

Life of Milton. Milton is like an ideal in the soul, like a lofty mountain on the horizon. We never attain the ideal; we never climb the mountain; but life would be inexpressibly poorer were either to be taken away.

From childhood Milton's parents set him apart for the attainment of noble ends, and so left nothing to chance in the matter of training. His father, John Milton, is said to have turned Puritan while a student at Oxford and to have been disinherited by his family;



JOHN MILTON

whereupon he settled in London and prospered greatly as a scrivener, that is, a kind of notary. In character the elder Milton was a rare combination of scholar and business man, a radical Puritan in politics and religion, yet a musician, whose hymn tunes are still sung, and a lover of art and literature. The poet's mother was a woman of refinement and social grace, with a deep interest in religion and in local charities. So the boy grew up in a home which combined the culture of the Renaissance with the piety and moral strength of early Puritanism. He begins, therefore, as the heir of one great age and the prophet of another.

Apparently the elder Milton shared Bacon's dislike for the educational methods of the time and so took charge of his son's training, encouraging his natural tastes, teaching him music, and seeking out a tutor who helped the boy to what he sought most eagerly, not the grammar and mechanism of Greek and Latin but rather the stories, the ideals, the poetry that hide in their incomparable literatures. At twelve years we find the boy already a scholar in spirit, unable to rest till after midnight because of the joy with which his study was rewarded. From boyhood two great principles seem to govern

Milton's career: one, the love of beauty, of music, art, literature, and indeed of every form of human culture; the other, a steadfast devotion to duty as the highest object in human life.

A brief course at the famous St. Paul's school in London was the prelude to Milton's entrance to Christ's College, Cambridge. Here again he followed his natural bent and, like Bacon, found himself often in opposition to the authorities. Aside from some Latin poems, the most noteworthy song of this period of Milton's life is his splendid ode, "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," which was begun on Christmas day, 1629. Milton, while deep in the classics, had yet a greater love for his native literature. Spenser was for years his master; in his verse we find every evidence of his "loving study" of Shakespeare, and his last great poems show clearly how he had been influenced by Fletcher's *Christ's Victory and Triumph*. But it is significant that this first ode rises higher than anything of the kind produced in the famous Age of Elizabeth.

While at Cambridge it was the desire of his parents that Milton should take orders in the Church of England; but the intense love of mental liberty which stamped the Puritan was too strong within him, and he refused to consider the "oath of servitude," as he called it, which would mark his ordination. Throughout his life Milton, though profoundly religious, held aloof from the strife of sects. In belief, he belonged to the extreme Puritans, called Separatists, Independents, Congregationalists, of which our Pilgrim Fathers are the great examples; but he refused to be bound by any creed or church discipline:

As ever in my great Task-Master's eye.

In this last line of one of his sonnets¹ is found Milton's rejection of every form of outward religious authority in face of the supreme Puritan principle, the liberty of the individual soul before God.

A long period of retirement followed Milton's withdrawal from the university in 1632. At his father's country home in Horton he gave himself up for six years to solitary reading and study, roaming over the wide fields of Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Spanish, French, Italian, and English literatures, and studying hard at mathematics, science, theology, and music, — a curious combination. To his love of music we owe the melody of all his poetry, and we note it in the rhythm and balance which make even his mighty prose arguments harmonious.

¹ "On his being arrived to the Age of Twenty-three."

In "Lycidas," "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," "Arcades," "Comus," and a few "Sonnets," we have the poetic results of this retirement at Horton, — few, indeed, but the most perfect of their kind that our literature has recorded.

Out of solitude, where his talent was perfected, Milton entered the busy world where his character was to be proved to the utmost. From Horton he traveled abroad, through France, Switzerland, and Italy, everywhere received with admiration for his learning and courtesy, winning the friendship of the exiled Dutch scholar Grotius, in Paris, and of Galileo in his sad imprisonment in Florence.¹ He was on his way to Greece when news reached him of the break between king and parliament. With the practical insight which never deserted him Milton saw clearly the meaning of the news. His cordial reception in Italy, so chary of praise to anything not Italian, had reawakened in Milton the old desire to write an epic which England would "not willingly let die"; but at thought of the conflict for human freedom all his dreams were flung to the winds. He gave up his travels and literary ambitions and hurried to England. "For I thought it base," he says, "to be traveling at my ease for intellectual culture while my fellow-countrymen at home were fighting for liberty."

