

shamble through life, many who stagger and fall through life; but the ideal of Milton was that of "The Happy Warrior."

"It is the generous spirit, who, when brought, Among the tasks of real life, hath wrought Upon the plan that pleased his boyish thought. Whose high endeavours are an inward light That makes the path before him always bright; Who, with a rational instinct to discern What knowledge can perform, is diligent to learn, Abides by his resolve, and stops not there, But makes his moral being his prime care."

The next mark of his youth was resolute purity of life, and on this I cannot do better than quote his own glorious words both in prose and verse. His "Comus" is mainly an immortal eulogy on the irresistible might and beauty of chastity. The Elder Brother has reminded the Younger that their Sister, who has lost her way in the wood, is not so defenceless as he supposes, since she has a hidden strength; not only the strength of Heaven, but—

"'Tis Chastity, my Brother, Chastity:  
She that has that, is clad in complete steel;  
And, like a quiver'd Nymph with arrows keen,  
May trace huge forests, and unharbour'd heaths,  
Infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds;

. . . . .

So dear to Heaven is saintly Chastity,  
That, when a soul is found sincerely so,  
A thousand liveried angels lackey her,  
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt."

This is only a fragment of that noble speech which I recommend to my youthful readers. And in his "Apology for Smectymnuus" he wrote this most glorious passage.

"And long it was not when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things. Even then I learned what a noble virtue chastity sure must be — only this my mind gave me that every free and gentle



spirit without that oath, ought to be born a knight, nor needed to expect the gilt spur, or the laying of a sword upon his shoulder to stir him up to secure and protect the weakness of any attempted chastity." And, he adds, that, besides his careful training in the Christian religion, "a certain reservedness of natural disposition and moral discipline learnt out of the noblest philosophy was enough to keep me in disdain of far less incontinencies. . . . But having had the doctrine of Holy Scripture unfolding those chaste and high mysteries with timeliest care infused, that the body is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body — I argued to myself that if unchastity in a woman be such a scandal and dishonour, then certainly in a man it must, though commonly not so thought, be much more deflouring and dishonourable."

The third mark of his dawning manhood was that high self-respect, on which I will quote from his "Reason of Church Govern-

ment," a passage that has always seemed to me one of the most precious in the English language. As is the case with the other passage to which I have referred, it should be read entire, but here, for want of space, I must abbreviate.

"But there is a yet more ingenuous and noble degree of honest shame, or call it if you will, an esteem, whereby men bear an inward reverence toward their own persons. And if the love of God, as a fire sent from heaven, to be ever kept alive upon the altar of our hearts, be the first principle of all godly and virtuous actions in men, this pious and just honouring of ourselves is the second, and may be thought as the radical moisture and fountain-head whence every laudable and worthy enterprise issues forth. Something I confess it is to be ashamed of evil-doing in the presence of any; and to reverence the opinion and countenance of a good man rather than a bad, fearing most in his sight to offend, goes so far as almost



to be virtuous; yet this is but still the fear of infamy, and many such, when they find themselves alone, saving their reputation, will compound with other scruples, and come to a close treaty with their dearer vices in secret. But he that holds himself in reverence and due esteem, both for the dignity of God's image upon him and for the price of his redemption, which he thinks is visibly marked upon his forehead, accounts himself both a fit person to do the noblest and godliest deeds, and much better worth than to deject and defile, with such a debasement and such a pollution as sin is, himself so highly ransomed and ennobled to a new friendship and filial relation with God. Nor can he fear so much the offence and reproach of others as he dreads and would blush at the reflexion of his own severe and modest eye upon himself, if it should see him doing or imagining that which is sinful, though in the deepest secrecy."

We pass on now to a fifth stage in Milton's life,—his travels. He set out for the Continent in the year 1638, when he had reached the age of twenty-nine. His father, never swerving in his confidence about his son's aims, cheerfully paid his expenses. Sir Henry Wotton gave him the kind and well-meant advice "*I pensieri stretti ed il viso sciolto*" (thoughts close and face frank'). But such advice was not for Milton, even in the home of the Inquisition. In that memorable journey he conversed with the great Grotius, was welcomed by the highest literary society of Florence, had an interview with "the starry Galileo," and was received with open arms by the Marquis Giovanni Battista Manso at Naples, in the palace that had already given a home to Marini and Tasso. The two Latin lines that Manso addressed to Milton, saying that he would have been an angel if he had not been an Anglican, show both that Milton still re-



tained his remarkable personal beauty, and also the indomitable courage, freedom, and truthfulness which made it impossible for him, for the sake of popularity, to conceal the fervor of his Protestant opinions. How well would it have been for England if all young Englishmen at the close of their travels — especially in days when Italy was unspeakably corrupt, and the proverb ran, "*Inglese italianato diavolo incarnato*" — could have said, as Milton did amid the calumnious lies of his enemies.

