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SAMSON AGONISTES
SAMSON

AGONISTES

EDITED

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

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RIVINGTONS

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INTRODUCTION

ALMOST everything is known about Milton, and Milton is the second greatest poet that England, the land of poets, has produced; but in a little book like this the briefest sketch of the poet's life must suffice.

John Milton was born at his father's shop, the "Spread Eagle," Cheapside, on the 9th of December, 1608.

The father was a scrivener, a sort of solicitor, and had made money; a man of sense, too, and accomplishments, skilled to compose tunes and airs; able and glad to provide good instruction for the son, who was ever grateful for this forethought. In music, we may suppose that Milton, the most musical of England's singing birds, gained much from a father's skill and early care. In the classics, he had as private tutor one Thomas Young, of whose instruction he speaks highly in later life. Young was with him also after he went to St. Paul's School, which was then presided over by that "ingeniose person" Alexander Gill, esteemed the best teacher of the day, notwithstanding, or perhaps to some extent in consequence of, his whipping fits. At sixteen Milton proceeded to Christ's College, Cambridge, where he went through the usual University course, misliking somewhat the lack of enthusiasm and the necessity of performing certain tasks required rather for the employment of the
pupils than for advancement in true learning; known for delicate beauty of life and person, retaining previous friendships and making others, but now as always select in the circle of his acquaintance.

Milton was designed for Holy Orders, and disposed to enter them, but upon maturer consideration learnt "to prefer a blameless silence." So then at the age of twenty-four he retired to "his father's house in the country," at Horton, in Buckinghamshire, with what aim and purpose those will see who read the sonnet written by him "On his being arrived at the age of twenty-three." Fortunately his father was a man of means, able and willing to permit the son to follow his bent.

Milton's working life divides well into three periods, with a brief interlude. First poetical, or Horton period, five years, from 1632-37; interlude of Italian travel, 1638-39; prose period, lightened by glorious sonnets, twenty years, from 1639-60; second, or great poetical period, 1660-71.

The Horton period produced such poems as L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, Comus, and Lycidas—poems themselves perhaps enough to have marked out Milton as the second greatest poet which England had hitherto produced. The poet is young, living a rural life, and L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, and parts at least of Comus, are distinguished by a light delicate touch, a spontaneity and exquisiteness hardly found in later poems; yet they do not lack a certain gravity, to deepen soon into the great spirit of religious and patriotic song, which sinks and swells in the ardent sentiment and haunting music of Lycidas.

I cannot dwell upon the interlude of Italian travel.
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To travel in Italy is still the ambition of generous-minded students, who find there, beneath a bright sun and a blue sky, much of the worth and beauty of a distant past, and of the revival of Art and Science in the Middle Ages. In Milton's time there was the additional charm, that Italy outstripped other countries in knowledge and culture. The best known incident of the tour is the famous interview at Florence with Galileo, "grown old, a prisoner* to the Inquisition for thinking in astronomy otherwise than the Franciscan and Dominican licensers thought;" blind too, as the poet himself one day would be.

Milton had purposed also to see Greece, but civil and religious troubles called him home to spend twenty years in defence of liberty of conscience and action.

His political influence does not seem ever to have been very great, even after he became Latin Secretary to the Committee for Foreign Affairs, in 1649; nor do his later poems show much sign of the influence upon him of the new world with which he was now for so many years to be in daily contact.

The twenty years of prose are chiefly remembered for the autobiographical passages, and for many splendid specimens of style. With important exceptions they are mainly on matters of religious or political controversy, and we are often reminded of what the king said to Dr. Johnson in another reference, "Why truly, when once it comes to calling names, argument is pretty well at an end."

Most poets would here have lost their poetry, but not so Milton, because of the pure and high purpose of his

* In his own house.
life, the daily constant thought, some day, in God's good time, to write a great world poem.

In 1643 Milton married a young girl, daughter of an Oxfordshire squire. The marriage was a failure—neither appreciated the other; and all the poet's view of woman was marred by the misery which he had rashly brought upon his own sensitive, sensuous nature—a nature headstrong too, and severe, and inexperienced in woman's ways, good or bad.

His wife left him, and there were divorce pamphlets, and a return, and submission. Three daughters were the offspring of the union, two at least of whom fared no better than their mother with a father who exacted implicit obedience, and who, with mind fully occupied in great matters, condescended not to small humanities of daily life. Servants, not friends, his elder daughters later on helped to "cheat him in his marketings," even, with incredible hardness of heart, to sell his books, unseen by those dark eyes. There were two subsequent and apparently happier marriages, both after the poet became blind. The second wife is the "espoused saint" of the Sonnet. "She died in childbirth of a daughter, who did not survive her." The third, who long survived her husband, is the "Betty," comforter of his declining years.

When the king came back, in 1660, the poet was in hiding for a time, even for a while in the custody of the serjeant-at-arms, but he escaped, with the loss of £2000 invested in Government securities, and of course the Secretaryship.

The new rulers, however, were not vindictive. Moreover, though Milton had written much against the Royalists,
he had done little, or rather nothing, and his political writings were less important than he had supposed.

And so we come to the second poetical period—the period which produced *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*.

"*Paradise Lost*," says Mr. Mark Pattison, "was composed after fifty, but was conceived at thirty-two." That is, there is in it the vigour and daring conceptions of youth, and the experience, consummate art, and judgment of mature age, united all these to extraordinary sense of high exquisite music, and to a perhaps unequalled capacity for sustained majesty of thought and diction. To read, understand, and appreciate *Paradise Lost* is an education. To speak of it in five or six lines would be an absurdity, or rather a profanity.