Then for nearly twenty years the poet of great achievement and still greater promise disappears. We hear no more songs, but only the prose denunciations and arguments which are as remarkable as his poetry. In all our literature there is nothing more worthy of the Puritan spirit than this laying aside of personal ambitions in order to join in the struggle for human liberty. In his best known sonnet, "On His Blindness," which reflects his grief, not at darkness, but at his abandoned dreams, we catch the sublime spirit of this renunciation.

Milton's opportunity to serve came in the crisis of 1649. The king had been sent to the scaffold, paying the penalty of his own treachery, and England sat shivering at its own deed, like a child or a Russian peasant who in sudden passion resists unbearable brutality and then is afraid of the consequences. Two weeks of anxiety, of terror and silence followed; then appeared Milton's *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*. To England it was like the coming of a strong man, not only to protect the child, but to justify his blow for liberty. Kings no less than people are subject to the eternal principle of law;

¹ "It is remarkable," says Lamartine, "how often in the libraries of Italian princes and in the correspondence of great Italian writers of this period you find mentioned the name and fame of this young Englishman."

the divine right of a people to defend and protect themselves, — that was the mighty argument which calmed a people's dread and proclaimed that a new man and a new principle had arisen in England. Milton was called to be Secretary for Foreign Tongues in the new government; and for the next few years, until the end of the Commonwealth, there were two leaders in England, Cromwell the man of action, Milton the man of thought. It is doubtful to which of the two humanity owes most for its emancipation from the tyranny of kings and prelates.

Two things of personal interest deserve mention in this period of Milton's life, his marriage and his blindness. In 1643 he married Mary Powell, a shallow, pleasure-loving girl, the daughter of a Royalist; and that was the beginning of sorrows. After a month, tiring of the austere life of a Puritan household, she abandoned her husband, who, with the same radical reasoning with which he dealt with affairs of state, promptly repudiated the marriage. His *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* and his *Tetrachordon* are the arguments to justify his position; but they aroused a storm of protest in England, and they suggest to a modern reader that Milton was perhaps as much to blame as his wife, and that he had scant understanding of a woman's nature. When his wife, fearing for her position, appeared before him in tears, all his ponderous arguments were swept aside by a generous impulse; and though the marriage was never a happy one, Milton never again mentioned his wife's desertion. The scene in *Paradise Lost*, where Eve comes weeping to Adam, seeking peace and pardon, is probably a reflection of a scene in Milton's own household. His wife died in 1653, and a few years later he married another, whom we remember for the sonnet, "Methought I saw my late espoused saint," in which she is celebrated. She died after fifteen months, and in 1663 he married a third wife, who helped the blind old man to manage his poor household.

From boyhood the strain on the poet's eyes had grown more and more severe; but even when his sight was threatened he held steadily to his purpose of using his pen in the service of his country. During the king's imprisonment a book appeared called *Eikon Basilike* (Royal Image), giving a rosy picture of the king's piety, and condemning the Puritans. The book speedily became famous and was the source of all Royalist arguments against the Commonwealth. In 1649 appeared Milton's *Eikonoklastes* (Image Breaker), which demolished the flimsy arguments of the *Eikon Basilike* as a charge

of Cromwell's Ironsides had overwhelmed the king's followers. After the execution of the king appeared another famous attack upon the Puritans, *Defensio Regia pro Carlo I*, instigated by Charles II, who was then living in exile. It was written in Latin by Salmasius, a Dutch professor at Leyden, and was hailed by the Royalists as an invincible argument. By order of the Council of State Milton prepared a reply. His eyesight had sadly failed, and he was warned that any further strain would be disastrous. His reply was characteristic of the man and the Puritan. As he had once sacrificed his poetry, so he was now ready, he said, to sacrifice his eyes also on the altar of English liberty. His magnificent *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano* is one of the most masterly controversial works in literature. The power of the press was already strongly felt in England, and the new Commonwealth owed its standing partly to Milton's prose, and partly to Cromwell's policy. The *Defensio* was the last work that Milton saw. Blindness fell upon him ere it was finished, and from 1652 until his death he labored in total darkness.

