MILTON'S

L'ALLEGRO, IL PENSEROSO, COMUS AND LYCIDAS

EDITED

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

TULEY FRANCIS HUNTINGTON, A.M.

INSTRUCTOR IN ENGLISH IN THE LELAND STANFORD JUNIOR UNIVERSITY
SOMETIME HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH IN
THE SOUTH SIDE HIGH SCHOOL, MILWAUKEE

BOSTON, U.S.A.:

GINN & COMPANY, PUBLISHERS

The Athenæum Press

1901

To the Memory

of

My Mother

PREFACE.

In Milton's *Tractate of Education* there is a passage which suggests in figure and with fine harmony the duty as well as the delight of every reader of Milton's poetry. "I shall . . . straight conduct you to a hill-side," writes Milton to Master Hartlib, "where I will point you out the right path of a virtuous and noble education, laborious indeed at the first ascent, but also so smooth, so green, so full of goodly prospect and melodious sounds, that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming." With the reader of Milton, in like manner, the effort, laborious though it be, must ever precede the pleasure. Every line, every word of Milton's poetry has its meaning, and very often diligent search must be made for it; but it is nevertheless true that he who gives his days and nights to the search for this meaning, and finds it, wins for himself a culture scarcely less precious than Milton's own "virtuous and noble education."

Since so much has been written about Milton, and that, too, so ably, it seemed wiser to give in the Introduction to the present volume the best of what has been written by some of the more modern critics about the poems here edited rather than to attempt a criticism which could hardly hope to equal, much less to better, what has already been so admirably done. Furthermore, the divergence of views expressed by the critics here quoted will give the student abundant opportunity for discussion, and thereby lead to the formation of opinions more just than could possibly result from the perusal of any one man's single criticism.

The text of the poems is taken from Masson's library edition of Milton's poetical works. Here, as in the case of the selections printed in the Introduction, the reprint is as exact as it was possible to make it.

The Notes, as must be the case where serious study is to be made of poems whose lines have been so much fought over by scholars as these of Milton, are necessarily rather full. Several important interpretations are sometimes given to a single passage.

The necessity the student is thus put to in choosing the most reasonable of these — and it is the business of the teacher to see that he has good reasons for his preference — ought to lead to clear thinking. The study of parallel passages should be left ordinarily to the maturer work of the college, but in the case of Milton some work of this sort is absolutely essential to an appreciation of his genius. Some limit needs to be set, however, and hence all parallel passages in works later than Milton's time, with two or three exceptions, are rigidly excluded, while those in works before his time are given only where the resemblance is so close as to make it probable that they were actually suggestive to him. Passages in the Bible, in Shakspere, and in Milton's other poems are merely cited, it being supposed that every student has at hand a Bible and the works of Milton and Shakspere. These passages should in every case be looked up, both for the light they will throw upon the text and for the familiarity this sort of reference will breed with three of the world's great books. Questions and problems, such as the editor's experience in teaching High School students has shown him can be profitably set for independent study, are dispersed throughout the Notes.

The obligations of the editor are many. In the Notes use has been made of all the important editions of Milton's works, from Newton's to the present time, and with the exception of the matter taken from the editions of Warton and Keightley, to which the editor unfortunately did not have access, all quotations and citations are made at first hand. In the case of the exceptions, the editor has consulted such reliable sources, usually indicated in the Notes, that it is hoped no inaccuracy has resulted. Credit has everywhere been freely given for all matter which did not seem common property. To the Macmillan Company the editor is indebted for permission to use Masson's text and three of the selections in the Introduction. For other copyrighted material in the Introduction he is indebted to Harper & Brothers, to Longmans, Green & Co., to Walter Scott, to D. Appleton & Co., and to Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Prof. Albert E. Jack of Lake Forest University offered a number of suggestions, which have been made use of in the Notes.

T. F. H.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY, CALIFORNIA,
October 16, 1899.

INTRODUCTION.