As a work of art *Paradise Regained* equals, perhaps surpasses, *Paradise Lost*, but we lack the life, the spacious musing, the "power which is got within me to a passion."

*Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* were published together in one volume in the latter part of the year 1670, or in the year 1671. The Press Act of 1662 revived the censorship of the Press, and the Archbishop of Canterbury was licenser for religious literature. The Archbishop acted by deputy, and *Paradise Lost* had been licensed by his domestic chaplain, the Rev. Thomas Tomkyns, Fellow of All Souls, Oxford; and he too was licenser, on July 2nd, 1670, of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*.

Tomkyns was a zealous Royalist and High Churchman, and tradition has it that various passages in *Paradise Lost* frightened him, especially Book I. 598–9, "and
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with fear of change perplexes monarchs."* Many a passage in *Samson Agonistes* might have frightened him far more, for the tragedy is the life history of Milton’s self, and Milton had been the chief literary critic of kings and churches in the late times. Besides, there were passages in it referring hardly darkly to the present frivolous times and regretting the past, and one passage at least (lines 272–276) which might easily have been thought to refer to Cromwell. Moreover, Milton’s arrest had been ordered after the Restoration, and two of his writings—the *Defensio* and the *Eikonoclastes*—had been directed to be burnt by the hangman.

However, Mr. Tomkyns passed *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*. Why he did so we do not know. A Fellow of All Souls, he was not altogether ignorant of literature, and he may have been somewhat affected by the poems themselves; and then they were by a blind man, of no great political importance even in the past, and still less important now. Besides, as Professor Masson suggests, in the *Samson Agonistes*, the worst offender, Milton had so subtly identified himself with Samson as almost to defy censorship.

Parts of the tragedy of *Samson Agonistes* are rather wearisome. We get tired of Manoa, Harapha seems intrusive and hardly required for the action of the play; but it is when the poet is thinking and writing of himself that he becomes sublime. Samson is Milton. Samson has been betrayed by women, by his countrymen, so too

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* An objection to these words, read with their context, might appear to show a rather shallow and verbal critic, though we must recollect the censor would have to think of the effect on others.
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has Milton. Have not women marred the poet’s home-
life? Has he not trusted that his country would recognise
a great deliverer when he came—a Milton, a Cromwell?
for I am disposed to think that here and there a passage
usually referred to Milton has reference too to Cromwell,
“our chief of men.” Has there not been a splendid
prospect for the nation? and, lo! the land is filled with
fools and harlots, the memory of God and good is lost
in the antics of mimics and dancers, patriotism is but a
name, virtue a very jest. Yet there is a God who does act
for the best. Good shall again triumph; “all is best.”

So then the most splendid passages are those which
are autobiographical; the most scathing satire is that
which refers to the present times. Milton writes best
of the supernatural, that is one reason why Paradise
Regained, whose subject is God as man, Jesus Christ the
Friend of sinners, is inferior to Paradise Lost. Next
best Milton writes of himself. His is the egoism of the
man who is noble and good, and knows that he is noble
and good.

And then Milton cannot be other than a consummate
artist. Many passages in the choruses and elsewhere are
like music. If the words were in an unknown language,
or if merely the sounds were strung together, they would
sound well. Milton, we must never forget, was the most
musical and the most artistic of English poets.

As regards the general construction of the poem, the
poet has set before himself the model of Greek tragedy.
There are to be set speeches, choruses conveying general
reflections, a “circumscription of time”—namely, “twenty-
four hours”—no “trivial or vulgar persons,” or “comic
stuff,” though some may think both the Harapha of
Milton and the *Hercules* of Euripides rather "vulgar," if by no means "comic."

The poet is at pains to explain that act and scene are not required, since the work is not intended for the stage, and it has been supposed that Milton spoke here for Puritan friends, who would be scandalized by the notion of his writing a stage play. Perhaps this is not so, for there seems as much scandal in writing a play as in getting it acted; at least Milton would not wish his play to have mingled with the obscene productions from the facile pens of the Restoration writers.

We may note that the idea of a dramatic composition had long been present to the poet's mind. In Book II. of the *Reason of Church Government urged against Prelaty* (1641), he is in doubt whether the great poem which he is to write shall be epic in form, "or whether those dramatic constitutions, wherein Sophocles and Euripides reign, shall be found more doctrinal and exemplary to a nation."*

The measure of verse used in the chorus is to be of all sorts, and the rhythm to depend upon the "pauses," which a musical ear will find naturally for itself. Regarding this matter of the metre these few hints may be given:

1. The lines in the speeches are usually decasyllabic; but there are half lines of six syllables, lines of eleven syllables, probably some of twelve syllables; where feeling or passion is strong the metre frequently resembles that of the chorus.

2. The feet throughout are the iambus, and sometimes

* The words *doctrinal* and *exemplary* are of importance as marking Milton's conception of tragedy. See his introduction to the poem and the concluding chorus.
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the trochee, as we call them for want of better names;* and there are other feet, to which we may give other names, but it is difficult or impossible to bring them under rule.

3. There are generally one or two pauses in the line, one more often than two. Of these pauses the commonest are after two, two and a half, or three feet.

4. In the choruses the lines have any number of syllables, from four up to twelve, a sort of half-line of six syllables being common, and even numbers being, of course, more common than odd, or the rhythm would be marred by overmuch irregularity.

5. Everything depends on intelligence and some sense of music in the reader, who must endeavour to observe the pauses in the lines, and the pauses in the passages of verse. To this end it is well to read in the spirit of the knight of Woodstock: "Repeat me these verses slowly and deliberately, for I always love to hear poetry twice—the first time for sound, and the latter time for sense."

A word or two may be allowed me about the notes. Here I have had the kind and accomplished assistance of my cousin, Mr. Jerram, of Trinity College, Oxford; though he is not in any way responsible for them. The student of poetry should be taught that notes are comparatively of small importance, that it is all-important to enter into the spirit of the poem. I may perhaps be permitted to quote here a few lines from my Milton syllabus, done for the Oxford University Extension

* For our present purpose, the iambus is simply a two-syllabled foot, with the stress on the second syllable; and the trochee a two-syllabled foot, with the stress on the first syllable.
“Home Reading Circles.” “Read mainly for enjoyment, and you will get profit; yet Milton is difficult, and since a complete appreciation of his poetry is reserved for experience and consummate scholarship, seek help where required.” And an editor may not pick or choose between difficulties; he must explain, if he is honest, all that seems hard to him, and that he can explain. With regard to spelling there need be no question in a little edition like this; yet here and there, for one reason and another, a peculiarity, or what would now be a peculiarity, has been preserved, and once at least (“dismist,” line 1757) I have been guided more by sight than sound, in its particular position “dismist” (the original spelling) seeming to look better than “dismissed.” As a general rule I have followed Professor Masson, who spells as we do at present, save when there is special reason for preserving the forms of the first edition. The title-page of the poem, the introduction to it, and the Argument are printed in the main as in the first edition, for the sake of the contrast of spelling, &c., with that of the present day.

Great attention, too, must be paid to punctuation. In this edition Professor Masson’s pointing has been usually adopted, as proceeding on the most reasonable plan—that of making grammar the guide.

There is no need to be much concerned regarding the pointing of the first edition. Milton was blind, and, moreover, careless about stops. It hardly seems necessary to reverence the punctuation of printers’ compositors. The apostrophe has been inserted only where it would now be employed. Its use was almost arbitrary in Milton’s time. There seems no good in using it, unless
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it is meant to have some effect. And who would read
as it is written such a line as this—

"That led th' imbatell'd Seraphim to Warr,"
or mar the full sonorous effect of that tremendous passage
which describes the opening of Hell gate by the miserable
mutilation in

"Ungast'na: on a sudden op'n fliè"? *

One other work only of Milton's requires notice here—
the posthumous Treatise of Christian Doctrine,† discovered among State papers in 1823; wherein Milton
shows that he believes the Bible to mean what it says.

The poet was now approaching the period of old age,
and we may observe that though not rich yet still his
means were fairly sufficient. It was an inestimable
advantage to Milton and to the world that he never had
to work for his daily bread. Paradise Lost could hardly
have been written by a poor man. He would not have
had time, or mind, enough for it.

Working on almost to the end Milton died quietly of
the gout on the 8th of November, 1674, at the age of
sixty-five years and eleven months. It would be impertin
tent in this little book to attempt to estimate his life
and work. Those who read his poetry with care, to
them surely it will be, as Coleridge said all poetry

* These lines are copied from the first edition of Paradise
Lost. Why should commentators retain the needless apostrophes,
and even insert others—thereby, if the apostrophes are to
have any effect, spoiling sound—yet alter spelling, &c., as
they please?

† For its strange history see Professor Masson's Life, vol. vi.
was to him, "its own exceeding great reward," provided they will not look upon it as a task. But there is one thing in the life and work of Milton which should be emphasised even here, and that is the poet's life-long devotion to one high and holy thought and purpose.

It should surely be encouraging to the student to recollect how through a pure and lovely youth, a turbulent middle age, and an old age of partial sadness and neglect, there was always this purpose before the poet's mind, to do his best for his own honour, for the honour of God, and of his country. It is not permitted to us to be Miltons, even probably to be poets; but if boy or girl, man or woman, live, so far as he or she shall be able, Milton's life, such an one will have something of Milton's reward, the conscience, that is, that he has served his country and his generation, and the reverent admiration of some of those whose opinion is of worth, if not now—then, which is more important, in the years to come.
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A
Dramatic Poem

THE AUTHOR
JOHN MILTON


Τραγῳδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας &c.

Tragœdia est imitatio actionis serie, &c. Per misericordiam
et metum perficiens talium affectuum lustrationem.

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Fleet-street, near Temple-Bar

MDCLXXI
OF THAT SORT OF DRAMATIC POEM

WHICH IS CALL'D

TRAGEDY.