The last part of Milton's life is a picture of solitary grandeur unequaled in literary history. With the Restoration all his labors and sacrifices for humanity were apparently wasted. From his retirement he could hear the bells and the shouts that welcomed back a vicious monarch, whose first act was to set his foot upon his people's neck. Milton was immediately marked for persecution; he remained for months in hiding; he was reduced to poverty, and his books were burned by the public hangman. His daughters, upon whom he depended in his blindness, rebelled at the task of reading to him and recording his thoughts. In the midst of all these sorrows we understand, in *Samson*, the cry of the blind champion of Israel:

Now blind, disheartened, shamed, dishonored, quelled,
To what can I be useful? wherein serve
My nation, and the work from Heaven imposed?
But to sit idle on the household hearth,
A burdensome drone; to visitants a gaze,
Or pitied object.

Milton's answer is worthy of his own great life. Without envy or bitterness he goes back to the early dream of an immortal poem and begins with superb consciousness of power to dictate his great epic. *Paradise Lost* was finished in 1665, after seven years' labor in darkness. With great difficulty he found a publisher, and for the

great work, now the most honored poem in our literature, he received less than certain verse makers of our day receive for a little song in one of our popular magazines. Its success was immediate, though, like all his work, it met with venomous criticism. Dryden summed up the impression made on thoughtful minds of his time when he said, "This man cuts us all out, and the ancients too." Thereafter a bit of sunshine came into his darkened home, for the work stamped him as one of the world's great writers, and from England and the Continent pilgrims came in increasing numbers to speak their gratitude.

The next year Milton began his *Paradise Regained*. In 1671 appeared his last important work, *Samson Agonistes*, the most powerful dramatic poem on the Greek model which our language possesses. The picture of Israel's mighty champion, blind, alone, afflicted by thoughtless enemies but preserving a noble ideal to the end, is a fitting close to the life work of the poet himself. For years he was silent, dreaming who shall say what dreams in his darkness, and saying cheerfully to his friends, "Still guides the heavenly vision." He died peacefully in 1674, the most sublime and the most lonely figure in our literature.

Milton's Early Poetry.¹ In his early work Milton appears as the inheritor of all that was best in Elizabethan literature, and his first work, the ode "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," approaches the high-water mark of lyric poetry in England. In the next six years, from 1631 to 1637, he wrote but little, scarcely more than two thousand lines, but these are among the most exquisite and the most perfectly finished in our language.

"L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" are twin poems, containing many lines and short descriptive passages which linger in the mind like strains of music, and which are known and loved wherever English is spoken. "L'Allegro" (the joyous or happy man) is like an excursion into the English fields at sunrise. The air is sweet; birds are singing; a

¹ In Milton's work we see plainly the progressive influence of the Puritan Age. Thus his Horton poems are joyous, almost Elizabethan in character; his prose is stern, militant, unyielding, like the Puritan in his struggle for liberty; his later poetry, following the apparent failure of Puritanism in the Restoration, has a note of sadness, yet proclaims the eternal principles of liberty and justice for which he had lived.

multitude of sights, sounds, fragrances, fill all the senses; and to this appeal of nature the soul of man responds by being happy, seeing in every flower and hearing in every harmony some exquisite symbol of human life. "Il Penseroso" takes us over the same ground at twilight and at moonrise. The air is still fresh and fragrant; the symbolism is, if possible, more tenderly beautiful than before; but the gay mood is gone, though its memory lingers in the afterglow of the sunset. A quiet thoughtfulness takes the place of the pure, joyous sensation of the morning, a thoughtfulness which is not sad, though like all quiet moods it is akin to sadness, and which sounds the deeps of human emotion in the presence of nature. To quote scattered lines of either poem is to do injustice to both. They should be read in their entirety the same day, one at morning, the other at eventide, if one is to appreciate their beauty and suggestiveness.

