

**COLLINS' SCHOOL AND COLLEGE
CLASSICS; MILTON'S PARADISE LOST
(BOOKS I. AND II.),
COMUS, LYCIDAS, IL PENSEROSO, AND
L'ALLEGRO, WITH INTRODUCTION,
NOTES, AND GLOSSARY**

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Collins' School and College Classics; Milton's Paradise Lost (Books I. And II.), Comus, Lycidas, Il Penseroso, and L'allegro, with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary by James G. David

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JAMES G. DAVID

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION,	5
PARADISE LOST,	9
COMUS, A MASK,	51
LYCIDAS,	76
IL PENSEROSO,	81
L'ALLEGRO,	85
NOTES,	89
GLOSSARY,	117

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INTRODUCTION.

JOHN MILTON was born in Bread Street, London, on the 9th of December 1608. The surname was derived from the town of Milton, in Oxfordshire, where the family at one time had flourished. The father of the poet, by profession a scrivener, was a man of high character and attainments, and eminently skilled in music: the well-known church tunes of Norwich and York were his compositions.

Milton received his early education at St. Paul's school. Of this period he himself says: 'So eager was I at my studies, that from my twelfth year I rarely left them till midnight.'* In fact, this application weakened both his eyesight and his health. His well-known version of the 136th Psalm was written during his last school year.

In February 1625 he proceeded to Christ's College, Cambridge, where he spent seven years. At the age of twenty-one he wrote the *Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, a production which showed that he was already 'smit with the love of sacred song,' as well as gifted with imagination of the highest order. Having taken the degree of M.A., he quitted the University, and at the same time resigned all idea of entering the Church, for which his parents had destined him. The five following years were spent at his father's house, Horton, Buckinghamshire. There, in tranquil leisure, he nourished his mind with the learning of the ancients, and cultivated the mathematics and music, studies he then delighted in. During this period he produced his inimitable *Comus*, as well as the *Lycidas*, *L'Allegro*, and *Il Penseroso*.

In the spring of 1638 he set out for a foreign tour. At Paris he was entertained by the celebrated Grotius, then ambassador from the Court of Sweden; and on reaching

* *Defensio Secunda*, vol. ii.

Florence, the centre of Italian art, he was welcomed by the Tuscan *litterati* to their academies, and honoured with not a few written encomiums. Among others, he visited the illustrious Galileo, 'then poor and old, and a prisoner of the Inquisition for thinking otherwise in astronomy than the Franciscans and Dominicans thought.*' After some time spent in Rome, Naples, and Venice, he returned to England in August 1639, and shortly after fixed his residence in London, undertaking the education of his two nephews and other pupils. But the disputes which led to the civil war were now setting the nation in a ferment; and before long Milton joined the struggle by writing his treatise *Of Reformation touching Church Discipline*, which was followed by other powerful pamphlets in defence of the Puritan clergy, and against Prelacy.

In his thirty-fifth year he married the daughter of Mr. Powell, a justice of the peace in Oxfordshire, and an inflexible royalist. As a result either of the latter circumstance or of a disparity of character, his wife, before very long, deserted him, and to this circumstance is to be ascribed the writing of his famous *Treatises on Divorce*. A reconciliation, however, was afterwards brought about. In 1644 appeared Milton's noblest prose work, the *Areopagitica*, a *Speech for the Liberty of Unlicens'd Printing*, which for style has been described as 'a perfect field of cloth of gold, stiff with gorgeous embroidery.' Upon the excitement which followed the execution of Charles I., Milton issued his *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, arguing that 'it is lawful, and hath been held so through all ages, for any who have the power to call to account a tyrant or wicked king.' Shortly after this service to the republican party he was appointed Latin or foreign secretary to Cromwell, an office for which he was admirably fitted, being acknowledged the first Latinist in England.

During the year 1650 he was engaged in his great controversy with Salmasius, a Professor at Leyden, reputed the most learned man in Europe. The latter had been employed to write a vindication of Charles I., and the Council of State requested Milton to make the reply. This he did in his *Defence of the People of England*, a masterpiece of political reasoning and eloquence. In it the author concentrated all his fierce controversial powers on his opponent, whom he perfectly 'massacred' in the eyes of all Europe. For this he received the congratulations of all the foreign ministers

* *Areopagitica*.

then in London. These and many other labours, unweariedly pursued for the public good, injured his already weak eyesight, which, at the age of forty-seven, totally failed him,—a calamity commemorated in his *Sonnet on his Blindness*.

The restoration of Charles II. forced him for a time into seclusion, but he was soon after comprehended in the Act of Indemnity. For several years he had been occupied, as more public duties would permit, on what had been the cherished project of his life, the composing of a great poem; and now, withdrawn from active life into 'a calm and pleasing solitariness,' he set himself to its full accomplishment. *Paradise Lost* was commenced probably as early as 1658, and published in 1667. Four years later appeared *Paradise Regained*, its beautiful but inferior sequel; and about the same time, *Samson Agonistes*, a drama on the model of the ancient Greek tragedy. Thus did his genius and fortitude triumph over outward adversity, and although now

' Fall'n on evil days and evil tongues,
In darkness and with dangers compass'd round,'

he still 'bated no jot of heart or hope,' but 'fed himself with cheerful and confident thoughts' to the end.