TRAGEDY, as it was antiently composed, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other Poems: therefore said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions; that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, tir'd up by reading or seeing those passions well mitated. Nor is Nature wanting in her own effects to make good his assertion; for so in Physic things of melancholic hue and quality are us'd against melancholy, sorr against sorr, salt to remove salt humours. Hence philosophers and other gravest Writers, as Cicero, Plutarch, and others, frequently cite out of Tragic Poets, both adorn and illustrate their discourse. The Apostle Paul himself thought it not unworthy to insert a verse of Euripides into the Text of Holy Scripture, 1 Cor. 15. 33. and Paræus commenting on the Revelation, divides the hole Book as a Tragedy, into Acts distinguish't each a Chorus of Heavenly Harpings and Song between. Wherefore Men in highest dignity have labour'd not a little to be thought able to compose a Tragedy. Of that
honour Dionysius the elder was no less ambitious, than before of his attaining to the Tyranny. Augustus Caesar also had begun his Ajax, but unable to please his own judgment with what he had begun, left it unfinished. Seneca the Philosopher is by some thought the Author of those Tragedies (at least the best of them) that go under that name. Gregory Nasiansen a Father of the Church thought it not unbeseeing the sanctity of his person to write a Tragedy, which he entitl'd, Christ Suffering. This is mention'd to vindicate Tragedy from the small esteem, or rather infamy, which in the account of many it undergoes at this day with other common Interludes, hap'ning through the Poets error of intermixing Comic stuff with Tragic sadness and gravity; or introducing trivial and vulgar persons, which by all judicious had bin counted absurd; and brought in without discretion corruptly to gratifie the people. And though antient tragedy use no Prologue, yet using sometimes, in case of self-defence, or explanation, that which Martial calls an Epistle; in behalf of this Tragedy coming forth after the antient manner, much different from what among us passes for best, thus much before-hand may be Epistl'd that Chorus is here introduced after the Greek manner, not antient only but modern, and still in use among the Italians. In the modelling therefore of this poem, with good reason, the antients and Italians are rather followed as of much more authority and fame. The measure of Verse used in the Chorus is of all sorts, call'd by the Greeks Monostrophic, or rather Apolelymenon, without regard had to Strophe, Antistrope, or Epod, which were a kind of Stanza's fram'd only for the Music, the us'd with the Chorus that sung; not essential to the
Poem, and therefore not material; or being divided into Stanza's or Pauses, they may be called *Alloestropha*. Division into Act and Scene referring chiefly to the Stage (to which this work never was intended) is here omitted.

It suffices if the whole Drama be found not produc't beyond the fift Act, of the style and uniformitie, and that commonly called the Plot, whether intricate or explicit, which is nothing indeed but such œconomy, or disposition of the fable as may stand best with verisimilitude and decorum; they only will best judge who are not unacquainted with *Æschylus, Sophocles*, and *Euripides*, the three Tragic poets unequall'd yet by any, and the best rule to all who endeavour to write Tragedy. The circumscription of time wherein the whole Drama begins and ends, is according to antient rule, and best example, within the space of 24 hours.
THE ARGUMENT.

SAMSON made Captive, Blind, and now in the Prison of Gaza, there to labour as in a common work-house, on a Festival day, in the general cessation from labour, comes forth into the open Air, to a place nigh, somewhat retir'd there to sit awhile and bemoan his condition. Where he happens at length to be visited by certain friends and equals of his tribe, which make the Chorus, who seek to comfort him what they can; then by his old Father Manoa, who endeavours the like, and withal tells him his purpose to procure his liberty by ransom; lastly, that this Feast was proclaim’d by the Philistins as a day of Thanksgiving for thir deliverance from the hands of Samson, which yet more troubles him. Manoa then departs to prosecute his endeavour with the Philistian lords for Samson's redemption; who in the mean time is visited by other persons; and lastly by a publick Officer to require his coming to the Feast before the Lords and People, to play or shew his strength in thir presence; he at first refuses, dismissing the publick Officer with absolute denial, to come; at length, persuaded inwardly that this was from God, he yields to go along with him, who came now the second time with great threatenings to fetch him; the Chorus yet remaining on the place, Manoa returns full of joyful hope, to procure e’er long his Sons deliverance: in the midst of which discourse an Ebrew comes in haste confusedly at first; and afterwards more distinctly relating the Catastrophe, what Samson had done to the Philistins, and by accident to himself; wherewith the Tragedy ends.
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THE PERSONS.

SAMSON.                  HARAPHA of Gath.
MANOA, the Father of Samson. | Public Officer.
DALILA, his Wife.              Messenger.

Chorus of Danites.

The Scene, before the Prison in Gaza.

SAMSON.