The "Masque of Comus" is in many respects the most perfect of Milton's poems. It was written in 1634 to be performed at Ludlow Castle before the earl of Bridgewater and his friends. There is a tradition that the earl's three children had been lost in the woods, and, whether true or not, Milton takes the simple theme of a person lost, calls in an Attendant Spirit to protect the wanderer, and out of this, with its natural action and melodious songs, makes the most exquisite pastoral drama that we possess. In form it is a masque, like those gorgeous products of the Elizabethan age of which Ben Jonson was the master. England had borrowed the idea of the masque from Italy and had used it as the chief entertainment at all festivals, until it had become to the nobles of England what the miracle play had been to the common people of a previous generation. Milton, with his strong Puritan spirit, could not be content with the mere entertainment of an idle hour. "Comus" has the gorgeous scenic effects, the music and dancing of other masques; but its moral purpose and its ideal teachings are unmistakable.

Comus

"The Triumph of Virtue" would be a better name for this perfect little masque, for its theme is that virtue and innocence can walk through any peril of this world without permanent harm. This eternal triumph of good over evil is proclaimed by the Attendant Spirit who has protected the innocent in this life and who now disappears from mortal sight to resume its life of joy:

Mortals, that would follow me,
Love Virtue; she alone is free.
She can teach ye how to climb
Higher than the sphery chime;
Or if Virtue feeble were,
Heaven itself would stoop to her.

While there are undoubted traces of Jonson and John Fletcher in Milton's "Comus," the poem far surpasses its predecessors in the airy beauty and melody of its verses.

In the next poem, "Lycidas," a pastoral elegy written in 1637, and the last of his Horton poems, Milton is no longer the inheritor of the old age, but the prophet of a new. A college friend, Edward King, had been drowned in the Irish Sea, and Milton follows the poetic custom of his age by representing both his friend and himself in the guise of shepherds leading the pastoral life. Milton also uses all the symbolism of his predecessors, introducing fauns, satyrs, and sea nymphs; but again the Puritan is not content with heathen symbolism, and so introduces a new symbol of the Christian shepherd responsible for the souls of men, whom he likens to hungry sheep that look up and are not fed. The Puritans and Royalists at this time were drifting rapidly apart, and Milton uses his new symbolism to denounce the abuses that had crept into the Church. In any other poet this moral teaching would hinder the free use of the imagination; but Milton seems equal to the task of combining high moral purpose with the noblest poetry. In its exquisite finish and exhaustless imagery "Lycidas" surpasses most of the poetry of what is often called the pagan Renaissance.

Lycidas

Besides these well-known poems, Milton wrote in this early period a fragmentary masque called "Arcades"; several Latin poems which, like his English, are exquisitely finished; and his famous "Sonnets," which brought this Italian form of verse nearly to the point of perfection. In them he seldom wrote of love, the usual subject with his predecessors, but of patriotism, duty, music, and subjects of political interest suggested by the struggle into which England was drifting. Among these sonnets each reader must find his own favorites. Those best known and most frequently quoted are "On His Deceased Wife," "To the Nightingale," "On Reaching the Age of Twenty-three," "The Massacre in Piedmont," and the two "On His Blindness."

Milton's Prose. Of Milton's prose works there are many divergent opinions, ranging from Macaulay's unbounded praise to the condemnation of some of our modern critics. From a literary view point Milton's prose would be stronger if less violent, and a modern writer would hardly be excused for using his language or his methods; but we must remember the times and the methods of his opponents. In his fiery zeal against injustice the poet is suddenly dominated by the soldier's spirit. He first musters his facts in battalions, and charges upon the enemy to crush and overpower without mercy. For Milton hates injustice and, because it is an enemy of his people, he cannot and will not spare it. When the victory is won, he exults in a pæan of victory as soul-stirring as the Song of Deborah. He is the poet again, spite of himself, and his mind fills with magnificent images. Even with a subject so dull, so barren of the bare possibilities of poetry, as his "Animadversions upon the Remonstrants' Defense," he breaks out into an invocation, "Oh, Thou that sittest in light and glory unapproachable, parent of angels and men," which is like a chapter from the Apocalypse. In such passages Milton's prose is, as Taine suggests, "an outpouring of splendors," which suggests the noblest poetry.

