

INTRODUCTION.

disputes," afar "from the quiet and still air of delightful studies," he reiterates in still stronger language his sublime idea of the poet's mission: "He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that is praiseworthy." Few have approached this ideal perfection so closely as himself.

When Milton went to Cambridge, his father intended him for the Church; but during his college career great changes took place in the political condition of England. In 1632, Charles had been for four years governing without a parliament, and with Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, as Viceroy in Ireland, had been trying to bring the nation under the yoke of an iron despotism. In ecclesiastical matters a similar system was being introduced. Laud, Bishop of London, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, was engaged in rigidly suppressing every manifestation of Puritanism in doctrine and practice. He had not yet extended his operations to Scotland; but, dissatisfied with the shape matters had assumed under James, the zealous Prelate had in view a complete remodelling of the form of Church organization in that country also. His efforts to promote Prelacy and Ritualism throughout England were regarded by the Puritans as subversive of the privileges conferred on them by the Reformation, and while some of the braver spirits went into exile rather than submit, the great body of the people lay groaning under the Tyranny, as yet afraid even to protest against the encroachments of the King and his advisers. During the early part of Milton's undergraduate career, his opinions do not seem to have been so decidedly anti-prelatical as they afterwards became; for at the age of seventeen he wrote a Latin Elegy (*Elegia Tertia*) on the death of Andrews, the learned and eloquent Bishop of Winchester. It is possible, however, that in commemorating one of the brightest intellects of the time, he ignored the fact that he was an ornament of the Prelacy. Be this as it may, we have his own words as to the state of his mind towards

Political
condition of
England.

Youthful
opinions.

1636