



MILTON'S HOUSE, CHALFONT ST. GILES.

## THREE PORTRAITS OF MILTON.

BY THE VEN. ARCHDEACON FARRAR, D.D.

With Illustrations by HUGH THOMSON.

THE three likenesses of Milton here presented to us are full of interest. They bring vividly before us the pathos, I might even say the tragedy, of a life which, even if Milton had never written the *Paradise Lost*, would have been memorable as that of a man, whom Wordsworth rightly calls

“Soul awful, if this world has ever held  
An awful soul.”

### I.

The first portrait is the “counterfeit” presentment of a boy of ten years, a little Roundhead, grave, serious, and beautiful. If we would animate the portrait into life we know from other sources that we must (to use his own phrase) “envermeil” the round cheek with a healthy rose, and give a gleam of gold to the short auburn hair. His eyes were hazel; the eyebrows are finely pencilled, and the curve of the upper lip forms a perfect “Cupid’s bow.” As the child stood before his friends with his thoughtful face, in his frilled lace collar, and braided dress, he was indeed a child of whom to be proud, and one in whom the opening dawn of life seemed to promise a golden day. The fact that in 1618 his parents should have commissioned the young Dutch painter Cornelius Jansen to paint this portrait, is very significant. Jansen had but recently come from Amsterdam, and he charged “five broad pieces” for a likeness. Milton’s father, the good Bread

Street scrivener, must have cherished high hopes for his favourite little boy, or he would not have had his likeness taken. When the picture was engraved—not very successfully—in 1760 by Cipriani, he placed beneath it the lines—

“When I was yet a child, no childish play  
To me was pleasing; all my mind was set  
Serious to learn to know, and thence to do  
What might be public good: myself I thought  
Born to that end, born to promote all truth  
And righteous things.”

The lines truly describe a childhood in which the predominant characteristic was earnest diligence. Milton tells us that his father—and he adds “whom God recompense,” for he always felt the strongest filial gratitude towards this wise and kind parent—had destined him to literature from his earliest years, and gave him an excellent education. The boy must have been an incomparable pupil to any able master, for he combined genius with extreme diligence. His ardent zeal for learning outran the efforts of his teachers. He needed the curb much more than the spur. He tells us that, even as a boy of twelve, he rarely went to bed before midnight. This heroic exertion did not exhaust his powers, but it cost him frequent headaches and laid the seeds of that blindness which was the heaviest trouble of his later life.

He stayed at St. Paul's School till he was sixteen years old, and his earnestness had borne such rich fruit that the world has rarely seen any boy of sixteen who could be regarded as his equal. But it must not be supposed that the boy Milton was only a hard student or an inveterate bookworm. We see that he was fond of manly exercises, especially sword-play, and he carried with him through life a sense of delight in all natural beauty, genial intercourse, and healthy recreation. He took with him from St. Paul's at least one deep and noble friendship. He has left many proofs of the closeness with which his soul was knit to that of his schoolfellow Charles Diodati—that “charming comrade,” “so faithful and so loving,” whose early death robbed Milton's life of one of its best sources of happiness, and left a void which could never fully be supplied. Such was the boy.



JOHN MILTON. *Ætat* 10. FROM A PICTURE IN THE POSSESSION OF EDGAR DISNEY, ESQ., OF THE HYDE, INGATESTONE, ESSEX.

## II.

The second portrait shows us Milton as a youth of twenty-one. It is by an unknown painter, but is indubitably authentic. It was engraved by Vertue in 1731, and by Cipriani in 1760. The original seems to have disappeared, but was in the possession of Speaker Onslow, who had bought it from the executors of Milton's widow. There can be no doubt that it represents the full youth of the boy whom Jansen painted. We see the same noble, engaging face, but the young man wears the long and curling locks which the Puritan tutors of the little boy had cut so short. The face—pure, virginal, strong, self-confident—corresponds to the known character of the student who is the special glory of Cambridge and of Christ's College.

Manly beauty of the highest type, singular purity of character, a temperament perfectly ready to unbend, a capacity for friendship, supreme ability, unusual attainments—these gifts might have seemed certain to secure popularity to the fair youth

here depicted. Yet it is clear that he was not at first popular, either with his tutors or his fellow-undergraduates.

We can see the reason. He was too independent for the very commonplace officials of his College, to some of whom it was impossible for him to look up with any esteem. We cannot be uncharitable if we say that the fault must have been more with them than with him. A youth who, at an age when many boys have not left school, had written such lines as those *On the Death of a Fair Infant*, and, not long afterwards, poems not only of superb promise but of consummate beauty, such as the *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, and the lines *At a Solemn Music*, and who is admitted to have been so chaste and diligent—a youth too who showed warm and lifelong gratitude to his earlier preceptors—must have been very unsympathetically treated and very blunderingly misjudged if the Chappells and Powers and Bainbrigges could not discover his worth. That his tutor—a Mr. Chappell, who afterwards became an Irish



JOHN MILTON. FROM A PICTURE IN THE POSSESSION OF SPEAKER ONSLOW.

bishop—actually proceeded so far as publicly to whip this virtuous and beautiful youth of eighteen, though he was confessedly “a very hard student in the University, and performed all his exercises with very good applause,” is a legend which only rests on an interlineal interpolation in the manuscript of Aubrey’s sketch of Milton. It is probably some unauthenticated after-thought of mean University gossip. Had it been true, whipping had by that time grown so uncommon that it would certainly have been remembered against the poet by hosts of furious enemies; although, if true, it is no discredit to Milton, and only redounds to the disgrace of Chappell. Some *contretemps* however probably did occur, and it is just possible that, for some independent expressions or actions, the youth was sent down for a time, though it is certain that he did not lose a single term. He tells us that he “never greatly admired Cambridge, even

in the time of her better health, and his own younger judgment.” Of the routine of University study, which had been completely outgrown by the needs of a new age, he would probably have said, as Roger Bacon said of Oxford some centuries earlier, “*languet et asinuat circum male intellecta.*” He objected to be “dragged from his studies, and compelled to employ himself in composing some frivolous declamation.” The grey flats of Cambridge, its “barren and shadeless fields,” and its “reedy Cam,” had little attraction for him, and its tutors delighted him still less.

“*Nec duri libet usque minas perferre magistri,  
Cæteraque ingenio non subeunda meo.*”

he says to Diodati. If he were rusticated for a time, he fairly enjoyed his rustication, and was supremely impenitent as to whatever may have been the cause of it.

“*Non ego vel profugi nomen sortemque recuso,  
Lætus et exilii conditione fruor.*”

He devoted himself so passionately to his studies that Diodati mentions his own moderation in study as the sole point in which he could claim superiority over him. He exulted in the beauty of the country, the flush of spring, the shadow of the elms,

the melody of birds. When he was weary he went to the theatres and London. He is even impressionable to the fresh English loveliness of the young maidens whom he meets, though he is prepared to leave them and return to "the murmurs of the hoarse-resounding school."

Nor is it wholly strange that Milton was not at first popular even among the students of his College. Something almost feminine in the fresh complexion and bright hair of that "beautiful and well-proportioned body" which, as Aubrey says, was the home also of "an ingenious and harmonical soul," had, together with his delicate, "tunable voice," gained him the nickname of "the Lady." Coarser spirits, probably—as in the case of the younger Pitt—saw something effeminate in the stainless chastity, in the ingenuous modesty, in the moral austerity, in that certain niceness and honest haughtiness of nature, which envy might call "pride," but which not only preserved him from vulgar dissipation and coarse talk, but refused to allow him to be "hail-fellow well-met" with every chance undergraduate. Wood indeed tells us that he was "affable," but adds that "his gait was erect and manly, bespeaking courage and undauntedness." Apart from his personal strength, and skill in fence, Milton was not a person with whom any Dick or Harry could take a liberty. He was a severe critic of academical performances, which were indeed, for the most part, very poor stuff. In the Colleges, he says, "many of the young divines were often seen writhing and embowing their clergy limbs to all the antics and dishonest gestures" of drunkards and others, and, "there, while they acted and over-acted, among other young scholars, I was a spectator; they thought themselves gallant men, and I thought them fools; they made sport and I laughed; they mispronounced and I disliked; and to make up the Atticism, they were out, and I hissed." Add to this that though he could appreciate humour he had no humour himself, and when he attempts it out of the pure gaiety of an innocent heart, as in the vacation exercise written for one of the undergraduate saturnalia, he becomes ponderous. In "festivities and jests," he says, "I acknowledge my faculty to be very slight." The key to Milton's character and life is in the glorious passage about "the pious and just reverence of a man for his own person," which was the unswerving law of his own life, but which in many youths has no existence.

