

He had devoted himself with so much assiduity to the composition of his Defence, though warned of the consequences by his physicians, that he now lost his eyesight, already impaired by protracted studies. No words can convey a proper conception of the character of this great poet and patriotic citizen more fitly than those he uses in reference to his blindness in his sonnet to his old pupil, Cyriac Skinner:

Blindness,  
1652

"What supports me, dost thou ask?  
The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied  
In Liberty's defence, my noble task,  
Of which all Europe rings from side to side—  
This thought might lead me through the world's vain mask,  
Content, though blind, had I no better guide."

The birth of another daughter cost him the life of the mother; and in 1653 or 1654 Milton found himself blind and a widower, with three young children. In 1656 he married his second wife, Catharine Woodcock: but how his family were cared for in the interval is unknown. Domestic misfortunes, however, were not to cease, and in 1658 Catharine Milton also died. From his tribute to her memory, *Sonnet on his Deceased Wife*, we are to infer that he held her in loving remembrance:

Second  
Marriage,  
1656

"Love, sweetness, goodness in her person shined  
So clear as in no face with more delight."

So great was the power of his will, and so indomitable the spirit that "bore him up and steered right onward," that, though blind, he continued, with an assistant, to dictate all the more important dispatches of the Commonwealth. His life during this period is interwoven with that of the Republic; and we have good reason to believe that he took an active part in shaping the foreign policy of Cromwell, who had been Lord Protector since 1654. There is strong ground for the opinion that Cromwell possessed Milton's full sympathies during the whole of his career, even to the extent of approval of some of his high-handed acts; for, with the spirit of an ancient Roman, Milton must have regarded an English Dictator as the best means of securing that Liberty for which he had sacrificed so much.<sup>1</sup> We can readily understand that he might have

Relations  
with Crom-  
well.

<sup>1</sup> In the motto to his work against the restoration of Kingship, Milton compares Cromwell to Sylla.