I. CRITICAL COMMENTS.

WORDSWORTH'S SONNET TO MILTON.[1]

MILTON! thou should'st be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

[Brooke, *English Literature*, pp. 161–168.[2]]

John Milton was the last of the Elizabethans, and, except Shakespeare, far the greatest of them all. Born

[1] This, Milton's own *On the Late Massacre in Piedmont*, and Keats's *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer* are among the best sonnets in our language. For some comments on the first line of the present sonnet, see the introductory essay in Ernest Myers's *Selected Prose Writings of John Milton.*

[2] For some strictures on Brooke's criticism as it was *originally* published, see Matthew Arnold's essay entitled *A Guide to English Literature.*

in 1608, in Bread Street (close by the Mermaid Tavern), he may have seen Shakespeare, for he remained till he was sixteen in London. His literary life may be said to begin with his entrance into Cambridge, in 1625, the year of the accession of Charles I. Nicknamed the "Lady of Christ's" from his beauty, delicate taste, and moral life, he soon attained a reputation by his Latin poems and discourses, and by his English poems which revealed as clear and original a genius as that of Chaucer and Spenser. Of Milton even more than of the two others, it may be said that he was "whole in himself, and owed to none." The *Ode to the Nativity*, 1629, the third poem he composed, while it went back to the Elizabethan age in beauty, in instinctive fire, went forward into a new world of art, the world where the architecture of the lyric is finished with majesty and music. The next year heard the noble sounding strains of *At a Solemn Music;* and the sonnet, *On Attaining the Age of Twenty-three*, reveals in dignified beauty that intense personality which lives, like a force, through every line he wrote. He left the university in 1632, and went to live at Horton, near Windsor, where he spent five years, steadily reading the Greek and Latin writers, and amusing himself with mathematics and music. Poetry was not neglected. The *Allegro* and *Penseroso* were written in 1633 and probably the *Arcades; Comus* was acted in 1634, and *Lycidas* composed in 1637. They prove that though Milton was Puritan in heart his Puritanism was of that earlier type which disdained neither the arts nor letters. But they represent a growing revolt from the Court and the Church. The *Penseroso* prefers the contemplative life to the mirthful, and *Comus*, though a masque, rose into a celestial poem to the glory of temperance, and under its allegory attacked the Court. Three years later, *Lycidas* interrupts its exqui-

site stream of poetry with a fierce and resolute onset on the greedy shepherds of the Church. Milton had taken his Presbyterian bent.

In 1638 he went to Italy, the second home of so many of the English poets, visited Florence where he saw Galileo, and then passed on to Rome. At Naples he heard the sad news of civil war, which determined him to return; "inasmuch as I thought it base to be traveling at my ease for amusement, while my fellow-countrymen at home were fighting for liberty." At the meeting of the Long Parliament we find him in a house in Aldersgate, where he lived till 1645. He had projected while abroad a great epic poem on the subject of Arthur, but in London his mind changed, and among a number of subjects, tended at last to *Paradise Lost*, which he meant to throw into the form of a Greek Tragedy with lyrics and choruses.

Suddenly his whole life changed, and for twenty years — 1640–60 — he was carried out of art into politics, out of poetry into prose. Most of the *Sonnets*, however, belong to this time. Stately, rugged, or graceful, as he pleased to make them, some with the solemn grandeur of Hebrew psalms, others having the classic ease of Horace, some of his own grave tenderness, they are true, unlike those of Shakespeare and Spenser, to the correct form of this difficult kind of poetry. But they were all he could now do of his true work. Before the Civil War began in 1642, he had written five vigorous pamphlets against Episcopacy. Six more pamphlets appeared in the next two years. One of these was the *Areopagitica; or, Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing*, 1644, a bold and eloquent attack on the censorship of the press by the Presbyterians. Another, remarkable, like the *Areopagitica*, for its finer prose, was a tract *On Education*. The four pamphlets in which he advo-

cated conditional divorce made him still more the horror of the Presbyterians. In 1646 he published his poems, and in that year the sonnet *On the Forcers of Conscience* shows that he had wholly ceased to be Presbyterian. His political pamphlets begin when his *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* defended in 1649 the execution of the king. The *Eikonoclastes* answered the *Eikon Basilike* (a portraiture of the sufferings of the king); and his famous Latin *Defence for the People of England*, 1651, replied to Salmasius's *Defence of Charles I.*, and inflicted so pitiless a lashing on the great Leyden scholar that Milton's fame went over the whole of Europe. In the next year he wholly lost his sight. But he continued his work (being Latin secretary since 1649) when Cromwell was made Protector, and wrote another *Defence for the English People*, 1654, and a further *Defence of Himself* against scurrilous charges. This closed the controversy in 1655. In the last year of the Protector's life he began the *Paradise Lost*, but the death of Cromwell threw him back into politics, and three more pamphlets on the questions of a Free Church and a free Commonwealth were useless to prevent the Restoration. It was a wonder he was not put to death in 1660, and he was in hiding and also in custody for a time. At last he settled in a house near Bunhill Fields. It was here that *Paradise Lost* was finished, before the end of 1665, and then published in 1667.

