

quel, *Paradise Regained*, we have here the spirit of Puritanism at its best and noblest. The weaker elements of the poem are equally the defects of Puritanism: the strange lack of humor, making the descent from the sublime to the ridiculous so easy, as in the description of the artillery that plays its part in the war in Heaven; the shocking irreverence that is all unconscious that it is irreverent, as in the hardihood with which God the Father is brought before us talking like a school divine; the lack of genial humanity, making Eve little more than a moving statue of beauty. The "mighty line" and the involved harmony of its music, the richness and variety of the scenes put before the imagination, the awe and mystery of the subject, are the chief attractions of the poem.

As it is not commonly valued so highly as it deserves, I beg you to give your closer attention to the *Samson Agonistes*. This poem is the most severely beautiful of Milton's works. Utterly bare of ornament; it contrasts singularly with his earlier poems in which there is so lavish a profusion of imagery. Compare its almost statuesque grandeur with the rich embroidery of the *Masque of Comus*, where the colors seem rather those of elaborate tapestry than of that word-painting which characterizes even the most brilliant poetry. We can, then, note only too clearly how private griefs, and disdain of the evil that had for the time triumphed, had stripped his great soul of its mellower tints and robbed his genius of the delight it had once taken in bright things.

Even in the early tide of song, which for him began so soon, his genius had

been Hellenic. Thought and coloring were both subordinated to form, from the Hymn on the Nativity to the *Samson Agonistes*. But in all that he produced before the downfall of the Commonwealth, there had been a richness of trope, metaphor, and simile, a luxurious harmony of rhythm, and that joy of the poet in the exquisite felicity of the language chosen to convey his thought, which are fully in keeping with the ripe taste of Hellenic art through all its mighty current, while perfection of form is still the ideal aimed at. In verse he reflects the whole body of Hellenic poetry. In prose he has the full Platonic weight and rhythm and amplitude of illustration.

But when the shadows settle down at last upon him—blind, lonely, unappreciated, and almost hopeless of his country's ever emerging from her saturnalia of shame and sin, the brightness vanishes from his inner vision, and the rugged grandeur of Æschylus is the type of his heartbroken but still battling genius. The bitter strength of one of the Hebrew prophets clings to the whole spirit and structure of the poem, and informs its design. Yet the Hellenic ideal in art remains paramount and gives to the tragedy its form throughout.

Yes, in this stern play that reads as if cut in stone, the Hebraic temper, always latent in Milton, the man, comes out in full force. But Milton, the artist, was from the first a Hellene, and could do no otherwise than work out his grand vindictory thought in a purely Hellenic form.

There are no prettinesses in the *Samson*. Yet naked strength has brought out qualities not found else-