

L'ebbe fedele, intrepido, costante,
Di pensieri leggiadro, accorto, e buono ;
Quando rugge il gran mondo, e scocca il tuono,
S'arma di se, e d'intero diamante :
Tanto del forse e d'invidia sicuro,
Di timori e speranza al popol use,
Quanto d'ingegno e d'alto valor vago,
E di cetra sonora, e delle muse.
Sol troverete in tal parte men duro
Ove Amor mise l'insanabile ago.

The following is a translation by the poet Cowper, which is probably more free than easy :—

Enamoured, artless, young, on foreign ground,
Uncertain whither from myself to fly,
To thee, dear lady, with an humble sigh,
Let me devote my heart, which I have found
By certain proofs, not few, intrepid, sound,
Good and addicted to conceptions high :
When tempests shake the world, and fire the sky,
It rests in adamant self-wrap around ;
As safe from envy, and from outrage rude,
From hopes and fears that vulgar minds abuse,
As fond of genius and fixt fortitude,
Of the resounding lyre and every muse.
Weak you will find it in one only part,
Now pierced by Love's immediate dart.

The other sonnets, addressed to the "Fair lady, whose harmonious name the Rhine, through all his grassy vale, delights to hear," are merely amatory verses, and useless for our present consideration. Milton came back after sixteen months' absence, and found his native land embroiled in civil strife. The sympathies of the young poet were with the people, but he did not consider it his duty to rush to arms. He stayed quietly in his house at Aldersgate, giving private tuition to his nephews and a few other lads. On the 12th November, 1642, the citizens of London were in a state of great alarm, owing to the fact that King Charles, having reached Brentford, after the battle of Edgehill, threatened the city itself. All who could bear arms turned out to defend the place, but Milton did not leave his house or pursuits, and in the midst of the greatest excitement prevalent whilst the Londoners marched away to Turnham Green to stop the King's approach, the student sat still in his chair, and the poet contented himself with composing the following sonnet, concerning which Main has this interesting note :

"In the Milton MS. folio preserved in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge, an amanuensis has headed the sonnet, *On his dore when ye Citty expected an Assault*, but that title is scored through, and the present one substituted in Milton's own hand."

WHEN THE ASSAULT WAS INTENDED TO THE CITY.

Captain, or colonel, or knight in arms,
Whose chance on these defenceless doors may seize,
If deed of honour did thee ever please,
Guard them, and him within protect from harms.
He can requite thee, for he knows the charms
That call fame on such gentle acts as these,
And he can spread thy name o'er land and seas,
Whatever clime the sun's bright circle warms.
Lift not thy spear against the Muses' bower ;
The great Ænathian conqueror bid spare
The house of Pindarus, when temple and tower
Went to the ground : and the repeated air
Of sad Electra's poet had the power
To save the Athenian walls from ruin bare.

By what seems to be a most extraordinary and unhappy perversion of judgment Professor David Masson declares the above sonnet to have been the result of "a mood of jest or semi-jest," and has some hypothetical nonsense to say about it, which Mr. Lowell has sensibly exploded. No one reading it can possibly see anything but a very serious and touching request made by a man who believed his house to be as worthy of protection as that of Pindar or the walls of Athens. Milton had a high opinion of his destiny, and in the midst of such serious surroundings was not likely to content himself with a very pitiable jest. He wetted his pen with satire but never disgraced it with foolishness. How Professor Masson can possibly see even the ghost or outline of a jest in this fine sonnet is a mystery of cerebral construction. Had Milton after writing it gone away with his fellow-citizens to meet the king and Rupert, there might have been some excuse for finding a sonnet nailed to the door of a deserted house ; but Milton most assuredly meant what he wrote and stayed at home, careless, probably, whether "captain, or colonel, or knight in arms" came to his door or not. Weigh every line and sift every sentence as we will, the jest, or even "semi-jest," is not at all apparent. Yet Professor Masson is a Scotchman, and most unlikely to discover a jest under the most favourable circumstances, according to popular theory. Can it be that he is gifted in the opposite direction ? At any rate, his opinion is curiously singular.

It is worthy of notice, as an error on the part of Milton, who was so good a classical scholar, that Alexander, at the sacking of Thebes, in B.C. 335, not only spared the house of Pindar and the citadel, but also the temples and holy places. Yet Milton states "temple and tower went to the ground." "Electra's poet" was, of course, Euripides, and the incident referred to occurred when Lysander captured Athens in B.C. 404. It was proposed to demolish the city and leave in its place a desert. During a discussion of this proposal at a council of war, a Phocian sang some verses from the "Electra," which so moved the audience that they resolved to spare the city for the sake of its having produced so many great men.