We may regret that Milton was shut away from his art during twenty years of controversy. But it may be that the poems he wrote when the great cause he fought for had closed in seeming defeat but real victory, gained from its solemn issues and from the moral grandeur with which he wrought for its ends their majestic movement, their grand style, and their grave beauty. During the struggle he had

never forgotten his art. "I may one day hope," he said, speaking of his youthful studies, "to have ye again, in a still time, when there shall be no chiding. Not in these Noises," and the saying strikes the note of calm sublimity which is kept in *Paradise Lost.*

As we read the great epic, we feel that the lightness of heart of the *Allegro*, that even the quiet classic philosophy of the *Comus*, are gone. The beauty of the poem is like that of a stately temple, which, vast in conception, is involved in detail. The style is the greatest in the whole range of English poetry. Milton's intellectual force supports and condenses his imaginative force, and his art is almost too conscious of itself. Sublimity is its essential difference. The subject is one phase of the great and universal subject of high poetic thought and passion, that struggle of Light with Darkness, of Evil with Good, which, arising in a hundred myths, keeps its undying attraction to the present day. But its great difficulty in his case was that he was obliged to interest us, for a great part of the poem, in two persons, who, being innocent, were without any such play of human passion and trouble as we find in Œdipus, Æneas, Hamlet, or Alceste. In the noble art with which this is done Milton is supreme. The interest of the story collects at first round the character of Satan, but he grows meaner as the poem develops, and his second degradation after he has destroyed innocence is one of the finest and most consistent motives in the poem. This at once disposes of the view that Milton meant Satan to be the hero of the epic. His hero is Man. The deep tenderness of Milton, his love of beauty, the passionate fitness of his words to his work, his religious depth, fill the scenes in which he paints Paradise, our parents and their fall, and at last all thought and emotion center round Adam and Eve,

until the closing lines leave us with their lonely image on our minds. In every part of the poem, in every character in it, as indeed in all his poems, Milton's intense individuality appears. It is a pleasure to find it. The egotism of such a man, said Coleridge, is a revelation of spirit.

Paradise Lost was followed by *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes,* published together in 1671. *Paradise Regained* opens with the journey of Christ into the wilderness after his baptism, and its four books describe the temptation of Christ by Satan, and the answers and victory of the Redeemer. The speeches in it overwhelm the action, and their learned argument is only relieved by a few descriptions; but these, as in that of Athens, are done with Milton's highest power. Its solemn beauty of quietude, and a more severe style than that of *Paradise Lost,* make us feel in it that Milton has grown older.

In *Samson Agonistes* the style is still severer, even to the verge of a harshness which the sublimity alone tends to modify. It is a choral drama, after the Greek model. Samson in his blindness is described, is called on to make sport for the Philistines, and overthrows them in the end. Samson represents the fallen Puritan cause, and Samson's victorious death Milton's hopes for the final triumph of that cause. The poem has all the grandeur of the last words of a great man in whom there was now "calm of mind, all passion spent." It is also the last word of the music of the Elizabethan drama long after its notes seemed hushed, and its deep sound is strange in the midst of the shallow noise of the Restoration. Soon afterwards, November, 1674, blind and old and fallen on evil days, Milton died; but neither blindness, old age, nor evil days could lessen the inward light, nor impair the imaginative power with which he sang, it seemed with the angels, the

"undisturbed song of pure concent," until he joined himself, at last, with those "just spirits who wear victorious palms."

To the greatness of the artist Milton joined the majesty of a clear and lofty character. His poetic style was as stately as his character, and proceeded from it. Living at a time when criticism began to purify the verse of England, and being himself well acquainted with the great classical models, his work is seldom weakened by the false conceits and the intemperance of the Elizabethan writers, and yet is as imaginative as theirs, and as various. He has not their naturalness, nor all their intensity, but he has a larger grace, a lovelier colour, a closer eye for nature, a more finished art, and a sublime dignity they did not possess. All the kinds of poetry which he touched he touched with the ease of great strength, and with so much energy, that they became new in his hands. He put a fresh life into the masque, the sonnet, the elegy, the descriptive lyric, the song, the choral drama; and he created the epic in England. The lighter love poem he never wrote, and we are grateful that he kept his coarse satirical power apart from his poetry. In some points he was untrue to his descent from the Elizabethans, for he had no dramatic faculty, and he had no humour. He summed up in himself the learned and artistic influences of the English Renaissance, and handed them on to us. His taste was as severe, his verse as polished, his method and language as strict as those of the school of Dryden and Pope that grew up when he was old. A literary past and present thus met in him, nor did he fail, like all the greatest men, to make a cast into the future. He established the poetry of pure natural description. Lastly, he did not represent in any way the England that followed the Stuarts, but he did rep-

resent Puritan England, and the whole spirit of Puritanism from its cradle to its grave.