On account of their controversial character these prose works are seldom read, and it is probable that Milton never thought of them as worthy of a place in literature. **Areopagitica** Of them all *Areopagitica* has perhaps the most permanent interest and is best worth reading. In Milton's time there was a law forbidding the publication of books until they were indorsed by the official censor. Needless to say, the censor, holding his office and salary by favor, was naturally more concerned with the divine right of kings and bishops than with the delights of literature, and many books were suppressed for no better reason than that they were displeasing to the authorities. Milton protested against this, as against every other form of tyranny, and his *Areopagitica* — so called from the Areopagus or Forum of Athens, the place of public appeal, and the Mars Hill of St. Paul's address — is the most famous plea in English for the freedom of the press.

Milton's Later Poetry. Undoubtedly the noblest of Milton's works, written when he was blind and suffering, are *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*. The first is the greatest, indeed the only generally acknowledged epic in our literature since *Beowulf*; the last is the most perfect specimen of a drama after the Greek method in our language.

Of the history of the great epic we have some interesting glimpses. In Cambridge there is preserved a notebook of Milton's containing a list of nearly one hundred subjects¹ for a great poem, selected while he was a boy at the university. King Arthur attracted him at first; but his choice finally settled upon the Fall of Man, and we have four separate outlines showing Milton's proposed treatment of the subject. These outlines indicate that he contemplated a mighty drama or miracle play; but whether because of Puritan antipathy to plays and players, or because of the wretched dramatic treatment of religious subjects which

¹ Of these sixty were taken from the Bible, thirty-three from English and five from Scotch history.

Milton had witnessed in Italy, he abandoned the idea of a play and settled on the form of an epic poem; most fortunately, it must be conceded, for Milton had not the knowledge of men necessary for a drama. As a study of character *Paradise Lost* would be a grievous failure. Adam, the central character, is something of a prig; while Satan looms up a magnificent figure, entirely different from the devil of the miracle plays and completely overshadowing the hero both in interest and in manliness. The other characters, the Almighty, the Son, Raphael, Michael, the angels and fallen spirits, are merely mouthpieces for Milton's declamations, without any personal or human interest. Regarded as a drama, therefore, *Paradise Lost* could never have been a success; but as poetry, with its sublime imagery, its harmonious verse, its titanic background of heaven, hell, and the illimitable void that lies between, it is unsurpassed in any literature.

In 1658 Milton in his darkness sat down to dictate the work which he had planned thirty years before. In order to understand the mighty sweep of the poem it is necessary to sum up the argument of the twelve books, as follows:

Book I opens with a statement of the subject, the Fall of Man, and a noble invocation for light and divine guidance. Then begins the account of Satan and the rebel angels, their banishment from heaven, and their plot to oppose the design of the Almighty by dragging down his children, our first parents, from their state of innocence. The book closes with a description of the land of fire and endless pain where the fallen spirits abide, and the erection of Pandemonium, the palace of Satan. Book II is a description of the council of evil spirits, of Satan's consent to undertake the temptation of Adam and Eve, and his journey to the gates of hell, which are guarded by Sin and Death. Book III transports us to heaven again. God, foreseeing the fall, sends Raphael to warn Adam and Eve, so that their disobedience shall be upon their own heads. Then the Son offers himself a sacrifice, to take away the sin of the coming disobedience of man. At the end of this book Satan appears in a different scene, meets Uriel, the Angel of the Sun, inquires from him the way to earth, and takes his journey thither disguised as an angel of light. Book IV shows us Paradise and the innocent state of man. An angel guard is set over

