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SPECIMENS OF OLD ENGLISH POETS.

No. IV—MILTON.

John Milton, the greatest of Old English Poets, Shakspeare, perhaps, excepted, and undoubtedly the best, flourished in the times of the Commonwealth, Protectorate, and Restoration.

The following surpassingly beautiful lines are from *Comus*, a poem on the model of the Greek drama. A virtuous lady has lost her way at night-fall in a wood, and, hearing a noise of rustic revelry, soliloquises thus:—

This way the noise was, if mine ear be true,
My best guide now; methought it was the sound
Of riot and ill-managed merriment,
Such as the jocund flute, or gamesome pipe
Stirs up among the loose unletter'd hinds,
When for their teeming flocks, and granges full,
In wanton dance they praise the bounteous Pan,
And thank the Gods amiss. I should be loth
To meet the rudeness and swill'd insolence
Of such late wassailers; yet oh, where else
Shall I inform my unacquainted feet
In the blind mazes of this tangled wood?
My brothers, when they saw me wearied out
With this long way, resolving here to lodge
Under the spreading favour of these pines,
Stept, as they said, to the next thicket side
To bring me berries, or such cooling fruit
As the kind hospitable woods provide.
They left me then, when the grey hooded even,
Like a sad votarist in palmer's weed,
Rose from the hindmost wheels of Phæbus' wain.
But where they are, and why they came not back,
Is now the labour of my thought; 'tis likeliest
They had engag'd their wand'ring steps too far,
And envious darkness, ere they could return,
Had stole them from me; else, O thievish night,
Why wouldst thou, but for some felonious end,
In thy dark lantern thus close up the stars,
That nature hung in Heav'n, and fill'd their lamps
With everlasting oil, to give due light
To the misled and lonely traveller?
This is the place, as well as I may guess,
Whence even now the tumult of loud mirth
Was rife and perfect in my list'ning ear;
Yet nought but single darkness do I find.
What might this be? A thousand fantasies
Begin to throng into my memory,
Of calling shapes, and beck'ning shadows dire,
And airy tongues, that syllable men's names
On sands, and shores, and desert wildernesses.
Those thoughts may startle well, but not astound
The virtuous mind, that ever walks attended
By a strong siding champion, Conscience.
O welcome pure-eyed faith, white-handed hope,
Thou hovering angel, girt with golden wings,
And thou, unblemish'd form of chastity;
I see ye visibly, and now believe
That he, the Supreme Good, to whom all things ill
Are but as slavish officers of vengeance,
Would send a glis'ring guardian, if need were
To keep my life and honour unassail'd.
Was I deceiv'd, or did a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night?
I did not err; there does a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night?
And casts a gleam over this tufted grove.

I cannot halloo to my brothers, but
Such noise as I can make to be heard farthest
I'll venture; for my new enliven'd spirits
Prompt me; and they perhaps are not far off.

[Sings.]

Comus, a malignant and lascivious spirit, hears her, and is for the moment completely overcome. He exclaims:—

Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould
Breathe such divine enchanting ravishment?
Sure something holy lodges in that breast,
And with these raptures moves the vocal air
To testify his hidden residence:
How sweetly did they float upon the wings
Of silence, through the empty vaulted night,
At every fall smoothing the raven down
Of darkness till it smil'd! I have oft heard
My mother Circe, with the Sirens three,
Amidst the flow'ry-kirtled Naiades
Culling their potent herbs, and baleful drugs,
Who, as they sung, would take the prison'd soul,
And lap it in Elysium; Scylla wept,
And chid her barking waves into attention,
And fell Charybdis murmur'd soft applause:
Yet they in pleasing slumber lull'd the sense,
And in sweet madness robb'd it of itself;
But such a sacred and home-felt delight,
Such sober certainty of waking bliss,
I never heard till now. I'll speak to her,
And she shall be my queen.

PUNISHMENT OF DEATH.

The following extracts are from a very able article by Dr. Leonard Bacon, we believe, in the last number of the "New Englander." They are well worthy of consideration.

For our own part, we place the whole stress of the argument for death as the punishment of murder, upon the one comprehensive consideration, that such punishment cannot be dispensed with. Prove to us that the abolition of capital punishment in all cases, would not in time draw after it infinite evils; prove to us that law can be sustained without the sword in the hand of the powers that are to administer it; prove that the state can continue to be a state, after solemnly abrogating its own right to inflict, upon crimes that strike directly at the existence of society, that extreme penalty which is the ultimate sanction of all law, and without which, as a coercive motive to submission, no other penalty can be inflicted; prove that any inferior penalty is adequate to express with full distinctness and power the abhorrence with which the state ought to regard a crime so horrible as murder; prove that it is safe to let the murderer live, safe for the innocent, safe for all the interests which it is the duty of civil government to guard; and when the proof on these points is clearly made out, we will give our influence to secure the abolition of all punishment by death. But till such a proof is produced, we cannot but regard the proposed abolition of this ultimate and highest sanction of law, as involving in the end the abolition of all punishment, and the complete disorganization of society.

In the precept given to Noah, construe it as you will, we see the announcement of a great principle, which, so long as human nature exists in this world, will probably make the punishment of death for murder, indispensable to the safety of society—not to say, indispensable to the existence of any government. Translate it if you please, as the simple declaration of a fact, "Whosoever sheddeth man's blood, by man will his blood be shed." Tell us then which shall we