He died, much weakened by the gout, on the 10th of November 1674, at his house near Bunhillfields, and was buried with much honour in the chancel of St. Giles' Church, Cripplegate.

Milton, when young, was remarkably handsome, with an open, fresh countenance, and light brown hair worn down over his shoulders. 'His deportment,' says a biographer,* 'was affable, his gait erect and manly, bespeaking courage and undauntedness.' A stern love of virtue, a passionate attachment to liberty, and profound piety, marked the character of 'this sublime and austere genius.'

Of Milton's imagination and learning, the *Paradise Lost* is the colossal monument. Its merits were recognised from the first by a discerning few, but were first unfolded adequately by Addison in the *Spectator*. Its chief excellence lies in a *sustained sublimity of thought*. This partly arises from the nature of the theme, and partly from the character of the author's genius. The *subject* is the finest that could be chosen. It undertakes to 'justify the ways of God;' to trace the fate of man; to describe the councils of hell and the splendours of heaven. And such themes were congenial to Milton's imagination, which delighted to portray what was vast and unearthly. His peculiar power is exhibited,

* Aubrey.

for example, in his pictures of the fallen angels. These are essentially human in idea, but this conception of them is distended and exaggerated until it reaches the dimensions of the sublime. And when, owing to the strange mixture of material and spiritual ideas which marks the story, the outlines are vague or even inconsistent, the imagination is only the more strongly appealed to, by an addition of the mysterious to the picturesque.

The poem is remarkable also for the number and variety of its *illustrative ideas*. Every page abounds with metaphors drawn from nature or the arts, and allusions to history or mythology, which keep the intellect and fancy perpetually on the alert. In *Paradise Lost*, it has been said not inaptly, we read a book of universal knowledge. This is a result of the author's vast and varied *learning*. Milton was deeply read in all literature, and familiar with all kinds of knowledge. He had accumulated in a life of study the intellectual spoils of all past ages, and from this treasury he is ever furnishing forth 'things new and old,' but all transmuted by his own genius into beautiful and unexpected shapes.

The character of Milton's *similes* constitutes a special beauty. They are always bold, and often astonishing. A comparison, simple at first, is frequently, by a train of associated ideas, prolonged and expanded till it fills, as it were, the mind of the reader.

Much of his superior majesty of thought and expression Milton borrows from the *Bible*. His muse affects theocracy. He is pre-eminently the Christian poet, and his theology is more than tinged with Puritanism. Thus is imparted to his epic a solemnity as of a sacred poem.

The *language*, though not simple, is perspicuous. By a free introduction of classicisms, both verbal and idiomatic, Milton has enriched his poetic diction and made it sonorous. His numbers, too, have the prime charm of expressiveness. 'Their music,' says Cowper, 'is like that of a fine organ—has the fullest and deepest tones of majesty with all the softness and elegance of the Dorian flute!' In short, for epic grandeur and poetic harmony combined, the *Paradise Lost* must be regarded as 'the first in design, and the second in performance, among the productions of the human mind,' and it has given its author a place by the side of Homer, Virgil, and Dante.

MILTON'S POETICAL WORKS.

PARADISE LOST.

BOOK I.

THE ARGUMENT.

THIS First Book proposes, first in brief, the whole subject, man's disobedience, and the loss thereupon of Paradise, wherein he was placed. Then touches the prime cause of his fall, the Serpent, or rather Satan in the Serpent; who, revolting from God, and drawing to his side many legions of angels, was, by the command of God, driven out of Heaven, with all his crew, into the great deep. Which action passed over, the Poem hastens into the midst of things, presenting Satan with his angels now fallen into hell, described here, not in the centre, for Heaven and Earth may be supposed as yet not made, certainly not yet accursed, but in a place of utter darkness, fittest called Chaos: Here Satan, with his angels, lying on the burning lake, thunderstruck and astonished, after a certain space recovers, as from confusion, calls up him who next in order and dignity lay by him; they confer of their miserable fall. Satan awakens all his legions, who lay till then in the same manner confounded; they rise; their numbers, array of battle, their chief leaders named according to the idols known afterwards in Canaan and the countries adjoining. To these Satan directs his speech, comforts them with hope yet of regaining Heaven, but tells them lastly of a new world and new kind of creature to be created, according to an ancient prophecy or report in Heaven; for, that angels were long before this visible creation, was the opinion of many ancient fathers. To find out the truth of this prophecy, and what to determine thereon, he refers to a full council. What his associates thence attempt. Pandemonium, the palace of Satan, rises, suddenly built out of the deep: the infernal peers there sit in council.

OF man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe,