

any other man of his age, saw that the struggle for political freedom in which the English were engaged, had a wider and more durable interest than was generally supposed. That great battle was fought for no single generation, for no single land. The destinies of the human race were staked on the same cast with the freedom of the English people. For these principles of liberty against despotism, and of reason against prejudice, Milton was the most ardent and eloquent literary champion.

But while Milton was so distinguished as a prose writer, it is by his poetry that he is best known. He took his place among great poets from the beginning, and he is generally considered in English Literature to rank next to Shakespeare. Even had he produced nothing but his minor poetical works, he would hold a high position, but when "Paradise Lost" is included, all acknowledge him to be a consummate master of the art of poetry.

The subject of "Paradise Lost" was one peculiarly adapted to the Puritan intellect. The fall of man was a theme suited to the serious part of the community. The Origin of Evil, the Power of Satan, and the Divinity of God, were subjects about which the minds of the Puritans were continually exercised. Milton intended, when first the idea of writing a grand poem occurred to him, to cast it in the form of a drama, and two drafts of his scheme are preserved among the manuscripts in Trinity College Library, Cambridge. But his genius was better fitted for an epic than a dramatic poem. When he attempted the dialogue in Samson Agonistes, the latest of his poems, he presented little variety of character; the movement is too slow, and the language much less poetical than in "Paradise Lost." His multifarious learning and uniform dignity would have been too weighty for dialogue, but in an epic poem these could be well used in narrative and illustration. How long the idea of writing such a poem was in the mind of Milton may be seen from the fact that he was considering it while travelling on the Continent in 1638. At that time, however, the subject of the future immortal poem was something about early English history. It is not probable that Milton would have succeeded as well, if he had attempted that, as he did

in "Paradise Lost." The peculiar character of his intellect and genius was suited rather to the sublime and mysterious than for the real and picturesque.

By consent of all, the first two books of "Paradise Lost," are the finest in the poem. The delineation of Satan and the fallen angels:

"Hurled headlong, flaming from the eternal sky,"

and the delineations of the infernal council of Pandemonium, dwarf every other poetical conception. Milton's Satan is unique. At his time it was the fashion to picture his Satanic Majesty in lost and debasing forms, with two horns and a forked tail, but in "Paradise Lost" Milton has invested him with colossal form and dignity:

"Forthwith upright he rears from off the pool
His mighty stature,"

"He above the rest,
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
Stood like a tower."

With invincible pride and courage, with passion and remorse:

"Browed
Of dauntless courage, and considerate pride,
Waiting revenge."

"Crushed his ear, but cast
Signs of remorse and passion."

and with sorrow and tears:

"Thrice he essayed, and thrice, in spite of scorn,
Tears such as angels weep, burst forth: at last
Words interwove with sighs found out their way."

Satan is the real hero of "Paradise Lost," if the poem may be said to have a hero. The chief interest is centered in him. His actions and words are heard with almost breathless attention; he possesses the spirit and daring of a great commander. He not only excites our wonder, he provokes our admiration, and if the object he pursues with such a horrible malignity were a good one, we should give him our unqualified approbation. We can only refer to the scenes of primitive Paradise, and the simplicity of our first parents. Their morning hymn in Paradise is one of the most beautiful compositions in the English language.

General readers have long been decided on the beauty of the characteristics of "Paradise Lost." First among these is the incomparable harmony of the numbers. We are carried along with the rhythm, and the music of lines makes up for the absence of rhyme. Milton has adopted a style which no rival has been able to equal. Some have attempt-