The period of Milton's youth which succeeded his College days was eminently fruitful. He had been destined for holy orders, but he had made a timely discovery that there could be no place for such as he in the ministry of a Church pervaded by the narrowness and intolerance of the Laudian spirit. Nothing can more forcibly illustrate his strong faith, and the steadfastness of his purpose, than his determination to "stand and wait." It was the nobler because nothing short of the loftiest religious feelings could reconcile him to the "belatedness" of that inward ripeness which seemed to him to endure some more "timely-happy spirits." Though he had already surpassed in learning all his contemporaries of the same age, and indeed most of the men of his day, and though he had already written immortal poems, he considered his life "as yet obscure and unserviceable to mankind." Men might suppose, he said, that "too much love of learning is a fault, and that I have given myself up to dream away my years in the arms of studious retirement." It was not so. Even while at Cambridge he had decided to resist all temptation to "vegetate through a hidden eternity." The love of honour was calling him, and the natural desire to form a home; yet he was encouraged by the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, "not to press forward, but to keep off with a sacred reverence and religious advisement how *best* to undergo—not taking thought of being *late*, so it gave advantage to the more *fit*; for those who were late lost nothing." Accordingly in those exquisite years at Horton (1632—1638) he gave himself wholly to beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies, while at the same time he was "pluming his wings and meditating flight." It is to these years that we owe poems which, taken alone, would have placed him in the forefront of the ranks of English poets. Here he wrote *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, *Arcades*, *Lycidas*—with its memorable outburst on the corrupted state of the Church—and *Comus*, the immortal eulogy on the irresistible might and beauty of chastity. We may still see the room in the church tower of Longley where he must have often studied, and in Horton church, the blue slab which covers his mother's grave. His father was more than content with the early fruits of his intellect, and accepted that promise of immortality which his son gave him. For that son had pledged himself

to his own conscience before God, and he afterwards gave, as it were, his note-of-hand to the world, that, when he had chosen his theme, he would devote all his powers to some strain which the world should not willingly let die.

In 1638 began that memorable journey in which he conversed with Grotius, visited Galileo, enjoyed the friendship of Dati, Francini, Frescobaldi, and other gifted young Florentines, was welcomed to the Vatican by Holstenius, heard the singing of Leonora Baroni in Rome, and almost fell in love with her or some other Italian lady. He was received with open arms by the Marquis of Villa, Giovanni Baptista Manso at Naples, in the palace which had already sheltered Tasso and Marini. The two lines which Manso addressed to Milton furnish an interesting proof both that he still retained his remarkable personal beauty, and also that the indomitable courage, freedom, and truthfulness of his spirit prevented him from making any effort to increase his popularity by concealing the fervour of his Protestant and even Puritan opinions. For Manso says, repeating Pope Gregory's play of words, that if his religion had been such as his intellect and beauty, he would have been an Angel rather than an Anglican.

Sir Henry Wootton had given him the kind and worldly-wise advice, "*pensieri stretti, ed il viso sciolto*" (thoughts close, and face frank); but such advice was not for such as John Milton, even in the homes of the Inquisition.

The tidings of the great events which were occurring in England hastened his return, and on landing he was met by the desolating news that the friend of his life—Charles Diodati—was no more. How well would it have been for England if all young Englishmen at the close of their travels were able to make the solemn attestation which Milton, under the base calumnies of his enemies, thought it right to make! The proverb then ran, *Inglese Italianato diavolo incarnato*; but Milton could write: "I take God to witness that in all those places where so many things are considered lawful, I lived sound and untouched from all profligacy and vice, having this thought per- eyes of men, I certainly could not



JOHN MILTON. *Ætat* 62. FROM THE ENGRAVING BY FAITHORNE.

The original pastel drawing for this is in the possession of William Baker, Esq., of Beyfordbury Park, Hertford. *V. Fagan's Catalogue of Faithorne*, pp. 48 and 91.

petually with me, that, though I might escape the eyes of God."

### III.

Let us turn to the third portrait.

It was taken in crayons by the engraver William Faithorne, for frontispiece for Milton's *History of Britain*, in 1670, when the poet was sixty-two; and underneath it were inscribed the words, *Gul. Faithorne ad vivum delin et sculpsit*. It is undoubtedly genuine and uniquely precious. When his third daughter, Deborah Clarke, had this picture shown to her by Vertue, about 1725, she exclaimed, "*O Lord! that is the picture of my father; how came you by it?*" and stroking the hair of her forehead, added "*Just so my father wore his hair.*" "No one," says Professor Masson, in his monumental *Life of Milton* (vi. 649), "can desire a more authentic or impressive portrait of Milton in his later life. The face is such as has been given to no other human being; it was and is uniquely Milton's. Underneath the broad forehead and arched temples there are the

great rings of eye-sockets, with the blind unblemished eyes in them, drawn straight upon you by your voice, and speculating who and what you are; there is a severe composure in the beautiful oval of the whole countenance, disturbed only by the singular pouting round the rich mouth; and the entire expression is that of English intrepidity mixed with unutterable sorrow." Milton's hair, which he still wore, unlike the Puritans, in long locks, and which, like Adam's

"hyacinthine locks,  
Round from his parted forelock manly hung  
Clustering, but not beneath his shoulders broad,"

retained to the last their auburn tint, though doubtless with many grey hairs among them; but

"his cheek  
Deep scars of thunder had entrenched."

