

and *Il Penseroso* are companion pictures, the two loveliest, most elaborate, and most perfect lyrics in our language, and like most of his youthful poems, the very essence of poetic fancy both in imagery and expression. In them he represents two types of temperament, the cheerful and the pensive. "The exquisite fitness with which circumstances are chosen or invented in true poetic affinity with the two words, secures them, while the English language lasts, against the possibility of being forgotten." In *Il Penseroso*—to him even now a congenial theme—we see the thoughtful sadness that deepened into the severity of the author of *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*; while in *Lycidas*, written still later, we find the first indications of that bold freedom of thought and expression which afterwards degenerated into the bitterness and coarseness of the controversialist. The exact date of the composition of *Il Penseroso* and *L'Allegro* is unknown, but, judging from the internal evidence, they were written shortly after his departure from Cambridge. *The Arcades* formed part of a masque¹ presented before the Countess Dowager of Derby, at her country seat, Harefield. At this time masques were a fashionable and often very costly form of entertainment among the aristocracy and at the English court. We have an account of one in which Charles and his Queen took part, with fourteen of the chief nobles and the sons of noblemen. For it the machinery was constructed by Inigo Jones, the celebrated architect, and the music composed by Henry Lawes, whose "tuneful and well-measured song" Milton has immortalized in a sonnet. In honour of John, Earl of Bridgewater, stepson of the Countess Dowager of Derby, the heroine of *Arcades*, Milton wrote in 1634 the *Masque of Comus*, a composition full of the exuberant fancy and "divine enchanting ravishment" that characterized the early works of this latest son of the beauty-loving Renaissance. According to Hallam, "this poem was sufficient to convince any one of taste and feeling that a great poet had arisen in England, and one partly formed in a different school from his contemporaries. Many of them had produced highly beautiful and imaginative passages, but none had evinced so classical a judgment, none had aspired to so regular a

¹ For an account of the Masque, consult Spalding's or Brooke's English Literature. Cf. also *P. L.*, B. I., l. 710, and note.