A LITTLE onward lend thy guiding hand
To these dark steps, a little further on;
For yonder bank hath choice of sun or shade:
There I am wont to sit, when any chance
Relieves me from my task of servile toil,
Daily in the common prison else enjoined me,
Where I, a prisoner chained, scarce freely draw
The air, imprisoned also, close and damp,
Unwholesome draught: but here I feel amends—
The breath of heaven fresh blowing, pure and sweet,
With day-spring born; here leave me to respire.
This day a solemn feast the people hold
To Dagon, their sea-idol, and forbid
Laborious works. Unwillingly this rest
Their superstition yields me; hence, with leave
Retiring from the popular noise, I seek
This unfrequented place to find some ease—
Ease to the body some, none to the mind
From restless thoughts, that, like a deadly swarm
Of hornets armed, no sooner found alone,
But rush upon me thronging, and present
Times past, what once I was, and what am now.
O, wherefore was my birth from Heaven foretold
Twice by an Angel, who at last, in sight
Of both my parents, all in flames ascended
From off the altar where an offering burned,
As in a fiery column charioting
His godlike presence, and from some great act,
Or benefit revealed to Abraham's race?
Why was my breeding ordered and prescribed
As of a person separate to God,
Designed for great exploits, if I must die
Betrayed, captivated, and both my eyes put out,
Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze,
To grind in brazen fetters under task
With this heaven-gifted strength? O glorious strength,
Put to the labour of a beast, debased
Lower than bond-slave! Promise was that I
Should Israel from Philistian yoke deliver!
Ask for this great deliverer now, and find him
Eyeless in Gaza, at the mill with slaves,
Himself in bonds under Philistian yoke.
Yet stay; let me not rashly call in doubt
Divine prediction. What if all foretold
Had been fulfilled but through mine own default?
Whom have I to complain of but myself,
Who this high gift of strength committed to me,
In what part lodged, how easily bereft me,
Under the seal of silence could not keep,
But weakly to a woman must reveal it,
O'ercome with importunity and tears?
O impotence of mind in body strong!
But what is strength without a double share
Of wisdom? Vast, unwieldy, burdensome,
Proudly secure, yet liable to fall
By weakest subtleties; not made to rule,
But to subserve where wisdom bears command.
God, when he gave me strength, to show withal
How slight the gift was, hung it in my hair.
But peace! I must not quarrel with the will
Of highest dispensation, which herein
Haply had ends above my reach to know.
Suffices that to me strength is my bane,
And proves the source of all my miseries—
So many, and so huge, that each apart
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Would ask a life to wail. But, chief of all,
O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!
Blind among enemies! O worse than chains,
Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!
Light, the prime work of God, to me is extinct,
And all her various objects of delight
Annulled, which might in part my grief have eased;
Inferior to the vilest now become
Of man or worm, the vilest here excel me:
They creep, yet see; I, dark in light, exposed
To daily fraud, contempt, abuse, and wrong,
Within doors, or without, still as a fool,
In power of others, never in my own—
Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half.
O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse
Without all hope of day!
O first-created beam, and thou great Word,
‘Let there be light, and light was over all,’
Why am I thus bereaved thy prime decree?
The Sun to me is dark
And silent as the Moon,
When she deserts the night,
Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.
Since light so necessary is to life,
And almost life itself, if it be true
That light is in the soul,
She all in every part, why was the sight
To such a tender ball as the eye confined,
So obvious and so easy to be quenched,
And not, as feeling, through all parts diffused,
That she might look at will through every pore?
Then had I not been thus exiled from light,
As in the land of darkness, yet in light,
To live a life half dead, a living death,
And buried; but, O yet more miserable!
Myself my sepulchre, a moving grave;
Buried, yet not exempt,
By privilege of death and burial,
From worst of other evils, pains, and wrongs;
But made hereby obnoxious more
To all the miseries of life,
Life in captivity
Among inhuman foes.
But who are these? for with joint pace I hear
The tread of many feet steering this way;
Perhaps my enemies, who come to stare
At my affliction, and perhaps to insult—
Their daily practice to afflict me more.

CHORUS.

CHORUS. This, this is he; softly a while;
Let us not break in upon him.
O change beyond report, thought, or belief!
See how he lies at random, carelessly diffused,
With languished head unpropt,
As one past hope, abandoned,
And by himself given over,
In slavish habit, ill-fitted weeds
O'er-worn and soiled.
Or do my eyes misrepresent? Can this be he,
That heroic, that renowned,
Irresistible Samson? whom, unarmed,
No strength of man, or fiercest wild beast, could withstand:
Who tore the lion as the lion tears the kid;
Ran on embattled armies clad in iron,
And, weaponless himself,
Made arms ridiculous, useless the forgery
Of brazen shield and spear, the hammered cuirass,
Chalybean-tempered steel, and frock of mail
Adamantine proof:
But safest he who stood aloof,
When insupportably his foot advanced,
In scorn of their proud arms and warlike tools,
Spurned them to death by troops. The bold Ascalonite
Fled from his lion ramp; old warriors turned
Their plated backs under his heel,
Or grovelling soiled their crested helmets in the dust.
Then with what trivial weapon came to hand,
The jaw of a dead ass, his sword of bone,
A thousand foreskins fell, the flower of Palestine,
In Ramath-lechi, famous to this day:
Then by main force pulled up, and on his shoulders bore,
The gates of Azza, post and massy bar,
Up to the hill by Hebron, seat of giants old—
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No journey of a sabbath-day, and loaded so—
Like whom the Gentiles feign to bear up Heaven. 150
Which shall I first bewail—
Thy bondage or lost sight,
Prison within prison,
Inseparably dark?
Thou art become, O worst imprisonment!
The dungeon of thyself; thy soul
(Which men enjoying sight oft without cause complain)
Imprisoned now indeed,
In real darkness of the body dwells,
Shut up from outward light 160
To incorporate with gloomy night;
For inward light, alas!
Puts forth no visual beam.
O mirror of our fickle state,
Since man on earth, unparalleled,
The rarer thy example stands,
By how much from the top of wondrous glory,
Strongest of mortal men,
To lowest pitch of abject fortune thou art fallen.
For him I reckon not in high estate 170
Whom long descent of birth,
Or the sphere of fortune, raises;
But thee, whose strength, while virtue was her mate,
Might have subdued the Earth,
Universally crowned with highest praises.

SAMSON. I hear the sound of words; their sense the air
Dissolves unjointed ere it reach my ear.

CHORUS. He speaks: let us draw nigh. Matchless in
might,
The glory late of Israel, now the grief!
We come, thy friends and neighbours not unknown, 180
From Eshtaol and Zora's fruitful vale,
To visit or bewail thee; or if better,
Counsel or consolation we may bring,
Salve to thy sores; apt words have power to swage
The tumours of a troubled mind,
And are as balm to festered wounds.

SAMSON. Your coming, friends, revives me; for I learn
Now of my own experience, not by talk,
SAMSON AGONISTES.

