

themselves, their sincerity of conviction. These characteristics would persist after the particular conviction that they held had fallen off them or they had outgrown it, and would stimulate them to more broadly human efforts than they then put forth. Out of this deep rich soil should grow a strong and stately tree, the British Empire, with branches spreading round the earth and the influence of its shade and shelter in every land.

Again was Milton a type of his age. As the age fought tyranny, so did he, and none more fiercely or with more self-sacrifice. These are the traits whose influence has persisted in the nation; the violence we have forgotten and buried. Likewise the fame of Milton rests not on his political ramping and raving, but on the higher and nobler thoughts of his saner moments.

An Unconquerable Soul

Some men are greatest when they fall, when all their hopes are crushed, all their efforts wasted. Milton hiding from the vengeance of the now victorious Royalists seems at last to realize that the cause of Puritanism is ruined. He resigns himself. He has done his best. He is blind now. What more can he do? Not many men would have done as he did. He remembers his life-long ambition is still unfulfilled, his great poem is still unwritten. He turns to that. He has thought over many subjects—King Arthur, Harold, Macbeth. None of them will do. None suits his temper like the one he at last settles upon—Paradise Lost. It is the story of a lost cause, of superhuman conflict between good and evil, such as had been waged in England for twenty years, evil at last triumphing. It embodies the Puritan tendency to personify good and evil. These were real war. The war in heaven ending in the banishment of Satan must represent the civil war in England and the punishment of Charles. Satan is still able to plot against Heaven, and so the Royalist party is still unbroken. By craft Satan ruins the new Earth and the happiness of Man in Eden. By craft again, not by force, observe, Charles II invades the Commonwealth and becomes its master. But when this sad story is told with all the earnestness and grandeur and sadness of a disappointed champion, a hope is still held out that sometime the ground lost will be recovered and the tyrant dethroned. This is the story of Paradise Regained.

Meditation

Let me bring this paper to a close by a reference to Milton's last poem, which, if you have not read, at least you know its story. It is the story of Samson, that half-barbarian, half-adventurer,

who found himself by the turn of events in the position of a sort of champion of Israel in their troubles with the Philistines; and who, by the fortunes of war and treachery fell into the hands of his enemies and experienced their revenge. To Milton, looking back over his own career, the story of Samson appealed strongly as that of a man who had labored and failed and suffered. He read into the character of Samson all his own loftiness of conception and purpose. The smallness of the Puritan party in the beginning, and its successful opposition to the Royalist party is figured in Milton's mind by the Youthful Samson slaying his enemies in heaps with an insignificant weapon. His final capture is an emblem of the overthrow of the Puritan cause, Milton's cause, for he identified himself personally with the movement. Samson's enemies have blinded him; his last days are in darkness. So also, Milton, blind, old and sad at heart, thinks how he lost his sight in conflict with his enemies. And now, in the poem, even as Samson rehearses his sorrows, he can hear the revellings of the Philistines in their temple near by. Likewise, Milton, as he writes, can almost hear the irreverent feasting and dancing of the now victorious Stuarts. Samson has his revenge. Milton, too, looks forward for the day of retribution and recompense. That day came, though Milton did not live to see it.

The poem is the musings of a man whose great life work has been done, and who has at the last a few hours to review his life and think on himself. To the end he is unconquerable. He has no vain regrets, and full of confidence in the rectitude of the cause for which he had given his life, he passes into the shadows.

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