense that he made his verses a mosaic of other men's thoughts and expressions, he is as innocent of indebtedness as his accusers are of humor and common sense.

But we have been defending Milton long enough, and it is time to say something more positive about his masterpiece. Yet, after all, what can be said that is either new or adequate? An analysis of so well-known a poem would be out of place, an introduction to it in

the shape of a discussion of its cosmogony or its theology would be equally inappropriate and useless as well, since Professor Masson has already accomplished the task in a most thorough manner. Any adequate treatment of the blank verse, which remains the allurement and despair of all poets using the English language, would be impossible within the limits of this chapter; and the same may be said of almost every single topic, such as the elaborate similes, the felicitous employment of proper names, the involution of the syntax, and the like. A discussion of the characters would be equally fruitless and unnecessary, besides holding by methods of criticism now abandoned to literary clubs, and we may therefore content ourselves with saying a few words about the rank held by the poem among the world's great epics. This is, indeed, a subject too large for full treatment here, and one on which critics are sure to disagree; but it will, at least, open up interesting fields for speculation. Before we enter upon it, however, it will be well to emphasize the fact that it is to "Paradise Lost" that the student of the art of poetry must come for his most important and inspiring lessons. If it is not the most purely artistic, elaborate work in the world's literature, it probably holds this position in English literature. All the resources of the poet's art are displayed in it in full perfection, so far as the epic form would allow. The poet's imagination may flag at times, owing to the exigencies of his subject, but his artistic power never. Hence it is a mistake to read the poem in selections, or to break off after finishing the first four books. Every page contains some marvel of rhythm or diction; nor are nine-tenths of these known to the reading public, which is in the habit of fancying that, with its short-cuts to culture, it gets at the heart of a classic author. How many people, for example, have fully realized the power of these lines from Book VII., in which Adam seeks to detain Raphael, or have gauged the timbre of the epithet "unapparent"?

[&]quot;And the great Light of Day yet wants to run

Much of his race, though steep. Suspense in heaven

Held by thy voice, thy potent voice he hears,

And longer will delay to hear thee tell

His generation and the rising birth

Of Nature from the unapparent Deep:
Or, if the Star of Evening and the Moon
Haste to thy audience, Night with her will bring
Silence, and Sleep listening to thee will watch;
Or we can bid his absence till thy song
End, and dismiss thee ere the morning shine."

This may or may not be in the "grand style," but who can wonder that it induced the archangel to prolong his stay?

Turning now to the relations sustained by Milton's epic to the other great world-poems, it is a commonplace to remark that it belongs to the class of artificial rather than national or natural epics. Yet it would be unjust not to maintain that, in so far as it embodies the speculations and imaginings of Christendom on the perennially interesting and universal problems of man's creation and destiny, it partakes, through its theme, of some of the noblest and most inevitable features of those natural epics that, like the "Iliad," seem to have been born to express the greatness of a race. In other words, not only does the tremendous import of its theme add greatly to the sublimity of "Paradise Lost," it actually gives it a representative

than that of the "Æneid" or "The Divine Comedy." That such a claim should be made for it with regard to Dante's great poem will probably excite surprise in this day of the Italian's elevation over his English peer; but the fact remains that, although the spirit of Dante's "Comedy" represents the spirit of mediæval Catholicism, its form and substance are mainly Dante's, and, while reflecting the greatest glory upon him as an inventor, lack much of the inevitableness that attaches to portions, at least, of "Paradise Lost," to a greater degree than to any other great epic since the "Iliad."

As a work of conscious art, however, "Paradise Lost" must after all take its stand with the epics of Virgil, Dante, Tasso, and their fellows; it is par excellence a literary epic and cannot possess the charm of unconscious perfection to be found in Homer, or that of naïve simplicity and directness to be found in "Beowulf" and the "Nibelungenlied." But it must be observed that it does not follow that, because a poem is the result of conscious

art, it is therefore inferior to a poem that springs almost naturally into existence, like a ballad or an epic founded on lays. Many readers and critics in this century suffer from what may be called "the heresy of the natural." Man has often supplemented and bettered nature in the past and he will continue to do so; on the other hand, there are occasions when he cannot touch nature without spoiling her. He can take an uninviting spot and turn it into a bower of beauty; but he lowers the sublimity of the Alps by rendering them habitable. It will not do, therefore, to make a shibboleth of the word "natural." In literature the so-called "natural" products have their own charm and power, which may or may not surpass those of consciously artistic products. For example, the "Beowulf," which is distinctly primitive and natural, would be considered equal in charm and power to "Paradise Lost" only by some philological pedant or some hopeless theorist. On the other hand, "Paradise Lost," with all its grandeur of theme and execution, could be considered equal to