Eden, and Satan is arrested while tempting Eve in a dream, but is curiously allowed to go free again. Book V shows us Eve relating her dream to Adam, and then the morning prayer and the daily employment of our first parents. Raphael visits them, is entertained by a banquet (which Eve proposes in order to show him that all God's gifts are not kept in heaven), and tells them of the revolt of the fallen spirits. His story is continued in Book VI. In Book VII we read the story of the creation of the world as Raphael tells it to Adam and Eve. In Book VIII Adam tells Raphael the story of his own life and of his meeting with Eve. Book IX is the story of the temptation by Satan, following the account in Genesis. Book X records the divine judgment upon Adam and Eve; shows the construction by Sin and Death of a highway through chaos to the earth, and Satan's return to Pandemonium. Adam and Eve repent of their disobedience and Satan and his angels are turned into serpents. In Book XI the Almighty accepts Adam's repentance, but condemns him to be banished from Paradise, and the archangel Michael is sent to execute the sentence. At the end of the book, after Eve's feminine grief at the loss of Paradise, Michael begins a prophetic vision of the destiny of man. Book XII continues Michael's vision. Adam and Eve are comforted by hearing of the future redemption of their race. The poem ends as they wander forth out of Paradise and the door closes behind them.

It will be seen that this is a colossal epic, not of a man or a hero, but of the whole race of men; and that Milton's characters are such as no human hand could adequately portray. But the scenes, the splendors of heaven, the horrors of hell, the serene beauty of Paradise, the sun and planets suspended between celestial light and gross darkness, are pictured with an imagination that is almost superhuman. The abiding interest of the poem is in these colossal pictures, and in the lofty thought and the marvelous melody with which they are impressed on our minds. The poem is in blank verse, and not until Milton used it did we learn the infinite variety and harmony of which it is capable. He played with it, changing its melody and movement on every page, "as an organist out of a single theme develops an unending variety of harmony."

Lamartine has described *Paradise Lost* as the dream of a Puritan fallen asleep over his Bible, and this suggestive description leads us to the curious fact that it is the dream, not

the theology or the descriptions of Bible scenes, that chiefly interests us. Thus Milton describes the separation of earth and water, and there is little or nothing added to the simplicity and strength of *Genesis*; but the sunset which follows is Milton's own dream, and instantly we are transported to a land of beauty and poetry:

Now came still Evening on, and Twilight gray
Had in her sober livery all things clad;
Silence accompanied; for beast and bird,
They to their grassy couch, these to their nests
Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale.
She all night long her amorous descant sung:
Silence was pleased. Now glowed the firmament
With living sapphires; Hesperus, that led
The starry host, rode brightest, till the Moon,
Rising in clouded majesty, at length
Apparent queen, unveiled her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.

So also Milton's Almighty, considered purely as a literary character, is unfortunately tinged with the narrow and literal theology of the time. He is a being enormously egotistic, the despot rather than the servant of the universe, seated upon a throne with a chorus of angels about him eternally singing his praises and ministering to a kind of divine vanity. It is not necessary to search heaven for such a character; the type is too common upon earth. But in Satan Milton breaks away from crude mediæval conceptions; he follows the dream again, and gives us a character to admire and understand:

"Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,"
Said then the lost Archangel, "this the seat
That we must change for Heaven? — this mournful gloom
For that celestial light? Be it so, since He
Who now is sovran can dispose and bid
What shall be right: farthest from Him is best,
Whom reason hath equalled, force hath made supreme
Above his equals. Farewell, happy fields,
Where joy forever dwells! Hail, horrors! hail,
Infernal World! and thou, profoundest Hell,

Receive thy new possessor — one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; the Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure; and, in my choice,
To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.

In this magnificent heroism Milton has unconsciously immortalized the Puritan spirit, the same unconquerable spirit that set men to writing poems and allegories when in prison for the faith, and that sent them over the stormy sea in a cockleshell to found a free commonwealth in the wilds of America.

For a modern reader the understanding of *Paradise Lost* presupposes two things, — a knowledge of the first chapters of the Scriptures, and of the general principles of Calvinistic theology; but it is a pity to use the poem, as has so often been done, to teach a literal acceptance of one or the other. Of the theology of *Paradise Lost* the least said the better; but to the splendor of the Puritan dream and the glorious melody of its expression no words can do justice. Even a slight acquaintance will make the reader understand why it ranks with the *Divina Commedia* of Dante, and why it is generally accepted by critics as the greatest single poem in our literature.

