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LESSONS FROM MILTON'S LIFE.

(From Archdeacon Farrar's Sermon.)

Take his youth. What a lesson is conveyed to the mental indolence of the mass of ordinary English boys by the ardor of this glorious young student, who, at the age of twelve, when he was at St. Paul's School, learned with such eagerness that he scarcely ever went to bed before midnight. He tells us that even in early years he took labor and intent study to be his portion in this life. While he could write Latin like a Roman, he had also mastered Greek, French, Italian, Syriac, and Hebrew.

Do not imagine that, therefore, he was some pallid student or stunted ascetic. On the contrary, he was a boy full of force and fire, full of self-control, eminently beautiful, eminently pure, a good fencer, an accomplished swordsman; and this young and holy student would probably have defeated in every manly exercise a dozen of the youths who have nothing to be proud of save their ignorance and their vices—the dissipated loungers and oglers at refreshment bars, who need perpetual glasses of ardent spirits to support their wasted energies. In him the sound body was the fair temple of a lovely soul. And even while we watch him as a youth we see the two chief secrets of his grandeur. The first was his exquisite purity. From earliest years he thought himself a fit person to do the noblest and godliest deeds and far better worth than to deject and debase by such a defilement as sin is, himself so highly ransomed and ennobled to friendship and filial relation with God. From the first he felt that every free and gentle spirit, even without the oath of knighthood, was born a knight, nor needed to expect the gilt spurs nor the laying a sword upon his shoulder to stir him up both by his counsel and his arms to protect the weakness of chastity.

From the first he cherished within himself a certain high fastidiousness and virginal delicacy of soul, an honest haughtiness of modest self-esteem, which made him shrink with the loathing of a youthful Joseph from coarse contaminations. He went to Christ's College, Cambridge, at the age of sixteen, and remained there seven years. The vulgar soul rarely loves the noble, and it was Milton's stainless chastity, together with his personal beauty, which

gained him the name of "the lady," until the dislike of his meaner fellows gave way before his moral nobleness and intellectual prominence. What he was at that time may be seen in his earliest lines on the death of a fair infant,

"Soft, silken primrose fading timelessly," written when he was but seventeen. What his thoughts were we learn also from those autobiographic passages of his writings in which, with a superb and ingenuous egotism,

place in which he sat with his garland and singing robes about him, to mingle with those other Elizabethan dramatists, who

"Stood around The throne of Shakespeare, sturdy but unclean," and had the glorious young Puritan ever appeared as a boy at one of the drinking bouts and wit encounters at the Mermaid Tavern, and propounded his grave theory that he who would be a true poet must aim first to make his life a true poem, I

And the other youthful germ of the greatness was his high steadfastness of purpose. Most men live only from hand to mouth. The bias of their life is prescribed to them by accident. They are driven hither and thither by the gusts of their own passions, or become the sport and prey of others, or entrust the decision of their course to the "immoral god, circumstance." In the words of Isaiah, "Gad and Meni are the idols of their service; they prepare a table for chance, and furnish a drink offering to Destiny." From such idols no inspiration comes. But Milton's mind, he tells us, was set wholly on the accomplishment of great designs. "You ask me, Charles,—of what I am thinking," he wrote to his young friend and school-fellow, Charles Diodati: "I think, so help me heaven, of immortality." He had early learned "to scorn delights, and live laborious days." His whole youth—the six years at school, the seven years at Cambridge, the five of his retirement at Horton, were all attended as one long preparation for the right use of those abilities which he regarded as "the inspired gift of God rarely bestowed." He felt that he who would be a true poet ought himself to be a true poem. He meant that the great poem which even then he meditated should be drawn "neither from the heat of youth, nor the vapors of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amourist or the trencher fury of some rhyming parasite, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases."

Poetry was not to him, as to the roystering town poets and love-poets and wit-poets of his times, the practice of a knack and the provision of an amusement; but he believed that the Holy Spirit to whom he devoutly prayed, could help him by means of his verse to imbued and cherish in a great people the deeds of virtue and public civility; to allay the perturbations of the mind and set the affections in right tune; to celebrate, in glorious and lofty hymns, the throne and equipage of God's almightiness; ... to sing of the agonies of saints and martyrs, and triumphs of just and pious



JOHN MILTON.

he put to shame the foul slanders of his enemies. "If," he said, "God ever instilled an intense love of moral beauty into the breast of any man, he has instilled it into mine." It is in this purity of his ideal that he stands so far as a man above all that we know of Shakespeare. He could not because he would not have written much that Shakespeare wrote; still less would he have descended from that high

think, with his biographer, that a blush may have passed over the swarthy cheek of Ben Jonson, and that Shakespeare might have bent his head to hide a noble tear. Austere he was; but his was neither the absorbed austerity of the scholar, nor the ostentatious austerity of the Pharisee nor the agonizing self-introspection of a monk; but the sweet and serene of a hero and a sage.

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