

thought 'Samson Agonistes' the test of a man's true appreciation of Milton, and not a bad test of his appreciation of high literature. It is the most unadorned poem that can be found. Even in 'Paradise Regained' there is little richness of style, but the great panorama from the mount has a certain material magnificence which can escape no one. There is no splendour of this kind in the 'Samson;' colour, which in his early poems is most rich and glowing, and in 'Paradise Lost' is still rich, begins to grow faint in 'Paradise Regained,' and disappears entirely in the 'Samson.' But the essential individuality of the man seems to appear only the more impressively. What you see here is not the dazzling talents and accomplishments of the man, but the man himself. It is pure greatness and grace, a white marble statue by the hand of a Phidias." This is finely said, and indeed the whole criticism of the 'Agonistes' is altogether admirable.

Every one is acquainted with the story of Samson. Milton brings him on the stage in the last great act of his life—after he had been deprived of sight—soliloquising on his misery, and folly, and degradation, compelled to grind in the prison-house for his task-masters, and brought forth now and again at their pleasure to make sport before them. Such monologues, with the dialogues sustained between him and the choros (after the fashion of the Greek play)—with his father Manoah—and others who come to condole with him in his misery, or to mock him in his misfortune, form the drama; and the denouement is the sudden and sweeping destruction that overtakes the Philistines assembled on the occasion of a great sacrifice to their God, Dagon—lords and people—to witness the feats of strength of their redoubtable captive. The plot is simple, only the Scriptural fact: but the dialogue is characterized by lofty thought, magnanimous sentiment, and contains a fine vindication of God even in the punishment of his servant, who had been raised up to deliver Israel from the Philistines, but who so signally failed except in a few conspicuous acts of his life, and in the last great tragedy of his death. There is a serene majesty pervading the whole utterances of the drama—especially the words of Samson himself. And there is a mighty pathos in those passages in which he bemoans his fate and the sad humiliation to which he was subjected. Samson is great in words as he is in deeds: he is the Samson of tragedy—the Philoctetes or Ajax of the Greek drama—while his great crowning feat stands out alone in the history of heroic action and self-sacrifice.

We have not space to dwell upon the 'Lycidas,' the "Hymn on the Nativity," the sonnets of Milton, or his miscellanies, translations, and Latin poems. The 'Lycidas' is a sort of pastoral monody on the loss of his College friend and congener, Edward King, fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, drowned at sea, Aug. 10th, 1637. It is a sort of 'In Memoriam,' but in a very different spirit and style from Tennyson's poem of that name, so tenderly and with such unrivalled depth of pathos lamenting the death of his friend Arthur Hallam. Milton's composition is one of many written on the same occasion, academic verses, intended to set forth the worth of the lamented deceased:

Dead, dead ere his prime;