[Pattison, *Milton*, pp. 19, 24–29.]

The fame of the author of *Paradise Lost* has over-shadowed that of the author of *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *Lycidas*. Yet had *Paradise Lost* never been written, these three poems, with *Comus*, would have sufficed to place their author in a class apart, and above all those who had used the English language for poetical purposes before him. . . .

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. . . a naturalist is at once aware that Milton had neither the eye nor the ear of a naturalist. At no time, even before his loss of sight, was he an exact observer of natural objects. It may be that he knew a skylark from a red-breast, and did not confound the dog-rose with the honey-suckle. But I am sure that he had never acquired that interest in nature's things and ways which leads to close and loving watching of them. He had not that sense of out-door nature, empirical and not scientific, which endows the *Angler* of his cotemporary Walton with his enduring charm, and which is to be acquired only by living in the open country in childhood. Milton is not a man of the fields, but of books. His life is in his study, and when he steps abroad into the air he carries his study thoughts with him. He does look at nature, but he sees her through books. Natural impressions are received from without, but always in those forms of beautiful speech in which the poets of all ages have clothed them. His epithets are not, like the epithets of the school of Dryden and Pope, culled from the *Gradus ad Parnassum;* they are expressive of some reality, but it is of a real emotion in the spectator's

soul, not of any quality detected by keen insight in the objects themselves. This emotion Milton's art stamps with an epithet which shall convey the added charm of classical reminiscence. When, e.g., he speaks of "the wand'ring moon," the original significance of the epithet comes home to the scholarly reader with the enhanced effect of its association with the "errantem lunam" of Horace. Nor because it is adopted from Horace has the epithet here the second-hand effect of a copy. If Milton sees nature through books, he still sees it.

> "To behold the wand'ring moon,
> Riding near her highest noon,
> Like one that had been led astray,
> Through the heaven's wide pathless way,
> And oft, as if her head she bow'd,
> Stooping through a fleecy cloud."

No allegation that "wand'ring moon" is borrowed from Horace can hide from us that Milton, though he remembered Horace, had watched the phenomenon with a feeling so intense that he projected his own soul's throb into the object before him, and named it with what Thomson calls "recollected love."

Milton's attitude toward nature is not that of a scientific naturalist, nor even that of a close observer. It is that of a poet who feels its total influence too powerfully to dissect it. If, as I have said, Milton reads books first and nature afterwards, it is not to test nature by his books, but to learn from both. He is learning, not books, but from books. All he reads, sees, hears, is to him but nutriment for the soul. He is making himself. Man is to him the highest object; nature is subordinate to man, not only in its more vulgar uses, but as an excitant of fine emotion.

He is not concerned to register the facts and phenomena of nature, but to convey the impression they make on a sensitive soul. The external forms of things are to be presented to us as transformed through the heart and mind of the poet. The moon is endowed with life and will, "stooping," "riding," "wand'ring," "bowing her head," not as a frigid personification, and because the ancient poets so personified her, but by communication to her of the intense agitation which the nocturnal spectacle rouses in the poet's own breast.

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In Milton, nature is not put forward as the poet's theme. His theme is man, in the two contrasted moods of joyous emotion or grave reflection. The shifting scenery ministers to the varying mood. Thomson, in the *Seasons* (1726), sets himself to render natural phenomena as they truly are. He has left us a vivid presentation in gorgeous language of the naturalistic calendar of the changing year. Milton, in these two idylls, has recorded a day of twenty-four hours. But he has not registered the phenomena; he places us at the standpoint of the man before whom they deploy. And the man, joyous or melancholy, is not a bare spectator of them; he is the student, compounded of sensibility and intelligence, of whom we are not told that he saw so and so, or that he felt so, but with whom we are made copartners of his thoughts and feeling. Description melts into emotion, and contemplation bodies itself in imagery. All the charm of rural life is there, but it is not tendered to us in the form of a landscape; the scenery is subordinated to the human figure in the center.