the "Iliad," with its natural grandeur of unconscious dignity, its divine charm, its utter inevitableness, only by a reader doomed to make Homer's acquaintance through a translation, or by one disposed to make the sublime outrank all other qualities of poetry. But "Beowulf" is as natural as the "Iliad," perhaps more so; yet while a touch of extra art would spoil the latter poem, the former might stand many such touches without loss. In the matter of syntax alone the "natural" Anglo-Saxon epic suffers greatly, not only in comparison with the modern English epic, for Milton's involved syntax, though it has repelled many a reader, is one of the special glories of his poetic art, - but when set beside the Greek. There had either been poets before Homer, just as there had been great men before Agamemnon, or Greek syntax sprang ready armed from the former's brain; English syntax emerged more like Vulcan than like Minerva from the brain of the author of the "Beowulf." Hence consistent "naturalists" ought to prefer "Beowulf" to the "Iliad," which they probably do.

Granting now that "Paradise Lost" must perhaps rank below either of the Homeric epics, but maintaining that it surpasses even them in sublimity of imagination and all other of the natural epics in most essentials, let us endeavor to weigh it with its kindred poems of conscious art. It is obviously difficult to weigh it with works not kindred, such as Shakspere's dramas or lyrics. A great epic is certainly a rarer production than a great drama or lyric; it is rarer than a great collection of lyrics; but it is not rarer than a great body of supreme dramatic work like the Shaksperian. The plays of Shakspere taken collectively must probably rank, on account of the universal genius displayed in them, above Milton's masterpiece, though yielding to that in sublimity and perhaps in artistic perfection, technically speaking. In other words, Shakspere's genius is superior to that of Milton in range, though seemingly not in quality. But this is only to say that Shakspere alone of moderns is worthy to stand beside - no one in my judgment can stand above—the immortal singer of heroic Greece.

With regard to other dramatists and lyrists a decision is not so difficult. The collected works of none of them show universality, and Milton's genius in its power and range falls only just short of being universal. There is, therefore, no room to place any dramatist or lyrist between him and his two great superiors.

But has he not a superior in his own class of poets? If he has, it must be Dante. Tasso and Spenser may almost match him in charm, but obviously lack his power. Goethe is probably superior to him in breadth and serenity of intelligence, but falls short in sublimity, charm, and artistic power. "Faust" may appeal to us moderns on the intellectual side more than "Paradise Lost" does; but intellectual interest is a lower thing than artistic rapture. Victor Hugo on the other hand, however grandiose his conceptions and however marvellous his command of his metrical instrument, — a command in its way worthy of being compared with that of Homer or of Milton, — has not the sanity and intellectual strength and poise necessary for the poet who would successfully rival Dante or Milton. Of our great Chaucer and those

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often admirable narrative poets beneath him in the scale, of whom most literatures can boast a few, it is almost needless to speak in this connection. But a word must be said about Virgil. In greatness of theme, in conscious artistic mastery, in the perfection of metrical workmanship, in general intellectual balance and power, the great Roman is almost, if not quite, the equal of the great Englishman. In point of charm he seems to be superior; in point of sublimity and sheer energy he is clearly inferior. The balance will therefore tip in accordance with the relative importance allowed to charm and power in the mind of the critic.

And when all is said, this is the safest conclusion to be reached when Milton is balanced against his great predecessor, Dante. The two poets have, of course, been compared ever since the masterpiece of the later became well known; but it cannot fairly be said that their respective merits have yet been thoroughly settled. It is quite true that if a show of critical hands were made Dante would bear off the palm. He also stands better than Milton the test of cosmopolitan success. But Milton's Protestantism has

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been in his way in Roman Catholic countries more than Dante's Catholicism has been in his way in Protestant countries, so that the cosmopolitan test is not quite fair. There have been in this century several reactions, religious, literary, and artistic, toward mediævalism that count in Dante's favor now, but may not weigh greatly with the twentieth century. Besides, Milton has never lacked lovers like Landor, who doubted "whether the Creator ever created one altogether so great as Milton," or critics like Dr. Garnett, who, in his "History of Italian Literature," speaking of Dante as the more representative man, is nevertheless inclined to rate Milton the more highly as a poet. He has not even lacked sympathetic women admirers, like Sara Coleridge, who actually seems to have argued with Mr. Aubrey de Vere by letter as to the Italian's inferiority to the Englishman. It is needless to say that the Irish poet was not convinced, finding in Dante a charm, a humane quality, a philosophy, that he could not discover in Milton.

