

**ANNOTATED  
POEMS OF ENGLISH  
AUTHORS: LYCIDAS**

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Annotated poems of English authors: Lycidas by E. T. Stevens & D. Morris & John Milton

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**E. T. STEVENS & D. MORRIS & JOHN MILTON**

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OF  
ENGLISH AUTHORS

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BY THE

Rev. E. T. STEVENS, M.A.

AND THE

Rev. DAVID MORRIS, B.A.

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ENGLISH AUTHORS

EDITED BY THE

REV. E. T. STEVENS, M.A. OXON.

*Joint-Editor of 'The Grade Lesson-Books' 'The Useful Knowledge Series' &c.*

AND THE

REV. D. MORRIS, B.A. LOND.

*Author of 'The Class-Book History of England' &c.*

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LYCIDAS

BY JOHN MILTON

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1877

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## JOHN MILTON.

JOHN MILTON, a poet of the first rank, was born in London in 1608, and died in 1674. His ancestors derived their name from the estate of Milton, near Thame, in Oxfordshire, of which they were the proprietors. He was educated at St. Paul's School, London, and Christ's College, Cambridge, and was ultimately appointed Latin Secretary to Oliver Cromwell and the Parliament. The last twenty years of his life were spent in total blindness; and yet during this period he composed his most important poem, 'Paradise Lost.' He wrote also many other works, both in poetry and prose, the chief of which are 'Paradise Regained,' 'Comus' (a mask, or play, performed at Ludlow Castle, in 1634, before the Earl of Bridgewater), 'L'Allegro,' 'Il Penseroso,' 'Samson Agonistes' and 'Lycidas'; besides various Sonnets, Odes, and Hymns.

The *Lycidas* is a pastoral elegy composed by Milton in 1637, in memory of a deceased friend. It was published in 1645 with the following heading attached for the first time: 'In this Monody, the Author bewails a learned friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester, on the Irish Seas, 1637, and by occasion foretells the ruin of our corrupted clergy, then in their height.' The friend alluded to was Edward King, son of Sir John King, Kt., Secretary for Ireland. During a voyage to that country, the ship struck in calm weather

upon a rock, and all on board were drowned. King was a fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, and was only twenty-five years old at his death. He had been distinguished at College for his piety and learning, and seems to have been generally beloved. The year after his death there appeared a collection of Elegiac poems on his loss, and of these twenty-three were in Latin and Greek, and thirteen in English. The *Lycidas*, with the initials 'J. M. appended, was placed last in the collection.

## CRITICISMS ON LYCIDAS.

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### DR. JOHNSON'S CRITICISM OF LYCIDAS.

‘Those who admire the beauties of this great poet sometimes force their own judgment into false approbation of his little pieces, and prevail upon themselves to think that admirable which is only singular. All that short compositions can commonly attain is neatness and elegance. Milton never learned the art of doing little things with grace; he over-looked the milder excellence of suavity and softness; he was a *Lion* that had no skill in *dandling the kid*.

‘One of the poems on which much praise has been bestowed is *Lycidas*; of which the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers displeasing. What beauty there is we must therefore seek in the sentiments and images. It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion; for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions. Passion plucks no berries from the myrtle and ivy, nor calls upon Arethuse and Mincius, nor tells of rough *satyrs* and *fauns with cloven heel*. Where there is leisure for fiction, there is little grief.

‘In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that