In the middle of 1643, Milton went off suddenly on a secret journey, and stayed away from his home for about a month. When he returned he brought with him a lady aged seventeen, then Mrs. John Milton, and "some few of her nearest relations." Mary Powell was of a Royalist family, and how Milton managed to overcome the loyal scruples of the family cannot be said, unless certain mort-

gages held by him and his father had some influence with the Powells. The poet (aged 35) and his bride (aged 17) lived together—let us hope, happily—for about a month ! Then Mrs. Milton, on the excuse of a visit and the promise of return, went back to her parental roof and refused to return to her husband after several invitations and commands. Milton felt wronged and aggrieved. His action was very characteristic. He set about writing a pamphlet entitled "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce Restored, to the good of both Sexes." It created a great stir, and several pamphlets were issued by Milton in answer to controversial replies. The last appeared in 1645, and was called "Tetrachordon." Milton seems to have been ready to remarry, in spite of law and opinion. Among his friends at this period were two ladies, the Lady Margaret Ley and a daughter of a Doctor Davis. The former was the wife of Captain Hobson, who lived in the Isle of Wight, and Phillips records her as one who "being a Woman of great Wit and Ingenuity, had a particular Honour for him (Milton) and took much delight in his company." Lady Margaret was the daughter of Sir James Ley, afterwards the first Earl of Marlborough, a very distinguished lawyer and statesman, who died four days after Charles I. dissolved his third parliament and proclaimed his own autocracy. Milton addressed a sonnet to this lady, which reads as follows :

TO THE LADY MARGARET LEY.

Daughter to that good Earl, once President
Of England's Council, and her Treasury,
Who lived in both, unstain'd with gold or fee,
And left them both, more in himself content,
Till sad the breaking of that Parliament
Broke him, as that dishonest victory
At Chæroneia, fatal to liberty,
Killed with report that old man eloquent.
Though later born than to have known the days
Wherein your father flourish'd, yet by you,
Madam, methinks I see him living yet ;
So well your words his noble virtues praise,
That all both judge you to relate them true,
And to possess them, honour'd Margaret.

"That old man eloquent" was the Athenian orator Isocrates who, at the age of ninety-eight, is said to have committed suicide by a voluntary starvation, lasting four days after he learned of the victory gained by Philip of Macedon over his countrymen at Chæroneia in the year B.C. 338. It has been suggested that Milton regarded the death of Isocrates as occurring suddenly after the report of Philip's victory, and that he confused it with the death of Eli, who fell from his seat and expired immediately on hearing of the defeat of his sons ; but this supposition is erroneous. Milton knew his Bible too well to mix it up with Greek history, and the wording of the sonnet does not warrant the construction. It is singular to notice in passing that Eli, at his death, was aged (according to the Massoretic text) ninety-eight years—the age of Isocrates at his death. The analogy, as Milton put it down, is strikingly complete and in no need of any critical emendation. The good Earl died four days after the dissolution of the Parliament by Charles and Isocrates is said to have died four days after the battle of Chæroneia.

The other lady who enjoyed Milton's friendship was a daughter of a Dr. Davis ; but nothing more of her is known. It has been supposed that she was the "virtuous young lady" to whom the poet wrote his fourth English sonnet. Phillips described her as witty and handsome, and it has been said that Milton pressed his attentions upon her to the point of marriage after his wife had left him. In his "Tetrachordon" occurs a singular and significant passage, supposed to have some bearing on this matter, as Mr. Mark Pattison points out : "If the law make not a timely provision, let the law, as reason is, bear the censure of the consequences." However this may be, the original Mrs. Milton put an end to her husband's erratic views by returning home penitent in 1645. Referring to "Tetrachordon," the poet wrote two sonnets on the stir occasioned by that work ; but they will be treated as sonnets on criticism. In 1646 Milton wrote a sonnet "On the Religious Memory of Mrs. Catharine Thomson," which Mr. Mark Pattison not unjustly considers the lowest point touched by him in poetry. It is elegiac and devotional, but the subject is unsuitable to the form of verse. This, with the two sonnets on the Divorce tracts and that addressed "To Mr. H. Lawes on the Publishing His Aïrs," were included in the "Poems of Mr. John Milton, both English and Latin, Composed at Several Times," a very rare volume originally published by Humphrey Moseley, at the sign of the Prince's Arms, in St. Paul's Churchyard. In this collection was included one of the two or three English specimens of the "Sonetto Candato," or tailed sonnet, which we give as an illustration of a sonnet form used in Italy chiefly for burlesque purposes. It was favoured by Berni. The sonnet here given shows the scorn in which Milton held "the new forcers of conscience under the Long Parliament."