With regard to Dante's superiority from the point of view of charm, as well as from that of human interest, no counter plea shall be entered

here. There is no passage in "Paradise Lost" so human, so touching, as the incident of Francesca da Rimini. There is probably no passage so exquisitely beautiful as that about the Siren in the "Purgatorio." In originality of conception, in the power to paint minutely vivid pictures, in his appreciation of the grandeur and sweetness of love, Dante surpasses Milton, and the latter's admirers may as well admit the fact gracefully. They may also admit Dr. Garnett's claim that Dante is the more representative man, which does not necessarily mean the greater man; and they can if they are minded admit Mr. de Vere's contention that his work is more philosophical, although wherein either poet is nowadays entitled to be considered specially philosophical might puzzle any one not a Roman Catholic or a Puritan to tell. But when Dante's admirers — and who is not his admirer? — have had their say, they must, it would seem, while rightfully asserting his strenuous dignity, admit that in sublimity, in the power to body forth tremendous conceptions, - in a word, to sound infinity, — he is Milton's inferior, and that thus very much the same balance has to be struck as

in the case of Virgil. Do charm, vividness, dignity, philosophy, and the human touch outweigh the grandeur of matchless sublimity, of superhuman power, of resistless but self-controlled energy? If we answer "yes," then we must put Dante next to Homer and Shakspere; if we answer "no," then we must put Milton there. It is not a question which of the two poets we most love, which is our most constant companion; it is a question of our judgment as to which is greater; and if any man wishes to refrain from attempting such a rash judgment, who shall blame him?

Some of us are so constituted, however, that we are obliged to love and admire Milton more than we do Dante, if, indeed, we do not go the whole length with Landor and proclaim him to be the greatest of mortal men. And we have something more than the qualities of sublimity and energy on which to rest our belief in his supereminent greatness. Dante, be it spoken reverently, has faults which his admirers minimize, and Milton has merits of which his admirers have hardly made enough.

There can be little question that, with all the

advantages his human touch gives him, Dante is too personal; that his very vividness of description carries him too far. He is, at times, too local in his loves and hates to reach the proper plane of the world-poet. His very concreteness, often so great a help to him, becomes a hindrance on occasions, as when, for example, at the end of the "Inferno," he has to describe Satan. Here he becomes grotesque, just where Milton is most sublime. Then, again, Dante's "action," technically speaking, is just as liable to the charge of inconsistency as Milton's. His idealization of Beatrice is quite as much to be faulted, of course from points of view not artistic, as Milton's idealization of Satan, — a statement which merely means, in the last analysis, that critics like Mr. Aubrey de Vere have no right to grow melancholy over Milton's glorification of the principle of evil. Furthermore, Dante's age limited him, and caused him to err, every whit as much as Milton's age limited and injured him. There is a bitterness of partisanship in "The Divine Comedy" not to be paralleled in "Paradise Lost," even though we remember

that Milton inserted those unnecessary lines about Limbo; there are dreary wastes of mediæval theology and philosophy in the "Purgatorio" and "Paradiso," beside which the speeches of Milton's Puritan God are luminous with interest. But Milton's faults are emphasized, while Dante's are passed over by an age reactionary enough to prefer Botticelli's mediæval types of ascetic beauty to Raphael's glorious Renaissance types of rounded loveliness.

