

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 perfection. It possesses an elevation, a purity, a sort of severity of sentiment which no one in that age could have given but Milton." It has been supposed, with a good deal of plausibility, that *Comus* has a purpose aside from the ostensible one—that it is intended to allegorize the Romanizing tendencies of the Prelacy. One can readily understand how Milton, whose life purpose was Poetry, and whom Duty had not yet called forth from "the quiet air of delightful studies" to the defence of Liberty, should have chosen at this period a poetical allegory for the expression of his feelings. But in the author of *Comus* and *Arcades*, of the lines *On Shakespeare* and the *Song on May Morning*, we see Milton as yet removed in sympathy from the stern Puritans, to whom plays and play actors were an abomination, and the games round the May-pole an unholy thing. *Comus*, in particular, is a poetical protest against the bigotry of the extremists, of whom Prynne's *Histriomastix*¹ was the natural outcome. In *Lycidas*, however, we have the first unmistakable indication that Milton, the poet, was alive to the signs of the time:²

Begins to
show an
interest in
Public
affairs.
1637

"The hungry sheep³ look up, and are not fed,
But, swollen with wind and the rank mist⁴ they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread;
Besides what the grim wolf⁵ with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing said.
But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more."—*Ll.* 125-131.

¹ "The *Histriomastix* of PRYNNE, a lawyer distinguished for his constitutional knowledge, but the most obstinate and narrow-minded of men, marked the deepening of Puritan bigotry under the fostering warmth of Laud's persecution. . . . This attack on the stage was as offensive to the more cultured minds among the Puritan Party as to the Court itself."—GREEN.

² "Hampden's resistance had roused England to a sense of the danger to her freedom, and forced into light the real character of the Royal claims. How stern and bitter the temper even of the noblest Puritans had become at last, we see in the poem which Milton produced at this time—his elegy of *Lycidas*."—GREEN.

³ The English People.

⁴ *Wind* and *rank mist* refer to the "windy" and unwholesome misleading doctrines of the Clergy.

⁵ (a) By some, *grim wolf* is taken to mean Laud, in which case *devours apace* refers to the religious persecutions of the time; *nothing said*, to the