These two short idylls are marked by a gladsome spontaneity which never came to Milton again. The delicate fancy and feeling which play about *L'Allegro* and *Il*

Penseroso never reappear, and form a strong contrast to the austere imaginings of his later poetical period. These two poems have the freedom and frolic, the natural grace of movement, the improvisation, of the best Elizabethan examples, while both thoughts and words are under a strict economy unknown to the diffuse exuberance of the Spenserians.

In *Lycidas* (1637) we have reached the high-water mark of English poesy and of Milton's own production. A period of a century and a half was to elapse before poetry in England seemed, in Wordsworth's *Ode on Immortality* (1807), to be rising again toward the level of inspiration which it had once attained in *Lycidas*. And in the development of the Miltonic genius this wonderful dirge marks the culminating point. As the twin idylls of 1632 show a great advance upon the *Ode on the Nativity* (1629), the growth of the poetic mind during the five years which follow 1632 is registered in *Lycidas*. Like the *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, *Lycidas* is laid out on the lines of the accepted pastoral fiction; like them it offers exquisite touches of idealised rural life. But *Lycidas* opens up a deeper vein of feeling, a patriot passion so vehement and dangerous that, like that which stirred the Hebrew prophet, it is compelled to veil itself from power, or from sympathy, in utterance made purposely enigmatical. The passage which begins "Last came and last did go" raises in us a thrill of awe-struck expectation which I can only compare with that excited by the Cassandra of Æschylus's *Agamemnon*. For the reader to feel this, he must have present in memory the circumstances of England in 1637. He must place himself as far as possible in the situation of a cotemporary. The study of Milton's poetry compels the study of his time; and Professor Masson's six volumes are not too

much to enable us to understand that there were real causes for the intense passion which glows underneath the poet's words — a passion which unexplained would be thought to be intrusive.

The historical exposition must be gathered from the English history of the period, which may be read in Professor Masson's excellent summary. All I desire to point out here is, that in *Lycidas* Milton's original picturesque vein is for the first time crossed with one of quite another sort, stern, determined, obscurely indicative of suppressed passion, and the resolution to do or die. The fanaticism of the covenanter and the sad grace of Petrarch seem to meet in Milton's monody. Yet these opposites, instead of neutralising each other, are blended into one harmonious whole by the presiding, but invisible, genius of the poet. The conflict between the old cavalier world — the years of gaiety and festivity of a splendid and pleasure-loving court, and the new Puritan world into which love and pleasure were not to enter — this conflict which was commencing in the social life of England, is also begun in Milton's own breast, and is reflected in *Lycidas*.

"For we were nurs'd upon the self-same hill."

Here is the sweet mournfulness of the Spenserian time, upon whose joys Death is the only intruder. Pass onward a little, and you are in presence of the tremendous

"Two-handed engine at the door,"

the terror of which is enhanced by its obscurity. We are very sure that the avenger is there, though we know not who he is. In these thirty lines we have the preluding mutterings of the storm which was to sweep away mask and revel and song, to inhibit the drama, and suppress

poetry. In the earlier poems Milton's muse has sung in the tones of the age that is passing away; except in his austere chastity, a cavalier. Though even in *L'Allegro* Dr. Johnson truly detects "some melancholy in his mirth." In *Lycidas*, for a moment, the tones of both ages, the past and the coming, are combined, and then Milton leaves behind him forever the golden age, and one half of his poetic genius. He never fulfilled the promise with which *Lycidas* concludes, "To-morrow to fresh fields and pastures new."

[Garnett, *Life of Milton*, pp. 49–54.]

The "Penseroso" and the "Allegro," notwithstanding that each piece is the antithesis of the other, are complementary rather than contrary, and may be, in a sense, regarded as one poem, whose theme is the praise of the reasonable life. It resembles one of those pictures in which the effect is gained by contrasted masses of light and shade, but each is more nicely mellowed and interfused with the qualities of the other than it lies within the resources of pictorial skill to effect. Mirth has an undertone of gravity, and melancholy of cheerfulness. There is no antagonism between the states of mind depicted; and no rational lover, whether of contemplation or of recreation, would find any difficulty in combining the two. The limpidity of the diction is even more striking than its beauty. Never were ideas of such dignity embodied in verse so easy and familiar, and with such apparent absence of effort. The landscape-painting is that of the seventeenth century, absolutely true in broad effects, sometimes ill-defined and even inaccurate in minute details. Some of these blemishes are terrible in nineteenth-century eyes, accustomed to the photography of our Brownings and