With regard, now, to Milton's more positive merits, Dr. Garnett is seemingly right in frankly intimating that as poet, that is, as poetic artist, Milton is Dante's superior. Dante's diction and rhythm, his figures, his command of the resources of his art, are almost beyond praise; but some of us think that Milton has slightly surpassed him in every one of these particulars. The Miltonic harmonies, diction, and figures, and, one may add, general sense of proportion, are unmatched in Dante, or in Shakspere, for that matter, for the true Miltonian, and these are most important points when a balance is being struck between rival poets. But here, again, fortune has been un-

kind to Milton. His chief qualities, sublimity and energy, dazzle rather than attract men; and the splendors of his art produce the same effect. Dante is more human, more lovable, more endowed with what may be called the intimate features of genius. Hence he will always band his lovers together more closely than Milton will. Dante societies already exist; but there is no motion being made to concentrate interest in Milton.

But the last, and probably the most important, reason for Milton's being considered inferior to Dante by so many students of literature, is the fact that they are usually far more students than lovers of the art of poetry. Dante's great poem is fuller of symbolical and allegorical content than Milton's is, and therefore affords more satisfaction to the inquiring and probing intellect. It is also much fuller of spiritual significance of a distinctly personal kind, hence it more strongly attracts such persons as make use of poetry for moral and spiritual stimulation. These concessions will doubtless seem to many to give away Milton's case, but not so. Intellectual satisfaction and

spiritual stimulation ought to be found in all great poetry—they can be obtained from a deep study of "Paradise Lost," but they are not the raison d'être of poetical creation, nor the main element of true poetical enjoyment. Poetry must be primarily æsthetic in its appeal, and it is clear that objective art satisfies this demand better than subjective art does. Hence it is that I rank the great objective theme of "Paradise Lost" as better poetical material than the more subjective, personal theme of "The Divine Comedy." The fact that Dante commentators are forever talking of the inner meaning of his symbolism means, in the last analysis, that elements not poetic enter largely into their enjoyment of the poem. It is the same with the Shakspere commentators, who are forever discussing psychological questions about "Hamlet." They are very shrewd and interesting gentlemen, but they seldom know much about art—if they did they would discuss "Othello" more than they do "Hamlet." Of course this is all very rash—as rash, perhaps, as it would be to tell the Browning devotees that "Childe Roland," with its delightful mystery, is not so good a poem as the simple stanzas beginning "You know we French stormed Ratisbon." People will continue to the end of time to value this poem, and that for precisely the wrong reasons, because they will persist in ignoring Greek, that is classic, standards, and in demanding mixed effects from the arts. They tell us that they get fuller results; and so they do, - results fuller of ugliness and distortion than anything that has ever come down to us from the Greeks. But we seem to be landing full in the midst of the controversy between the adherents of classic and those of Gothic art perhaps we have been in the midst of that controversy ever since we began to discuss the merits of Milton and Dante - and we may as well extricate ourselves while we can, leaving the task of forming a Milton Society to the next generation, which may be a little less mediæval than we are.

But, after all, is there not something of moral weakness in the failure of so many Anglo-Saxons to stand up manfully for Milton's superiority to all save the two universal

geniuses? It is natural for the peoples of the Continent to venerate Dante the more highly, not only because they largely sympathize with his religious philosophy, but also because sublimity of character is not one of their virtues. The Anglo-Saxon, on the other hand, though he often sinks to the depths, is of all men the most capable of rising to the heights; hence he ought to comprehend the most national of his poets. This Milton is. He is the literary embodiment of the sublime ideals that have made English liberty the dream of less fortunate peoples; he is the fullest exponent of the heroism, the steadfastness, the irresistible energy, that have planted the British outposts amid Arctic snows and the islands of the Southern seas. He is the poet of triumphant strength; his eye droops not before the Sun itself; his wings flag not in the rarest reaches of the upper ether. And yet men speaking the English tongue, and professing themselves to be proud of the achievements of their race, have had the ineffable impertinence to speak slightingly of this master spirit, and of his master work.

CHAPTER IX

"PARADISE REGAINED" AND "SAMSON AGONISTES"

