

ENGLAND'S DEBT TO MILTON.

WE considered, a short time ago, England's debt to Wordsworth. The appearance of Professor Corson's "Introduction to the Poetical and Prose Works of John Milton" (Macmillan & Co., 5s.) suggests the even greater debt that England owes to Milton. We say "greater," though we must make it clear that in a certain realm of poetic inspiration we think Wordsworth supreme. We should not dream of comparing him as an artist, with Milton; we should not dream of suggesting that either his learning or his sheer intellectual power was comparable with that of Milton. It was as regards the subtly blended relations of Nature and humanity that Wordsworth struck a note unique in poetry, conveying to us far-off hints as to our nature and destiny which have revolutionized English thought. But Wordsworth himself, as one of his noblest sonnets testifies, owed not a little to the inspiring example and lofty idealism of Milton; and we think that England has been a different nation from the fact that Milton was born a citizen of this land. It is not only that a line of poetic creation, in which Keats and Tennyson have been the greatest names, has proceeded from Milton. It is not only that to Milton, as Arnold says, we owe the one conspicuous example of the "grand style," the one illustrious example of structural grandeur that we can show to the world as exhibiting the capacities of English poetry. It is the total personality and general achievements of Milton that we regard as constituting the immortal heritage, not only of this country of ours, but of all English-speaking people for all time.

If we want to know what Milton did for us, we must say that, exclud-

ing Spenser, who, as the "poet's poet," has never been and will never be read except by a few, Milton was the first and supreme poet who introduced a high, serious and noble strain into our literature and life, clothing it in the most perfect artistic forms ever conceived among us, and permeated it with an idealism sane and (in the best sense of the word) thoroughly English on the one hand, while yet religious and divine on the other. He initiated us into the love of divine things, he redeemed us from the dominion of earthliness. We have still much of the sot and the clown in our national life, but few of us realize the nature and extent of the mere carnal life of the mass of Englishmen until the Puritan movement had begun seriously to take hold of their minds. The Anglo-Saxon (we will not go into the question of the diffusion of a Celtic element; it is enough that the substratum of our population was Anglo-Saxon) was descended from sensual marauders, whose conversion to Christianity was largely nominal, given to gorging and drinking, filled, to use the Apostolic words, with "desires of the flesh and of the mind." It was necessary that a powerful antidote to this animalism should be found, and it was found in Puritanism. First came the great Lollard movement, the ground for which had been prepared by the Franciscans, and to this movement we may trace the beginnings of serious popular thought, religious earnestness, social reform, intellectual freedom, and that belief in a doctrine of "right" to which no race of mankind has ever been wholly indifferent. Persecution could not kill Lollardy, and the seed it sowed came up again in the reign of Elizabeth, when it assumed the form of serious life and demo-