How counterfeit a coin they are who 'friends'
Bear in their superscription (of the most
I would be understood): in prosperous days
They swarm, but in adverse withdraw their head,
Not to be found, though sought. Ye see, O friends,
How many evils have enclosed me round;
Yet that which was the worst now least afflicts me,
Blindness; for, had I sight, confused with shame,
How could I once look up, or heave the head,
Who, like a foolish pilot, have shipwrecked
My vessel trusted to me from above,
Gloriously rigged, and for a word, a tear,
Fool! have divulged the secret gift of God
To a deceitful woman? Tell me, friends,
Am I not sung and proverb'd for a fool
In every street? Do they not say, 'How well
Are come upon him his deserts'? Yet why?
Immeasurable strength they might behold
In me; of wisdom nothing more than mean.
This with the other should at least have paired;
These two, proportion'd ill, drove me transverse.

CHORUS. Tax not divine disposal. Wisest men
Have erred, and by bad women been deceived;
And shall again, pretend they ne'er so wise.
Deject not, then, so overmuch thyself,
Who hast of sorrow thy full load besides.
Yet, truth to say, I oft have heard men wonder
Why thou should'st wed Philistian women rather
Than of thine own tribe fairer, or as fair,
At least of thy own nation, and as noble.

SAMSON. The first I saw at Timna, and she pleased
Me, not my parents, that I sought to wed
The daughter of an infidel: they knew not
That what I motioned was of God; I knew
From intimate impulse, and therefore urged
The marriage on, that, by occasion hence,
I might begin Israel's deliverance—
The work to which I was divinely called.
She proving false, the next I took to wife
(O that I never had! fond wish too late!)
Was in the vale of Sorec, Dalila,
That specious monster, my accomplished snare.
SAMSON AGONISTFS.

I thought it lawful from my former act,
And the same end, still watching to oppress
Israel's oppressors. Of what now I suffer
She was not the prime cause, but I myself,
Who, vanquished with a peal of words, (O weakness!)
Gave up my fort of silence to a woman.

CHORUS. In seeking just occasion to provoke
The Philistine, thy country's enemy,
Thou never wast remiss, I bear thee witness;
Yet Israel still serves with all his sons.

SAMSON. That fault I take not on me, but transfer
On Israel's governors and heads of tribes,
Who, seeing those great acts which God had done
Singly by me against their conquerors,
Acknowledged not, or not at all considered,
Deliverance offered. I, on the other side,
Used no ambition to commend my deeds;
The deeds themselves, though mute, spoke loud the doer.
But they persisted deaf, and would not seem
To count them things worth notice, till at length
Their lords, the Philistines, with gathered powers,
Entered Judea, seeking me, who then
Safe to the rock of Etham was retired—
Not flying, but forecasting in what place
To set upon them, what advantaged best.
Meanwhile the men of Judah, to prevent
The harass of their land, beset me round;
I willingly on some conditions came
Into their hands, and they as gladly yield me
To the Uncircumcised a welcome prey,
Bound with two cords; but cords to me were threads
Touched with the flame: on their whole host I flew
Unarmed, and with a trivial weapon felled
Their choicest youth; they only lived who fled.
Had Judah that day joined, or one whole tribe,
They had by this possessed the towers of Gath,
And lorded over them whom now they serve.
But what more oft, in nations grown corrupt,
And by their vices brought to servitude,
Than to love bondage more than liberty—
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty—
And to despise, or envy, or suspect,
SAMSON AGONISTES.

Whom God hath of his special favour raised
As their deliverer? If he aught begin,
How frequent to desert him, and at last
To heap ingratitude on worthiest deeds!

CHORUS. Thy words to my remembrance bring
How Succoth and the fort of Penuel
Their great deliverer contemned,
The matchless Gideon, in pursuit
Of Madian, and her vanquished kings;
And how ingrateful Ephraim
Had dealt with Jephtha, who by argument,
Not worse than by his shield and spear,
Defended Israel from the Ammonite,
Had not his prowess quelled their pride
In that sore battle when so many died
Without reprieve, adjudged to death
For want of well pronouncing Shibboleth.

SAMSON. Of such examples add me to the roll,
Me easily indeed mine may neglect,
But God’s proposed deliverance not so.

CHORUS. Just are the ways of God,
And justifiable to men,
Unless there be who think not God at all:
If any be, they walk obscure;
For of such doctrine never was there school,
But the heart of the fool,
And no man therein doctor but himself.
Yet more there be who doubt his ways not just,
As to his own edicts found contradicting;
Then give the reins to wandering thought,
Regardless of his glory’s diminution,
Till, by their own perplexities involved,
They ravel more, still less resolved,
But never find self-satisfying solution.
As if they would confine the Interminable,
And tie him to his own prescript,
Who made our laws to bind us, not himself,
And have full right to exempt
Whomso it pleases him by choice
From national obstruction, without taint
Of sin, or legal debt;
SAMSON AGONISTES.

For with his own laws he can best dispense.
He would not else, who never wanted means,
Nor in respect of the enemy just cause,
To set his people free,
Have prompted this heroic Nazarite,
Against his vow of strictest purity,
To seek in marriage that fallacious bride,
Unclean, unchaste.

Down, Reason, then; at least, vain reasonings down;
Though Reason here aver
That moral verdict quits her of unclean:
Unchaste was subsequent; her stain, not his,
But see! here comes thy reverend sire,
With careful step, locks white as down,
Old Manoa: advise
Forthwith how thou ought'st to receive him.

SAMSON. Ay me! another inward grief, awaked
With mention of that name, renews the assault.

MANOA.

MANOA. Brethren and men of Dan (for such ye seem,
Though in this uncouth place), if old respect,
As I suppose, towards your once gloried friend,
My son, now captive, hither hath informed
Your younger feet, while mine, cast back with age,
Came lagging after, say if he be here.