THE two great poems - minor they are not in any true sense of the term — that form the subject of this chapter appeared in one volume in 1671. There is reason to think that they were printed for Milton rather than published by John Starkey on his own account. At any rate Mr. Samuel Simmons did not figure in the transaction, while the Rev. Thomas Tomkyns, the ecclesiastical censor, gave his signature to the license to print with few twinges of conscience. With regard to the dates of composition there is little available information. If Milton acted immediately upon the query of Ellwood, "But what hast thou to say of 'Paradise Found," it is not unlikely that the shorter epic was completed during the year 1666, or before "Paradise Lost" was published. As for "Samson," no definite year can be assigned, but critics prefer to place it as near 1671 as they can, chiefly because its style is supposed to bear marks of old age. It is hard to say whether the harsh passages thus relied on as determining data are not the result of metrical experimentation on Milton's part, and equally hard to deny that many passages show a surprisingly youthful vigor. One may more confidently agree with the critics on psychological grounds. "Samson" is the pathetic but nobly strenuous protest of an old man against an age and country that have deserted ideals precious to him; it is the kind of protest to which Milton may have worked himself slowly up, as the last service he could do mankind. Besides, having finished two epics, the aged poet may have felt a desire to carry out his youthful purpose of writing a drama on a Scriptural subject; he had, indeed, thirty years before, considered the propriety of writing two dramas on the theme, and he may, as one may gather from his preface, have desired both to qualify the usual Puritan judgment on the drama and to censure the stage-plays then holding the London boards, as well as most of those that had hitherto been produced in England. Be this as it may, the two poems must have added to Milton's reputation and suggested by their numerous misprints the misfortune of their author.

As might have been expected, critics have differed greatly over "Paradise Regained." It is often said that Milton preferred it to "Paradise Lost," whereas he seems merely to have disliked to hear it slightingly treated in comparison with the more elaborate poem. In this he was entirely right. "Paradise Regained" is not, as Coleridge and Wordsworth thought, Milton's most perfectly executed work, but it is, as its author seems to have perceived, thoroughly sui generis, a masterpiece to be judged after its own kind. The reading public has not taken to it because of a preconceived notion that as a sequel to "Paradise Lost" it ought to continue the style and general interest of that great work. This, however, Milton never intended that it should do. He seized upon Christ's temptation by Satan - relying on the accounts given in Matt. iv. and Luke iv., particularly in the latter—as a parallel to the temptation of Eve and Adam, and resolved that in Christ's triumph he would shadow forth Satan's ultimate defeat and the final acquisition of Paradise by Adam's race. He will have little or no action, but will rely in great measure upon the effects produced by the speeches put in the mouths of the protagonists. He hardly tells a story; he reports an argument in the issue of which the sequel of the first epic is found. It is evident, then, that to judge the second poem properly, one must in many respects dissociate it entirely from the first, and ask one's self whether Milton could possibly have succeeded better in the task he undertook.

It is hard to see how he could have done so, or how, with the materials at hand, he could have constructed an epic on the plan of "Paradise Lost." We need not call the sequel an epic at all unless we are inclined to agree with Masson, who follows Milton, in holding that there are two kinds of epic, one diffuse, the other brief. Neither need we look to Giles Fletcher's "Christ's Victory and Triumph," or to other poems, for Milton's model. He meant his second poem to be a spiritual exposition

of a transcendent truth; he had made his former poem a sublime setting forth of an empyrean and cosmical catastrophe. As he succeeded beyond expectation in his earlier task, it is idle to talk of the later poem as his most perfect work of art, for it accomplishes its purpose no better than "Paradise Lost" fulfils its mission, and it is obviously inferior in power and scope.

But of its kind it is far more admirable than general readers seem to know. Even Dr. Garnett hardly does it justice when he asserts that it occasionally becomes jejune. From first to last its tone is that of poised nobility, which takes on at times a note of the richest eloquence known to verse. Sublimity is nowhere to be found; but poised nobility is no despicable substitute for it. Charm, too, is present, although not to the same extent as in "Paradise Lost" or in "Comus." But the peculiar note indicated is so perfect and so unique in literature, that the popular depreciation that has attended the poem seems to cast a sinister light upon Anglo-Saxon capacity to appreciate at least the subtler phases of the poetic art.