Over few men has there rolled such an overwhelming tide of calamity. He might have exclaimed with David: "All Thy waves and storms have gone over me." As we



CHALFONT ST. GILES, BUCKS.

look on the first two portraits, how little could we have anticipated that Life would prove so apparently cruel a stepmother to that sweet child, to that royally endowed youth; that the world had such hard fortunes in store for him; that he would receive such deadly measure at the hands of his fellow-men, whose imaginations he was to enrich for ever by his poetry, for whose liberties he was content to spend and be spent, to whom he bequeathed the inheritance of so luminous an example!

We are not attempting to write a life of Milton, but only glancing at the man himself. When he returned from his delightful Italian tour, the last year of unclouded happiness was with him over for ever. He did not indeed plunge into the vortex of civil strife, either as a statesman or as a soldier, but waiting till God opened the way for him, he became the champion of his country in those intellectual regions in which all battles must ultimately be decided. With him a passion for liberty was

one of the ruling impulses of his life, and if he fought kings and prelates for twenty years, and poured forth pamphlet after pamphlet of powerful Latin and magnificently impassioned English in defence of the Puritans and the Parliament, he thereby fulfilled what he regarded as one great mission of his life. Never abandoning the high purpose of his youth, to leave behind him some immortal epic on one of the hundred and thirty subjects which he considered, and out of which he ultimately selected the *Paradise Lost*, he yet laid aside the intention during all the best years of his life, because he held that God called him to a yet more urgently needful task. We know not which to admire most—the steadfast purpose cherished through so many years of preparation, or the heroic self-sacrifice with which, for such a long and stormy epoch, the purpose was laid aside.

Wave after wave of calamity burst over him. He made a miserable marriage. He had to bear an awful weight of execration. He became hopelessly blind. The cause to which he had devoted his life was utterly ruined.

His country, grown radically corrupt, basely preferred license to liberty. England, no longer the glorious England of the Commonwealth, whom the nations feared and honoured, was ruled by a perjured rake, who was a crypto-Romanist in such religion as he had, and who complacently pocketed the subsidies of a foreign tyrant. And as though all this were not enough, his own life was in peril; his name was a by-word among men whose fathers he would have disdained to set among the dogs of his flock; the very objects came together against him, making mouths and ceased not. Private losses and public misery came over him in a flowing tide. The Plague turned the neighbourhood of his last refuge into pest-fields. The Great Fire destroyed the last house which he possessed. The *Samson Agonistes*, the most Greek-like drama ever written since the death of Euripides, gives us some insight into the passion-seething abysses of his soul, whose swelling turbulence was only kept down by a sovereign faith. Professor Seeley finely calls it "the thundering reverberation of a mighty spirit struck by the plectrum of disappointment"; but though that plectrum struck the reverberant chords into thunder, it was the last sob of the retiring storm beyond which we already see the gleam of blue.

When Medea was taunted with the loss of all, and asked what remained, she replied, "*Medea superest!*" Even so Milton had *himself* for an abiding possession. Milton was still Milton. He still had the heart of which he had written in early manhood that "it was faithful, fearless, constant, secure in its own adamant though worlds flamed, free from the malice, fears, and hopes of the vulgar, and loyal to all things manly." The painter Richardson gives us one glimpse of him in 1671, with the bookseller Millington leading him by the hand. He is dressed "in a green camblet coat," and no longer wears his small silver-hilted sword. Richardson describes him again as he sat "in a grey coarse cloth at the door of his house near Bunhill Fields in warm sunny weather to enjoy the fresh air." And a little later, an aged Dorsetshire clergyman, Dr. Wright, found him "in a small house, up one pair of stairs, sitting in an elbow-chair, in a room hung with rusty green, in black clothes, and neat enough, pale but not cadaverous, his hands and fingers gouty and with chalk stones." We learn too how courteous, if a little stately, his manner was, and that his voice was still "musically agreeable." The end was not far off. On November 8, 1674, "the gout struck in," and glad to be released he passed

"To where beyond these voices there is peace."