"I take God to witness, that in all those places where so many things are considered lawful, I lived sound and untouched from any profligacy and vice, having this thought perpetually with me, that though I might escape the eyes of men, I certainly could not escape the eye of God."

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So far, then, we have traced the career of Milton, and illustrated it by his writings up to the period of his full manhood. We shall now, with a similar method, read the "Great Books" of his life and character until the close.

## II.

The sixth stage of Milton's biography is the period of *Sturm und Drang*, — of storm and strife, of calamities and disappointments. It might almost be said that at thirty ended the ease and unclouded happiness of his life. His travels were suddenly cut short by the stern and threatening news that kept reaching him from England. He was personally saddened by the intelligence of the early death of his best friend, Charles Diodati. At the stern trumpet-call of Duty, he at once broke the even tenor and laid aside the settled purpose of his life.

"I considered it dishonourable," he wrote,



“to be taking my ease in foreign lands while my countrymen were striking a blow for freedom.” He did, indeed, as he tells us, hate the task of political conflict; but he did not shrink from it.

“I trust to make it manifest,” he wrote, “with what small willingness I endure to interrupt no less hopes than these, and leave a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful, confident thoughts, to embark on a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes.”<sup>1</sup> Never abandoning the high purpose of his youth, to write some immortal epic on one of the thirteen subjects from which he ultimately selected “Paradise Lost,” he laid the intention aside during the best years of his life, because he thought that God called him to a more urgently needful, if infinitely less delightful, task. We know not whether more to admire the steadfastness of his purpose, or the heroic self-sacrifice with

<sup>1</sup> “The Reason of Church Government.”

which for such long and stormy years it was laid aside, or the passion for liberty which made the efforts for the good of his country seem a supream aim.

The intensity of his patriotic feelings is illustrated by language that seems to flush with burning passion. The closing paragraphs of his “Reformation in England” furnish a specimen of this white heat of conviction, and they are further interesting from their prophecy of his own future intentions.

“Then,” he says, “amidst the hymns and hallelujahs of saints, some one may perhaps be heard offering at high strains in new and lofty measure to sing and celebrate Thy divine mercies and marvelous judgments in this land throughout all ages . . . whereby this great and warlike nation may press on hard . . . to be found the soberest, wisest, and most Christian people, when Thou the Eternal King shalt open the clouds to judge the several king-



doms of the world . . . where they undoubtedly that, by their labours, 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, unto 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 on overmeasure for ever.

But they contrariwise, that by impairing and diminution of the true faith, the distress and servitude of their country, aspire to high dignity, rule, and promotion here, after a shameful end in this life (which God grant them) shall be thrown down eternally into the darkest and deepest gulf of hell, where, under the despiteful control, the trample and spurn of all the other damned — that, in the anguish of their torture, shall have no other ease than to exer-

cise a raving and bestial tyranny over them, as their slaves and negroes, they shall remain in that plight for ever, the basest, the lowermost, the most dejected, most underfoot, and down-trodden vassals of perdition."

Language so tremendous is not of course to be taken quite *au pied de la lettre*, but it serves to illustrate the fiery earnestness generated by the awful struggles involved in the achievement of freedom by the English people.

Milton did not, indeed, at once plunge into the vortex of civil strife, either as a soldier or as a statesman; but, waiting till God opened the way for him, he became the champion of his country in those intellectual regions wherein all conflicts must be ultimately decided. For twenty years he fought against the tyranny of kings and prelates, pouring out pamphlet after pamphlet of powerful Latin and magnificently impassioned English, in defence of the Puritans and of the Parliament. Mean-



while he engaged in the task of trying to carry out his ideal of education. In his fine "Tractate," he says, "I call a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously, all offices, both public and private, of peace and war . . . and the true end of learning is to repair the ruin of our first parents, by regaining to know God aright."

From this period begins the story of Milton's calamities; and it is sad that among the heaviest we must count his marriage. It was the first wave in the awful flood of his misfortunes. Won by the face of Mary Powell, then seventeen, and clothing her with imaginary perfection, he took the girl from the loose freedom of her home in the house of a roistering and bankrupt Cavalier only to be fearfully disillusioned, and in all probability grossly outraged, before the honeymoon was over. He found her a mere Philistine; utterly incompatible; an image of phlegm and re-

pellency; while she, for her part, found in the quiet and studious home of the Puritan something between a tomb and a torment.

She left him, and returned to her home. She did not answer his letters, and dismissed his messengers with contempt. Stung to the very depths of his indignant being, he wrote those pamphlets on divorce which raised a swarm of hornets about his ears. Afterwards she flung herself at his feet, and implored his pardon.