As a matter of course the mere interest of

the poem is slight. Satan, though eloquent and not yet stripped of his native dignity as "Archangel ruin'd," is not the wonder-compelling protagonist of the great epic. The victorious Christ is too consistently self-poised and confident of triumph to serve as a properly suffering hero, but as Dr. Garnett, whom one never tires of quoting, aptly says, "It is enough, and it is wonderful, that spotless virtue should be so entirely exempt from formality and dulness." In other words, Milton makes the most of his two characters in the situations found for him in Holy Writ. He can display his constructive invention far less than in "Paradise Lost," but, as in the latter poem, the blame must be laid on the theme not on the poet. He does display to the utmost what may be called his unfolding invention. The splendid panoramas beheld from the "specular mount" are an instance of this power perhaps unequalled in literature, and with this portion of the poem at least the world is familiar. The description of Athens is probably best known, but if it surpasses that of the Parthian array and if the latter surpasses that of the Rome of Tiberius,

the difference is like that between three apparently perfect autumn days. Almost every poetical resource is brought into play, and if the rhythm is less compelling, the diction less majestic than is the case with the sublimest passages of "Paradise Lost," it is because the three themes while royally noble were not superhumanly grand. The art of the later poem may truly be said to be perfect of its kind; but it is not the supreme kind. In one respect, however, the poet's art has neither changed nor deteriorated. The wonderful use of proper names in "Paradise Lost" is completely paralleled in "Paradise Regained." Take only the passage,

"From Arachosia, from Candaor east,
And Margiana, to the Hyrcanian cliffs
Of Caucasus, and dark Iberian dales;
From Atropatia, and the neighboring plains
Of Adiabene, Media, and the South
Of Susiana to Balsara's haven."

But the typical note of poised dignity is not exemplified in these lines nor in that wonderfully beautiful passage, haunted literally by

> "Knights of Logres, or of Lyones, Launcelot, or Pelleas, or Pellenore."

Not in such truly "oraculous gems" do we find the note of the poem, but rather in the simple diction and satisfying rhythm of lines like these:—

"Ill wast thou shrouded then,
O patient Son of God, yet only stood'st
Unshaken! Nor yet stayed the terror there:
Infernal ghosts and hellish furies round
Environed thee; some howled, some yelled, some shrieked,
Some bent at thee their fiery darts, while thou
Sat'st unappalled in calm and sinless peace."

Or to take a lower level and thus give ourselves the pleasure of another quotation from a work that deserved from its author the love that Jacob had for Benjamin, we find the note of poised nobility in these words of Christ:—

"To know, and, knowing, worship God aright
Is yet more kingly. This attracts the soul,
Governs the inner man, the nobler part;
That other o'er the body only reigns,
And oft by force — which to a generous mind
So reigning can be no sincere delight."

Turning now to "Samson Agonistes" we should notice that if it has never been a very popular poem, it has always been spoken of with

the highest respect. Even Milton's Puritan contemporaries, though they might not have understood his defence of the Greek drama any more than some of his admirers have been able to understand or forgive his hypothetical change of heart with regard to Shakspere, would have been hard put to it to show how any uninspired writer could have produced a more essentially righteous and noble work of the imagination. Just so from Milton's day to our own it has been impossible, as Goethe admitted, to point to any piece of modern literature more thoroughly Greek in form and even Greek in spirit. The theme is Hebrew and the spirit, too, yet somehow the latter is also Greek in spite of the presence of Milton's characteristic diction.

It may, indeed, be contended that the theme of "Samson" hampered Milton less than the themes of any of his other great poems. It was exactly suited for dramatic treatment after the Greek fashion, and it fitted in with Milton's own temperament and experience. He, too, as every critic has pointed out, had married a wife of Philistine parentage and had suffered untold misery by her; he, too, was living blind and help-

less in a state that worshipped not the true God; he, too, if he could not like Samson destroy the rulers of that people, would still cherish the hope that the English Puritans would one day rise in their might and accomplish the pious work. What wonder, then, that Milton should have turned such a theme to account in his old age, and how idle to suppose that Vondel's "Samson" influenced him appreciably.

But the peculiar dramatic form suited Milton almost as well as the theme. It required few characters, and thus his inability, which we noticed in "Comus," to create inevitable, objective personages, did him little harm. Samson was himself, or else incarnate Puritanism; the chorus did not need to be personalized; and with Manoah, Delilah, the giant Harapha of Gath, the officer, and the messenger, little play of character was required. Hence, although his weakness is perhaps apparent in a few passages, the strength and lifelikeness of his play are indisputably splendid. With a fuller action and more characters it may be questioned whether he would have succeeded so well; hence his choice of the

Greek form was not only consistent with his developed prejudice against the looser English drama, but was also a clear proof of his artistic prescience.

His artistic inventiveness was also displayed in "Samson" in marked measure, not only in his use of the incident of Harapha's discomfiture, as Dr. Garnett has pointed out, but also in the metrical construction of the admirable choruses.