CHORUS. As signal now in low dejected state
As erst in highest, behold him where he lies.

MANOA. O miserable change! Is this the man,
That invincible Samson, far renowned,
The dread of Israel's foes, who with a strength
Equivalent to Angels' walked their streets,
None offering fight; who, single combatant,
Duelled their armies ranked in proud array,
Himself an army—now unequal match
To save himself against a coward armed
At one spear's length? O ever-failing trust
In mortal strength! and, oh, what not in man
Deceivable and vain? Nay, what thing good
Prayed for, but often proves our woe, our bane?
I prayed for children, and thought barrenness
In wedlock a reproach; I gained a son,
And such a son as all men hailed me happy:
Who would be now a father in my stead?
O, wherefore did God grant me my request,
And as a blessing with such pomp adorned?
Why are his gifts desirable, to tempt
Our earnest prayers, then, given with solemn hand
As graces, draw a scorpion's tail behind?
For this did the Angel twice descend? for this
Ordained thy nurture holy, as of a plant
Select and sacred? glorious for a while,
The miracle of men; then in an hour
Ensnared, assaulted, overcome, led bound,
Thy foes' derision, captive, poor and blind,
Into a dungeon thrust, to work with slaves!
Alas! methinks whom God hath chosen once
To worthiest deeds, if he through frailty err,
He should not so o'erwhelm, and as a thrall
Subject him to so foul indignities,
Be it but for honour's sake of former deeds.

SAMSON. Appoint not heavenly disposition, father.
Nothing of all these evils hath befallen me
But justly; I myself have brought them on;
Sole author I, sole cause. If aught seem vile,
As vile hath been my folly, who have profaned
The mystery of God, given me under pledge
Of vow, and have betrayed it to a woman,
A Canaanite, my faithless enemy.
This well I knew, nor was at all surprised,
But warned by oft experience. Did not she
Of Timna first betray me, and reveal
The secret wrested from me in her highth
Of nuptial love professed, carrying it straight
To them who had corrupted her, my spies
And rivals? In this other was there found
More faith, who, also in her prime of love,
Spousal embraces, vitiated with gold,
Though offered only, by the scent conceived,
Her spurious first-born, Treason against me?
Thrice she assayed, with flattering prayers and sighs,
And amorous reproaches, to win from me
My capital secret, in what part my strength
Lay stored, in what part summed, that she might know:
Thrice I deluded her, and turned to sport
Her importunity, each time perceiving
How openly and with what impudence
She purposed to betray me, and (which was worse
Than undissembled hate) with what contempt
She sought to make me traitor to myself.
Yet, the fourth time, when, mustering all her wiles,
With blandished parleys, feminine assaults,
Tongue-batteries, she surceased not day nor night
To storm me, over-watched and wearied out,
At times when men seek most repose and rest,
I yielded, and unlocked her all my heart;
Who, with a grain of manhood well resolved;
Might easily have shook off all her snares:
But soul effeminacy held me yoked
Her bond-slave. O indignity, O blot
To honour and religion! servile mind
Rewarded well with servile punishment!
The base degree to which I now am fallen,
These rags, this grinding, is not yet so base
As was my former servitude, ignoble,
Unmanly, ignominious, infamous,
True slavery; and that blindness worse than this,
That saw not how degenerately I served.

MANOA. I cannot praise thy marriage-choices, son—
Rather approved them not; but thou didst plead
Divine impulsion prompting how thou might'st
Find some occasion to infest our foes.
I state not that: this I am sure; our foes
Found soon occasion thereby to make thee
Their captive, and their triumph; thou the sooner
E'ntemptation found'st, or over-potent charms,
To violate the sacred trust of silence
Deposited within thee; which to have kept
Tact was in thy power: true, and thou bear'st
Enough, and more, the burden of that fault;
Bitterly hast thou paid, and still art paying,
That rigid score. A worse thing yet remains:
This day the Philistines a popular feast
Here celebrate in Gaza, and proclaim
Great pomp, and sacrifice, and praises loud,
To Dagon, as their god who hath delivered
Thee, Samson, bound and blind, into their hands,
Them out of thine, who slew'st them many a slain.
So Dagon shall be magnified, and God,
Besides whom is no god, compared with idols,
Disglorified, blasphemed, and had in scorn
By the idolatrous rout amidst their wine;
Which to have come to pass by means of thee,
Samson, of all thy sufferings think the heaviest,
Of all reproach the most with shame that ever
Could have befallen thee and thy father's house.

SAMSON. Father, I do acknowledge and confess
That I this honour, I this pomp, have brought
To Dagon, and advanced his praises high
Among the Heathen round—to God have brought
Dishonour, obloquy, and oped the mouths
Of idolists and atheists; have brought scandal
To Israel, diffidence of God, and doubt
In feeble hearts, propense enough before
To waver, or fall off and join with idols:
Which is my chief affliction, shame and sorrow,
The anguish of my soul, that suffers not
Mine eye to harbour sleep, or thoughts to rest.
This only hope relieves me, that the strife
With me hath end. All the contest is now
'Twixt God and Dagon. Dagon hath presumed,
Me overthrown, to enter lists with God,
His deity comparing and preferring
Before the God of Abraham. He, be sure,
Will not connive, or linger, thus provoked,
But will arise, and his great name assert.
Dagon must stoop, and shall ere long receive
Such a discomfit as shall quite despoil him
Of all these boasted trophies won on me,
And with confusion blank his worshippers.

