

**ECLECTIC ENGLISH
CLASSICS. PARADISE
LOST (BOOKS I. AND II.)**

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Eclectic English Classics. Paradise Lost (Books I. And II.) by John Milton

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INTRODUCTION.

JOHN MILTON was born in Bread Street, London, on the 9th of December, 1608. He was the third child of John and Sarah Milton. His father, who had been disinherited for turning Protestant, had left the family home in Oxfordshire, and settled in London as a scrivener.¹ He was a musician, and a composer of such worth that his songs were published along with those of Byrd, Dowland, and others of first rank of that time. We find little about the poet's mother. Her grandson, Edward Phillips, says she was "a woman of incomparable virtue and goodness."

"John, our author," wrote Phillips in a sketch of his uncle's life, "who was destined to be the ornament and glory of his country, was sent, together with his brother, to Paul's School, whereof Dr. Gill, the elder, was then chief master. . . . He entered into the first rudiments of learning, and advanced therein with that admirable success, not more by the discipline of the school and good instructions of his masters . . . than by his own happy genius, prompt wit and apprehension, and insuperable industry; for he generally sat up half the night, as well in voluntary improvements of his own choice as the exact perfecting of his school exercises. . . . At the age of fifteen he was full ripe for

¹ Similar in functions to our notary public.

academic learning, and accordingly was sent to the University of Cambridge."

"My father," wrote Milton, "destined me while yet a little boy for the study of humane letters, which I seized with such eagerness, that from the twelfth year of my age I scarcely ever went from my lessons to bed before midnight; which, indeed, was the first cause of injury to my eyes, to whose natural weakness there were also added frequent headaches. At which, not retarding my impetuosity in learning, he caused me to be daily instructed, both at the grammar school and under other masters at home; and then, when I had acquired various tongues and also not some insignificant taste for the sweetness of philosophy, he sent me to Cambridge."

Milton became a member of Christ's College in the Easter term of 1625, and chose the tutorship of William Chappell, who was afterwards Bishop of Cork. In his second year occurred the rustication of which much has been said and little known. It is supposed that he was sent away because of a quarrel with his tutor, Chappell. In a Latin elegy to his friend Diodati in the spring of 1626 he wrote: "At present I do not care to revisit the reedy Cam, nor does regret for my forbidden rooms grieve me. Nor am I yet in the humor to bear the threats of a harsh master, and other things intolerable to my disposition. If this be exile . . . then I refuse neither the name nor the lot of a runaway, and gladly I enjoy my state of banishment." He returned, and took up work under a new tutor.

It was during this interval that Milton wrote his first poem in English, "On the Death of a Fair Infant," the daughter of his sister, Mrs. Phillips. After this he composed Latin elegies and letters, and in English the beautiful ode "On the Morning of

Christ's Nativity." "It is a gift," he said, in writing to Diodati, "I have presented to Christ's natal day. On that very morning at daybreak it was first conceived."

Afterwards he wrote the "Epitaph upon the Marchioness of Winchester," and the sonnet "On Attaining the Age of Twenty-three." With this latter poem, which Milton sent to a friend, went a remarkable letter, saying that "the very fear of the punishment denounced against him who hid the talent restrains him, so that he takes no thought of being late so it gave advantage to be more fit; for those that were latest lost nothing when the Master of the vineyard came to give every man his hire."

"Soon after he had taken his master's degree (1632) he thought fit to leave the university; not upon any disgust or discontent for want of preferment, as some ill-willers have reported; nor upon any cause whatsoever forced to fly, as his detractors maliciously feign." The rooms he occupied while a student are still pointed out. "His father, having got an estate to his content [at Horton, near Colebrook, in Berkshire], and left off all business, was retired from the cares and fatigues of the world." Thither Milton went, and for more than five years "spent there a complete holiday in turning over the Greek and Latin writers," varying his life by journeys to London for "something new in mathematics or music, in which sciences he delighted." Amid the quiet and peace of Horton and its woods and fields, he wrote poems which reflect such life,—the sonnet "To the Nightingale," "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," the "Arcades" and "Comus," and, perhaps a little later, the exquisite "Lycidas," the last of his English lyrics.

"After the said term of five years," continues his nephew Phillips, "his mother then dying, he was willing to add to his

acquired learning the observation of foreign customs, manners, and institutions, and thereupon took a resolution to travel, more especially designing for Italy; and accordingly, with his father's consent and assistance, he put himself into an equipage suitable to such a design. . . . At Paris . . . he went first to wait upon my Lord Scudamore, then ambassador in France from King Charles I. My lord received him with wonderful civility, and, understanding he had a desire to make a visit to the great Hugo Grotius, he sent several of his attendants to wait upon him, and to present him in his name to that renowned doctor and statesman, who was at that time ambassador from Christina, Queen of Sweden, to the French King. - Grotius took the visit kindly, and gave him entertainment suitable to his worth and the high commendations he had heard of him. After a few days, not intending to make the usual tour of France, he took his leave of my lord, who at his departure from Paris gave him letters to the English merchants residing in any part through which he was to travel, in which they were requested to show him all the kindness, and to do him all the good offices, that lay in their power.

“From Paris he hastened on his journey to Nice, where he took shipping, and in a short space arrived at Genoa, from whence he went to Leghorn, thence to Pisa, and so to Florence. In this city he met with many charming objects, which invited him to stay a longer time than he intended,—the pleasant situation of the place, the nobleness of the structures, the exact humanity and civility of the inhabitants, the more polite and refined sort of language there than elsewhere. During the time of his stay here, which was about two months, he visited all the private academies of the city, which are places established for the improvement of wit and learning. . . . Visiting these places, he was soon taken

notice of by the most learned and ingenious of the nobility and the grand wits of Florence, who caressed him with all the honors and civilities imaginable. . . .

"From Florence he took his journey to Sienna; from thence to Rome, where he was detained much about the same time he had been at Florence, as well by his desire of seeing all the rarities and antiquities of that most glorious and renowned city as by the conversation of Lucas Holstenius and other learned and ingenious men, who highly valued his acquaintance, and treated him with all possible respect.

"From Rome he traveled to Naples, where he was introduced by a certain hermit, who accompanied him in his journey from Rome thither, into the knowledge of Giovanni Baptista Manso, Marquis of Villa, a Neapolitan by birth, a person of high nobility, virtue, and honor," who "received him with extraordinary respect and civility, and went with him himself to give him a sight of all that was of note and remark in the city, particularly the viceroy's palace, and was often in person to visit him at his lodgings."

Milton "had entertained some thoughts of passing over into Sicily and Greece, but was diverted by the news he received from England, that affairs there were tending towards a civil war, thinking it a thing unworthy in him to be taking his pleasure in foreign parts while his countrymen at home were fighting for their liberty. . . . To Rome the second time he went, determining with himself not industriously to begin to fall into any discourse about religion, but, being asked, not to deny, or endeavor to conceal, his own sentiments. Two months he staid at Rome, and in all that time never flinched; . . . and so, returning through France by the same way he had passed it going to Italy, he, after a