He explained his metrical innovations in his preface in a lucus a non lucendo way by using learned Greek terms, which resolve themselves into the statement that he either avoids stanzaic divisions, or else makes his stanzas irregular, and that inside a stanza he adopts any sort of line or verse he chooses. The result of his procedure has been that it requires a carefully trained ear to appreciate the harmonies of most of the choruses. To many readers they degenerate into prose; but in view of the correctness of Milton's ear, and his unequalled command of rhythmical and metrical resources, it is unsafe for any one to pronounce any passage prosaic. The truth is, rather, that Milton

has far surpassed all other English poets in producing lyrical effects without rhymes, a few of which are, however, scattered through the poem: and that, if we fail to catch the harmonies hidden in his verses, the fault is our own. Yet it may be granted, perhaps, that in some cases he has followed the Italian plan of mixing verses of various lengths, more consistently than is advisable in English, for, after all, a poem is meant to be read, and the poet must, more or less, consult the capacities of his readers.

With regard, now, to the rank of "Samson" among Milton's poems, there is little reason to agree with Macaulay in rating it below "Comus." Dr. Garnett inclines to put the two poems on a level. Pattison, after explaining how Dr. Johnson could think "Samson" a "tragedy which only ignorance would admire, and bigotry applaud," followed up his own unsympathetic treatment of "Paradise Regained" by observing that "while, for the biographer of Milton 'Samson Agonistes' is charged with a pathos which, as the expression of real suffering, no fictive tragedy can

equal, it must be felt that, as a composition, the drama is languid, nerveless, occasionally halting, never brilliant." Against this uncalledfor depreciation we may well set Goethe's praise, and remark that a successful treatment of any theme in the fashion of the Greek drama could not possibly be languid and nerveless. The fact, indeed, seems to be that, in intensity of power, "Samson" is as preëminent as "Paradise Lost" is in sublimity, "Paradise Regained" in poised nobility, and "Comus" in nobility fused with charm. If this be true, Milton's latest dramatic effort should rank above his first, though it be far less popular. It might almost be held that the "Samson" is the most intensely powerful of the great English tragedies except "Lear," which is universal in its stormy passion, while "Samson" is more national and individual. If the poem shows the signs of age, as Pattison maintains, it shows them as an aging gladiator might do — the thews and muscles stand rigidly out, unclothed by youthful flesh. But the power, if naked, is all the more conspicuous and impressive. the war to more In conclusion, let us take leave of this poem, as of its companion, "Paradise Regained," by recalling two passages typical of its spirit. The first is from a chorus:—

"O, how comely it is, and how reviving To the spirits of just men long oppressed, When God into the hands of their deliverer Puts invincible might, To quell the mighty of the earth, the oppressor, The brute and boisterous force of violent men, Hardy and industrious to support Tyrannic power, but raging to pursue The righteous, and all such as honor truth! He all their ammunition And feats of war defeats, With plain heroic magnitude of mind And celestial vigor armed; Their armories and magazines contemns, Renders them useless, while With winged expedition Swift as the lightning glance he executes His errand on the wicked, who, surprised, Lose their defence, distracted and amazed."

Traces of senility are hardly to be discovered in this passage, or in the following, which will serve to illustrate the staple blank verse of the drama:—

"But what more oft, in nations grown corrupt,
And by their vices brought to servitude,
Than to love bondage more than liberty—
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty—
And to despise, or envy, or suspect,
Whom God hath of his special favor raised
As their deliverer? If he aught begin,
How frequent to desert him, and at last
To heap ingratitude on worthiest deeds!"

CHAPTER X

MILTON'S ART

IT is quite obvious that a chapter with the above caption is a bold undertaking and one that is doomed from the beginning to partial or complete failure. Even a book would not exhaust the subject of Milton's art, especially in these days when it would be likely to consist in large measure of statistical tables. Then, again, there is practically nothing new to be said about a topic upon which critics great and small have exhausted themselves from the days of Patrick Hume to those of Professor Masson. Yet to close a study such as the present without an attempt to sum up the general artistic powers of the great poet with whom it has dealt, would be to leave the whole undertaking somewhat in the air; a result in which it would be cowardly to acquiesce without a struggle or at least a dignified effort.