Because you have thrown off your prelate lord,
And with stiff vows renounced his liturgy,
To seize the widow'd whore Plurality
From them whose sin ye envied, not abhor'd,
Dare ye for this adjure the civil sword
To force our consciences that Christ set free,
And ride us with a classic hierarchy,
Taught us by mere A. S. and Rotherford ?
Men whose life, learning, faith, and pure intent,
Would have been held in high esteem by Paul,
Must now be named and printed heretics,
By shallow Edwards, and Scotch what d'ye call ;
But we do hope to find out all your tricks,
Your plots and packings, worse than those of Trent,
That so the Parliament
May, with their wholesome and preventive shears,
Clip your phylacteries, though baulk your ears,
And succour our just fears
When they shall read this clearly in your charge,
New Presbyter is but Old Priest writ large.

In 1648, while Cromwell was crushing the Scottish forces at Preston after long and hard fighting, Fairfax was occupied in quelling the English Royalists who had joined in the Second Civil War. The siege and capture of Colchester by Fairfax was the occasion of great joy to the Parliamentarians, and Milton wrote his sonnet usually entitled "To the Lord General Fairfax," but which was originally headed, "On ye Lord General Fairfax at ye Siege of Colchester." In 1649 Milton became Latin Secretary to the Council of State. Three years later he went quite blind, and wrote his sonnets to Cromwell and the younger Vane. In 1655 the massacre of the Vaudois Protestants by the Italian troops occurred, because they would have neither their country nor their religion. The outrage brought forth indignant letters from Cromwell and his Council to the foreign powers, and these letters were written by Milton. But what is more important to our present consideration is that the poet gave vent to his personal feelings in a sonnet "On the late Massacre of Piedmont" :

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold ;
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
Forget not : in thy book record their groans
Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that roll'd
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven. Their martyr'd blood and ashes sow
O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway
The triple tyrant ; that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who, having learn'd thy way
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

Of this sonnet Henry Reed wrote : "The spirit of Milton was so stirred by the sufferings of the Waldenses that he felt the need of more than even high-toned mandates to earthly monarchs, and therefore there went up from the depths of his poet's heart, in one of his mighty sonnets, the fervid imprecation, 'Avenge, O Lord,'—a note so fearful and so loud that we can almost fancy it echoing over the valleys in which the bones of the martyrs lay covered with snow." Walter Savage Landor terms it "a magnificent psalm" and "the noblest of sonnets." Macaulay calls it "a collect in verse." Mr. Palgrave says it is "the most mighty sonnet in any language known to him."

About this time Milton wrote his famous sonnet "On his blindness" :

When I consider how my life is spent
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide,
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide ;
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied ?"
I fondly ask ; but Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work, or his own gifts ; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best ; his state
Is kingly ; thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest,
They also serve who only stand and wait."

Mr. Main points out that nearly all the critics have taken the "one talent" referred to to be Milton's eyesight, whereas it really is his gift of poetry. His blindness was tolerable as a physical infirmity ; but as a hindrance to the accomplishment of his life's work it made the poet murmur in his heart. This sonnet has a connection with the one written when he arrived at the age of twenty-three, in which he said :—

All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great Task-master's eye.

He then had the patience to await the "inward ripeness" that was necessary to perfect the work of his life and forty-seven years afterwards he still finds his soul more bent to serve his Maker with his high gift and patience counsels him wisely when the sense of his affliction causes him to murmur. His work has yet to be done and must bear the mild yoke. Milton became resigned ; so much so that he wrote about the same time the following sonnet to Mr. Lawrence, whom Professor Masson has identified as one of his old pupils. It is light and cheerful, with a flavour of Horace about it that is truly refreshing. It has a touch of *otium cum dignitate*, quite compatible with Milton's temperament.

Lawrence, of virtuous father virtuous son,
Now that the fields are dank, and ways are mire,
Where shall we sometimes meet, and by the fire
Help waste a sullen day, what may be won
From the hard season gaining ? Time will run
On smoother, till Favonius reinspire
The frozen earth, and clothe in fresh attire
The lily and the rose, that neither sow'd nor spun,
What neat repast shall feast us, light and choice
Of Attic taste, with wine, whence we may rise
To hear the lute well-touch'd, or artful voice
Warble immortal notes and Tuscan air ?
He who of those delights can judge, and spare
To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

It is the same idea that runs through the first sonnet addressed to Cyriac Skinner, wherein the poet-philosopher deems it not wise to overburden life with too much work, but thinks it right to lighten the day with innocent recreation when the feelings so incline. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," is a proverb truer in fact than in rhyme, and Milton knew this and occasionally unbent his great mind from the work to which he had dedicated himself, and in spite of his blindness made merry with his friends. Cyriac Skinner was another of his old pupils and the "grandsire" alluded to was the celebrated lawyer Sir Edward Coke, Chief Justice of England, life-long antagonist of Bacon and reviler of Raleigh.