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SKETCH OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

PERIOD 2ND.—FROM THE ELIZABETHAN TO THE AUGUSTAN AGE.

Continuation of 2nd Period.

BY PROFESSOR LYALL.

MILTON is chiefly known by the two great poems 'Paradise Lost and 'Paradise Regained:' he is not so much known by those minor pieces 'L'Allegro,' 'Il Penseroso,' or even the 'Lycidas' or the 'Comus.' It is difficult to realize these productions as all by the same mind. It comes upon one with a sort of pleasing surprise, that Milton, the author of 'Paradise Lost,' could be also the author of 'L'Allegro' and the 'Comus.' The Poet of a sudden appears in a new point of view: the grand, the majestic, the severe, can be also the light, the playful, the exquisitely graceful, the luxuriantly fanciful: the writer of the greatest epics can be also the writer of the sweetest idyls in the language. The explanation is, that the one class of poems was the production of the youth Milton; the other that of the same youth now the aged bard, having half a century of years and experience moulding his mind, and influencing at once the choice of his subject and his manner of treating it. Milton, fresh from the classic haunts of one of England's classic universities—with his own Academic laurels green upon him—with his glowing literary associations—with a mind stored with the legends of romance and fairy-land, replete with the illusions drawn from those ages of picturesque and *chevaleresque* history which had just passed away—that had fed itself with the thoughts of Spenser and of Shakspeare—Milton who felt the inspiration of the muses so strongly himself: it was an easy thing for him, and the most natural in the world, to produce such poems as we have named. It was but the natural bias of his genius: these productions were its most spontaneous outflow. It was the luxuriance of the ivy, or the flowering plant, round the stem of the oak, which had not yet shot up into all its robustness and gigantic proportions. Milton's mind possessed all the grace and the beauty of the one, while it had all the strength and grandeur of the other. It luxuriated and sported like the clinging parasite before it appeared as the monarch of the trees. It first put out those forms of grace and loveliness before it stood erect