

in all its stateliness and majesty of intellect. There was the combination of these two different qualities—grace and grandeur—the most sportive fancy with the most inventive and creative imagination. In Shakspeare and Spenser also, his precursors, these latter existed in remarkable unison, but somewhat differently from the way in which they showed themselves in Milton. There was more spontaneity and geniality both in Spenser and Shakspeare than exhibits itself in Milton. Milton was of a colder temperament. He lays on colder colours than either Spenser or Shakspeare. He does not dally so fondly with his own fancies or thoughts: like the stock-dove “brooding over its own sweet voice.” And yet in those pieces written in early youth there is a good deal of this warmer and fonder temperament; far more than in the later poems. It may be questioned if—apart from grandeur—there is not more of the essential elements of poetry in those minor pieces than in the greater epics, or than in the ‘*Samson Agonistes*.’ There is a greater approximation to Shakspeare in the ‘*Comus*’ than in any of the other poems of Milton: there are true Shaksperian touches in that poem. The Lady in the *Comus* is an exquisite creation. *Comus* himself is but the embodiment of vice—licentiousness and debauchery—and the Lady, exposed to his machinations, and victorious over them, is but the representation of the dangers to which purity and innocence may be laid open in certain circumstances, and the triumphs which high-toned virtue will always assert against whatever is false and unworthy either in sentiment or conduct.

A masque written to celebrate an actual incident in the first Earl of Bridgewater’s family—and enacted at Ludlow Castle, to do honour to the occasion of that nobleman’s assuming the Lord-presidency of Wales—it finely portrays a character of great purity and innocence, and noble sentiment, and represents vice in all its revolting and most unamiable aspects. The invention of the plot, founded upon the actual incident referred to, gave scope to Milton’s command over the field of fairy lore, while his own high principles of virtue have ample opportunity for expressing themselves in many a noble utterance. Opposed to whatever savoured of lightness and profligacy in the courtly amusements of the time, the masque would not have come in for Milton’s patronage, or received the sanction of his genius, unless he had been able to stamp upon it a nobler character, and turn it to a worthier account. The ‘*Comus*,’ though a masque, therefore, will always be read with profit as well as pleasure. It was impossible for Milton’s mind to stoop to anything unworthy, or inconsistent with the most generous and loftiest sentiments. Of a somewhat colder temperament than Spenser or Shakspeare, it was just in proportion as his mind was cast in a grander and nobler mould.

We have the two sides of Milton’s mind in ‘*L’Allegro*’ and ‘*Il Penseroso*’—and ‘*Il Penseroso*’ perhaps is the more native or original of the two. There could not be a finer picture of rural life, however, than the ‘*L’Allegro*.’ It is the most picturesque perhaps of Milton’s poetry. It abounds in every image the most pleasing, and the most suggestive of country scenery and manners. All that could delight