Soon after the completion of *Paradise Lost*, Thomas Ellwood, a friend of Milton, asked one day after reading the manuscript, "But what hast thou to say of *Paradise Regained* Found?" It was in response to this suggestion that Milton wrote the second part of the great epic, known to us as *Paradise Regained*. The first tells how mankind, in the person of Adam, fell at the first temptation by Satan and became an outcast from Paradise and from divine grace; the

second shows how mankind, in the person of Christ, withstands the tempter and is established once more in the divine favor. Christ's temptation in the wilderness is the theme, and Milton follows the account in the fourth chapter of Matthew's gospel. Though *Paradise Regained* was Milton's favorite, and though it has many passages of noble thought and splendid imagery equal to the best of *Paradise Lost*, the poem as a whole falls below the level of the first, and is less interesting to read.

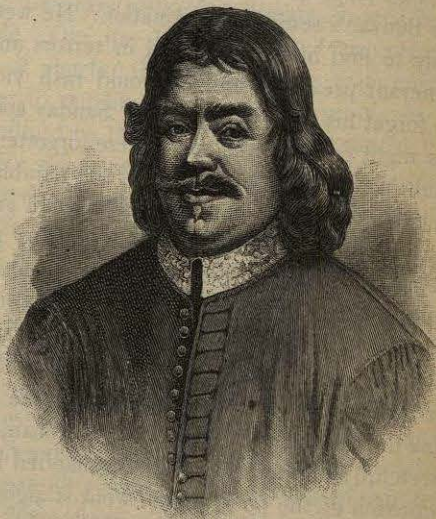
In *Samson Agonistes* Milton turns to a more vital and personal theme, and his genius transfigures the story of Samson, the mighty champion of Israel, now blind and scorned, working as a slave among the Philistines. The poet's aim was to present in English a pure tragedy, with all the passion and restraint which marked the old Greek dramas. That he succeeded where others failed is due to two causes: first, Milton himself suggests the hero of one of the Greek tragedies, — his sorrow and affliction give to his noble nature that touch of melancholy and calm dignity which is in perfect keeping with his subject. Second, Milton is telling his own story. Like Samson he had struggled mightily against the enemies of his race; he had taken a wife from the Philistines and had paid the penalty; he was blind, alone, scorned by his vain and thoughtless masters. To the essential action of the tragedy Milton could add, therefore, that touch of intense yet restrained personal feeling which carries more conviction than any argument. *Samson* is in many respects the most convincing of his works. Entirely apart from the interest of its subject and treatment, one may obtain from it a better idea of what great tragedy was among the Greeks than from any other work in our language.

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise or blame, — nothing but well and fair,
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

III. PROSE WRITERS OF THE PURITAN PERIOD

JOHN BUNYAN (1628–1688)

As there is but one poet great enough to express the Puritan spirit, so there is but one commanding prose writer, John Bunyan. Milton was the child of the Renaissance, inheritor of all its culture, and the most profoundly educated man of his age. Bunyan was a poor, uneducated tinker. From the Renaissance he inherited nothing; but from the Reformation he received an excess of that spiritual independence which had caused the Puritan struggle for liberty. These two men, representing the extremes of English life in the seventeenth century, wrote the two works that stand to-day for the mighty Puritan spirit. One gave us the only epic since *Beowulf*; the other gave us our only great allegory, which has been read more than any other book in our language save the Bible.



JOHN BUNYAN

Life of Bunyan.

Bunyan is an extraordinary figure; we must study him, as well as his books. Fortunately we have his life story in his own words, written with the same lovable modesty and sincerity that marked all his work. Reading that story now, in *Grace Abounding*, we see two great influences at work in his life. One, from within, was his own vivid imagination, which saw visions, allegories, parables, revelations, in every common event. The other, from without, was the spiritual ferment of the age, the

multiplication of strange sects, — Quakers, Free-Willers, Ranters, Anabaptists, Millenarians, — and the untempered zeal of all classes, like an engine without a balance wheel, when men were breaking away from authority and setting up their own religious standards. Bunyan's life is an epitome of that astonishing religious individualism which marked the close of the English Reformation.