We have a reminiscence of the scene, in "Paradise Lost," where Eve weeps before her ruined husband:—

"She ended weeping; and her lowly plight,  
Immovable, till peace obtain'd from fault  
Acknowledged and deplored, in Adam wrought  
Commiseration: soon his heart relented  
Toward her, his life so late, and sole delight,  
Now at his feet submissive in distress.

. . . . .  
As one disarmed his anger all he lost,  
And thus, with peaceful words, upraised her soon."



He not only took her back with magnanimous forgiveness, but, during the civil troubles, gave a free home to her insulting and impecunious family. His infant son died; but she bore him three daughters, who, by a fatal atavism, reproduced the characteristics of their mother's family. They were undutiful and unloving. They cheated and pilfered him in his blindness, and lit the fires of hell upon his hearth. He loved dearly his second wife, Katherine Cockwood "my late espoused saint," to whom he addressed an exquisite sonnet; but he lost her and her infant child within a year. His third wife, Elizabeth Minshull, was kind and loving; but the intolerable family feuds between her and her wretched stepdaughters at last necessitated an arrangement by which they lived elsewhere.

The next calamity from which he had to suffer was the overwhelming deadliness of hatred which, in doing his duty, he was called on to endure from all sides.

Salmasius and Morus exhausted the vocabulary of vituperation in describing him as a physical monster and a moral leper. They disseminated the grossest lies about his person and about his life; and it must be remembered that, at that time, Salmasius had the ear of Europe. One of his contemporaries was not ashamed to describe "Paradise Lost" as "a profane and lascivious poem." The rage against him vented itself in unparalleled execrations, in personal threats, in nameless insults. Let two instances suffice. Even the excellent Bishop Hacket, in his life of Lord Keeper Williams, has no better terms for Milton than these,

"What a venomous spirit is in that serpent Milton, that black-mouthed Zoilus that blows his viper's breath upon those immortal devotions [the Eikon Basilike]—a petty schoolboy scribbler . . . Get thee behind me, Milton! Thou savourest not the things that be of truth and loyalty, but of



pride, bitterness, and falsehood. But there will be a time, though such a dead dog in Abishai's phrase . . . this canker worm Milton escape for a while."

The famous scene in Sir Walter Scott's "Woodstock" is in accordance with facts. The old Cavalier, Sir Henry Lee, bursts into execration against his nephew, Markham Everard, for having induced him to praise the noble lines in "Comus" which begin,—

"O welcome, pure-eyed Faith, white-banded Hope,  
Thou hovering angel girt with golden wings,

before he was aware of the name of their author. When Master Kerneguy (who is Charles II. in the disguise of a page) tells him that the lines were by John Milton, the old knight bursts out in furious astonishment,—

"John Milton! What! John Milton the blasphemous and bloody-minded author of the 'Defensio Populi Anglicani!' the advocate of the infernal High Court of

Fiends; the Creature and parasite of that grand impostor, that loathsome hypocrite, that detestable monster, that prodigy of the Universe, that disgrace of mankind, that landscape of iniquity, that sink of sin, and that compendium of baseness, Oliver Cromwell! Markham Everard, I will never forgive thee—never, never! Thou hast made me speak words of praise respecting one whose offal should fatten the region kites."

The scene is closely true to history; and even in his sublime independence of human sympathy "like that with which mountains fascinate and rebuff us," there is no doubt that Milton keenly felt this madness of hatred, and this tornado of lies. Yet when he began to sing the archangelic strains of "Paradise Lost," it was

"With voice unchanged  
To hoarse or mute, tho' fall'n on evil days,  
On evil days tho' fall'n, and evil times,  
In darkness, and with danger compassed round  
And solitude."



To these miseries was added the trial that might well have seemed the most utterly irreparable to a proud and lonely scholar, the horror of blindness, with the helpless dependence that it involves. And this happened to him at the age of forty-three. How awfully he felt it may be seen in that most tragic outburst of wailing in *Samson Agonistes*, which begins:—

“But chief of all,  
O loss of sight, of thee I most complain:  
Blind among enemies! O worse than chains,  
Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age.”

Yet he tells us that he was ready to pay even this cost in the accomplishment of his duty:—

“My glory is to have lost them overplied  
In liberty’s defence my noble task,  
Whereof all Europe rings from side to side.”

And again, “It is not so wretched to be blind as not to be capable of enduring blindness. I would not have listened to the voice even of *Æsculapius* himself from

the shrine of *Epidaurus* in preference to the suggestions of the heavenly monitor within my breast. My resolution was unshaken, though the alternative was either the loss of my sight, or the desertion of my duty.”

