

# THE BATTALION.

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## LITERARY.

### Milton's Genius as a Poet.

As a poet he singularly links the age of Spenser and Shakespeare with the age of Cowper; for, while his genius has the seriousness of both and, in his earlier works, the air of romance and the rich diction characteristic of the former, his spirit is worlds away from the frivolous vein and the prosaic outlook of the literary generation that was contemporary with his closing years.

As much as Spenser or Shakspeare, he is a child of the great Revival of Letters. As much as Bunyan or Cromwell, he is a child of the intenser spirit of that Revival of Christianity which we call the Reformation. Seldom has a great genius been better equipped in all the harness of culture, and at the same time in the defensive armor of personal purity, lofty enthusiasm, and noble purpose. He had, too, a two-edged sword of style, for he wrote Latin and English in either prose or verse with equal vigor, and to reach the ear of Europe in that age Latin was essential. Two gifts alone

were not his: the genial nature and the sense of humor; and the absence of these accounts fully for all that is faulty in his life or his works.

Among the poems, the Comus is my choice for perfect beauty in thought and in workmanship. As Saintsbury says: "It is impossible to single out passages, for the whole is golden."

The Hymn on the Nativity is remarkable, aside from its intrinsic merits, as being the first sustained lyric strain in the language.

Lycidas and Arcades have the same charms of noble thought and exquisite diction which give imperishable grace to all his earlier song. The two delicious companion pieces, L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, have almost passed into the inner tissue of the English language, for almost every line of each has become a piquant quotation in social life.

The Sonnets are unique of their kind, few in any age or tongue being so evidently autobiographic.

As to the Paradise Lost and its se-