He was born in the little village of Elstow, near Bedford, in 1628, the son of a poor tinker. For a little while the boy was sent to school, where he learned to read and write after a fashion; but he was soon busy in his father's shop, where, amid the glowing pots and the fire and smoke of his little forge, he saw vivid pictures of hell and the devils which haunted him all his life. When he was sixteen years old his father married the second time, whereupon Bunyan ran away and became a soldier in the Parliamentary army.

The religious ferment of the age made a tremendous impression on Bunyan's sensitive imagination. He went to church occasionally, only to find himself wrapped in terrors and torments by some fiery itinerant preacher; and he would rush violently away from church to forget his fears by joining in Sunday sports on the village green. As night came on the sports were forgotten, but the terrors returned, multiplied like the evil spirits of the parable. Visions of hell and the demons swarmed in his brain. He would groan aloud in his remorse, and even years afterwards he bemoans the sins of his early life. When we look for them fearfully, expecting some shocking crimes and misdemeanors, we find that they consisted of playing ball on Sunday and swearing. The latter sin, sad to say, was begun by listening to his father cursing some obstinate kettle which refused to be tinkered, and it was perfected in the Parliamentary army. One day his terrible swearing scared a woman, "a very loose and ungodly wretch," as he tells us, who reprimanded him for his profanity. The reproach of the poor woman went straight home, like the voice of a prophet. All his profanity left him; he hung down his head with shame. "I wished with all my heart," he says, "that I might be a little child again, that my father might learn me to speak without this wicked way of swearing." With characteristic vehemence Bunyan hurls himself upon a promise of Scripture, and instantly the reformation begins to work in his soul. He casts out the habit, root and branch, and finds to his astonishment that he can speak more freely and vigorously than before. Nothing is more characteristic of the man than this sudden seizing upon a text, which he had

doubtless heard many times before, and being suddenly raised up or cast down by its influence.

With Bunyan's marriage to a good woman the real reformation in his life began. While still in his teens he married a girl as poor as himself. "We came together," he says, "as poor as might be, having not so much household stuff as a dish or spoon between us both." The only dowry which the girl brought to her new home was two old, threadbare books, *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven*, and *The Practice of Piety*.¹ Bunyan read these books, which instantly gave fire to his imagination. He saw new visions and dreamed terrible new dreams of lost souls; his attendance at church grew exemplary; he began slowly and painfully to read the Bible for himself, but because of his own ignorance and the contradictory interpretations of Scripture which he heard on every side, he was tossed about like a feather by all the winds of doctrine.

The record of the next few years is like a nightmare, so terrible is Bunyan's spiritual struggle. One day he feels himself an outcast; the next the companion of angels; the third he tries experiments with the Almighty in order to put his salvation to the proof. As he goes along the road to Bedford he thinks he will work a miracle, like Gideon with his fleece. He will say to the little puddles of water in the horses' tracks, "Be ye dry"; and to all the dry tracks he will say, "Be ye puddles." As he is about to perform the miracle a thought occurs to him: "But go first under yonder hedge and pray that the Lord will make you able to perform a miracle." He goes promptly and prays. Then he is afraid of the test, and goes on his way more troubled than before.

After years of such struggle, chased about between heaven and hell, Bunyan at last emerges into a saner atmosphere, even as Pilgrim came out of the horrible Valley of the Shadow. Soon, led by his intense feelings, he becomes an open-air preacher, and crowds of laborers gather about him on the village green. They listen in silence to his words; they end in groans and tears; scores of them amend their sinful lives. For the Anglo-Saxon people are remarkable for this, that however deeply they are engaged in business or pleasure, they are still sensitive as barometers to any true spiritual influence, whether of priest or peasant; they recognize what Emerson calls the "accent

¹ The latter was by Lewis Bayly, bishop of Bangor. It is interesting to note that this book, whose very title is unfamiliar to us, was speedily translated into five different languages. It had an enormous sale, and ran through fifty editions soon after publication.