

and wonder of his readers. Here in his walks through the lanes and "meadows trim with daisies pied," reclining in the "chequered shade" beneath some "hedgerow elm," or listening to the warbling of the nightingale "on the bloomy spray," he meditated those works which are full of the sights and sounds of external nature. *L'Allegro*

Early  
Poems.

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. *Il Penseroso*—to him even now a congenial theme—displays 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 masque<sup>1</sup> 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, step-

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son 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 anyone of taste and feeling that a great poet had arisen in England, and one partly formed

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the MASQUE, consult Spalding's or Broeke's English Literature. Cf. also *P. L.*, B. I., l. 710, and note.