But what now do we mean by saying that Milton was a great artist? We may mean many things, but we certainly mean that he was careful in selecting and ordering the materials out of which he composed his works, and that he was particular in joining these materials together and in preparing them for the joining process. To speak more concretely, we mean that he took great pains with his choice and evolution of theme, that he thought out the details of his composition from a logical point of view, and that in addition to this care about the thought-matter of his poems or their substance, he paid great attention to the word-matter, whether from the points of view of diction, syntax, metrical rhythm, or harmony; that is to say, to the form of his poems. This is, of course, a commonplace statement, but the twofold division it contains will furnish us with a good point of departure.

With regard to his choice of materials, Milton, as we have observed, showed the caution that befits the scholar and the man, who, conscious of great powers, is determined to excel supereminently. He was never a hasty writer.

Up to the time of the composition of the "Epitaphium Damonis," i.e. his thirty-second year, he had produced what is, on the whole, a small body of verse for a poet so gifted, and had for a considerable portion of it relied upon external stimulation to production rather than upon inward prompting. In other words, if Lawes had not been Milton's friend and if King had not died, the minor poems would not now be preferred by some critics to "Paradise Lost." During the twenty years of prose writing, computing roughly, external stimulation was again the rule, as is evidenced both by the pamphlets and by the sonnets. "Paradise Lost" is the first important work representing Milton's own creative impulse, and "Samson Agonistes" is the second, for Ellwood suggested "Paradise Regained" and the theological, historical, and grammatical treatises are hardly to be considered in this connection.

As we have seen and as it has been frequently shown for the past two hundred years, Milton brought to bear on each subject, whether chosen by himself or not, the full weight of his learning and the full force of his conscience.

We have ocular proof that he was a careful reviser and that he improved what he altered; he packed whatever he wrote with erudition, sifted and fitted in to his purpose; and he studied the technic and the details of his art. He innovated and experimented, and in short prefaces explained his methods of composition. The result is that the more minute the student, the more he becomes convinced that Milton could have given a reason for every detail of his work, even for his minor variations from the normal types of his blank verse lines. This is not to say that Milton composed with meticulous care when the impulse of composition was upon him, but that the rules of his art had become a second nature to him and that his taste was as perfect as a finite man's can be. In other words, the more one studies Milton the more loath one becomes to find fault with a passage, a line, a word, — the more one comes to believe that Milton as an artist is practically flawless.

But we have already examined in some detail Milton's themes and have commented upon their evolution as well as upon the great use he

made of the work of other men in carrying out his own designs. We have mentioned also, time and again, the power by which the substance of his works is fused into a poetic whole —the power of his shaping imagination. An attempt to describe Milton's imagination would be impertinent, for it would require an almost equal imagination for its successful accomplishment. It may, however, be noted that Milton's imagination seems to affect the substance of his works by limiting it to that which is noble, sublime, strenuous, or elementally pure and therefore charming. Humor is thus practically excluded as well as the intimate human note to be found in Dante and Shakspere. Pathos and sympathy exist, as, for example, in the exquisite closing passage of "Paradise Lost"; but the normal majesty of the action in each of the greater poems reduces these qualities to a minimum. In the same way, however much we may admire, with Tennyson, the paradisaic charm of the descriptions of Eden, we must admit that it is the product of an imagination that does not haunt the earth that lesser mortals tread. Milton's genius moves more freely in empyrean

and cosmical spaces, and if his imagination is limited as regards certain peculiarly human spheres, it is nevertheless limitless in its own proper domain. Hence it is that in the Pandemonium scenes Milton attains to a strenuous sublimity that is probably unrivalled in literature. Hence, too, when his imagination utters itself in tropes and figures, little is definite or precise; or if precision be demanded, the spatial dimensions are large or the setting in time is indefinite, grand, unusual, or mysterious. This last point may be well illustrated by two examples taken from "Paradise Lost."

Satan is not, with Milton, the three-faced monster whose arms in length are to the height of a giant more than the latter's stature is to that of Dante; he lifts his head above the waves and

"his other parts besides

Prone on the flood, extended long and large,"

lie floating many a rood, as huge in bulk as Briareos or Typhon or "that sea-beast Leviathan." Here we see that the description is at first purely indefinite, and that, when a precise comparison is made, it is of such a nature that