His enemies represented his blindness as a Divine judgment; he replied that it was neither the object of his shame nor of his regret. “I am not depressed,” he said, “by any sense of the Divine displeasure—in the most momentous periods I have had full experience of the divine favor and protection; in the solace and the strength which have been infused into me I have been enabled to do the will of God. I oftener think of what He has bestowed than on what He has withheld. I am unwilling to exchange my consciousness of rectitude with that of any other person, and I feel the recollection a treasured store of tranquillity and delight.” And in the “*Paradise Lost*” he sings:—



"Yet not the more  
Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt  
Clear spring, or shady grove, or sunny hill,  
Smit with the love of sacred song."

We now come to the last epoch of his life. In 1660 came the culminating and least consolable misery which befel him,—the total ruin of his party; the utter conflagration of all his hopes; the scattering of dust and ashes over all his glory; the giving of his fruit unto the caterpillar, and his labor unto the grasshopper; the sight of the corpse of Freedom, as she lay done to death by vile stabs, and left there to be trampled under the hoofs of swine.

Even at this far-off day, we can hardly think of the epoch of the Stuart Restoration, its public disgraces, its private infamies, its mean and revolting tyranny, its lickspittle servility, its reversion from virtuous and noble manhood to the lewdness of the ape and the cunning ferocity of the tiger, without a blush of shame. It

was, as Macaulay says, a day "of servitude without loyalty, and sensuality without love; of dwarfish talents and gigantic vices; the paradise of cold hearts and narrow minds; the golden age of the coward, the bigot, and the slave."

How must such a man as Milton have felt, amid

"The barbarous dissonance  
Of Bacchus and his revellers!"

His ideals were in the dust; his enemies were triumphant; his friends were dead on the scaffold, or exiled, or imprisoned; his name was infamous; his principles were execrated; his property was seriously impaired by the vicissitudes of the times. The body of the great Protector—by an infamously mean revenge, which even Pagans had scorned—had been exhumed from its grave in Westminster Abbey, and hung on the gibbet; his head had been stuck on a spike upon the roof of Westminster Hall.



Vane had perished on the scaffold, and they who saw him ride thither had seemed to see Virtue herself seated by his side. The corpse of the heroic Blake, and of many other noble Puritans, had been flung out of the Abbey into a promiscuous pit in St. Margaret's churchyard.

The cause which Milton deemed to be the cause of Heaven had been shattered as if by red hot thunderbolts; his life was in peril, his name was outraged by men whose fathers he would have disdained to set among the dogs of his flock. And now a degraded England, in her most degraded epoch, was complacently slobbering the feet of a perjured rake, who, in such religion as he retained, amid his gross and endless adulteries, was a crypto-Romanist, and was complacently pocketing the subsidies of France.

Private losses and public miseries came on Milton in a flowing tide, with wave on wave. The Plague of 1665 turned the

neighborhood of his home into pest-fields. The Great Fire of 1666 destroyed the last house that he possessed. If you would know what he felt, look at his last portrait taken at the age of sixty-two. It is a face which, as it were, "deep scars of thunder had entrenched;" and yet it retained its severe composure, and shows English intrepidity mixed with unutterable sorrow. Life had indeed proved herself a cruel stepmother to that sweet child, to that beautiful and poetic boy, to that royally endowed youth. It was in the "Samson Agonistes" that he unbosomed all his feelings. It is almost an autobiography of his old age. He, like Samson, was:—

"Eyeless at Gaza, in a mill, with slaves."

He, like Samson, was forced to say,—

"Nor am I in the list of those that hope;  
 Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless;  
 This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard  
 No long petition; speedy death  
 The close of all my miseries, and the balm."



In the magnificent chorus "God of Our Fathers," he expresses the awful perplexity of our souls as we face the afflictions and apparently deadly ingratitude that God sends, not only to the common rout of men, who —

"Grow up and perish, like the summer fly,  
Heads without name, no more remembered,"

but even to those whom He had eminently adorned with gifts and grace; who, amid every complication of catastrophe, have to cry, "All thy waves and storms are gone over me!" Yet even under this immense accumulation of all the calamities which might have seemed most crushing, Milton could write for himself —

"Come, come; no time for lamentation now,  
Nor much more cause. Samson hath quit himself  
Like Samson, and heroically hath finished  
A life heroic;"

and he could close his statuesque and mon-

umental drama with such calm words of faith as these, —

"All is best, tho' we oft doubt  
What the unsearchable dispose  
Of highest wisdom brings about,  
And ever best found in the close."

And indeed for Milton, as for all good Christians, there were alleviations. Fame, if that were anything, still reached his ears, and Dryden, the Poet Laureate, in his later days acknowledged his supremacy. Friends sought him out, and high-souled youths like John Phillips and Cyriack Skinner, and Henry Lawrence and the Quaker Thomas Ellwood, loved him and looked up to him. In 1665 he published the "Paradise Lost," in 1670 the "Paradise Regained," and so consummated the glory, and completed the purpose of his life.

Above all — when everything that made life worth living seemed to be lost — Milton was still Milton. Like the Hebrew