MANOAH. With cause this hope relieves thee; and these
I as a prophecy receive; for God,
Nothing more certain, will not long defer
To vindicate the glory of his name
Against all competition, nor will long
Endure it doubtful whether God be Lord
Or Dagon. But for thee what shall be done?
SAMSON AGONISTES.

Thou must not in the meanwhile, here forgot,
Lie in this miserable loathsome plight
Neglected. I already have made way
To some Philistian lords, with whom to treat
About thy ransom: well they may by this
Have satisfied their utmost of revenge,
By pains and slaveries, worse than death, inflicted
On thee, who now no more canst do them harm.

SAMSON. Spare that proposal, father; spare the trouble
Of that solicitation. Let me here,
As I deserve, pay on my punishment,
And expiate, if possible, my crime,
Shameful garrulity. To have revealed
Secrets of men, the secrets of a friend,
How heinous had the fact been, how deserving
Contempt and scorn of all—to be excluded
All friendship, and avoided as a blab,
The mark of fool set on his front!
But I God's counsel have not kept, his holy secret
Presumptuously have published, impiously,
Weakly at least and shamefully—a sin
That Gentiles in their parables condemn
To their Abyss and horrid pains confined.

MANOAH. Be penitent, and for thy fault contrite;
But act not in thy own affliction, son.
Repent the sin; but, if the punishment
Thou canst avoid, self-preservation bids;
Or the execution leave to high disposal,
And let another hand, not thine, exact
Thy penal forfeit from thyself. Perhaps
God will relent, and quit thee all his debt;
Who ever more approves and more accepts
Best pleased with humble and filial submission)
Him who, imploring mercy, sues for life,
Than who, self-rigorous, chooses death as due;
Which argues over-just, and self-displeased
For self-offence more than for God offended.
Reject not, then, what offered means who knows
But God hath set before us, to return thee
Home to thy country and his sacred house,
Where thou may'st bring thy offerings, to avert
His further ire, with prayers and vows renewed.
SAMSON AGONISTES.

SAMSON. His pardon I implore; but, as for life,
To what end should I seek it? When in strength
All mortals I excelled, and great in hopes,
With youthful courage, and magnanimous thoughts
Of birth from Heaven foretold and high exploits,
Full of divine instinct, after some proof
Of acts indeed heroic, far beyond
The sons of Anak, famous now and blazed,
Fearless of danger, like a petty god
I walked about, admired of all, and dreaded,
On hostile ground, none daring my affront.
Then, swollen with pride, into the snare I fell
Of fair fallacious looks, venereal trains,
Softened with pleasure and voluptuous life,
At length to lay my head and hallowed pledge
Of all my strength in the lascivious lap
Of a deceitful concubine, who shore me,
Like a tame wether, all my precious fleece,
Then turned me out ridiculous, despoiled,
Shaven, and disarmed among my enemies.

CHORUS. Desire of wine and all delicious drinks,
Which many a famous warrior overturns,
Thou could'st repress; nor did the dancing ruby,
Sparkling out-poured, the flavour or the smell,
Or taste, that cheers the heart of gods and men,
Allure thee from the cool crystalline stream.

SAMSON. Wherever fountain or fresh current flowed
Against the eastern ray, translucent, pure,
With touch ethereal of Heaven's fiery rod,
I drank, from the clear milky juice allaying
Thirst; and refreshed; nor envied them the grape
Whose heads that turbulent liquor fills with fumes.

CHORUS. O madness! to think use of strongest wines
And strongest drinks our chief support of health,
When God with these forbidden made choice to rear
His mighty champion, strong above compare,
Whose drink was only from the liquid brook!

SAMSON. But what availed this temperance, not complet
Against another object more enticing?
What boots it at one gate to make defence,
And at another to let in the foe—
Effeminately vanquished? by which means,
Now blind, disheartened, shamed, dishonoured, quelled,
To what can I be useful? wherein serve
My nation, and the work from Heaven imposed?
But to sit idle on the household hearth,
A burdensome drone; to visitants a gaze,
Or pitied object; these redundant locks,
Robustious to no purpose, clustering down,
Vain monument of strength; till length of years
And sedentary numbness craze my limbs
To a contemptible old age obscure.
Here rather let me drudge, and earn my bread;
Till vermin, or the draf of servile food,
Consume me, and oft-invoked death
Hasten the welcome end of all my pains.

MANOA. Wilt thou then serve the Philistines with that gift
Which was expressly given thee to annoy them?
Better at home lie bed-rid, not only idle,
Inglorious, unemployed, with age outworn.
But God, who caused a fountain at thy prayer
From the dry ground to spring, thy thirst to allay
After the brunt of battle, can as easy
Cause light again within thy eyes to spring,
Wherewith to serve him better than thou hast.
And I persuade me so. Why else this strength
Miraculous yet remaining in those locks?
His might continues in thee not for naught,
Nor shall his wondrous gifts be frustrate thus.

SAMSON. All otherwise to me my thoughts portend—
That these dark orbs no more shall treat with light,
Nor the other light of life continue long;
But yield to double darkness nigh at hand;
So much I feel my genial spirits droop,
My hopes all flat: Nature within me seems
In all her functions weary of herself;
My race of glory run, and race of shame,
And I shall shortly be with them that rest.

MANOA. Believe not these suggestions, which proceed
From anguish of the mind, and humours black
That mingle with thy fancy. I, however,
Must not omit a father's timely care
To prosecute the means of thy deliverance
By ransom or how else: meanwhile be calm,
And healing words from these thy friends admit.

SAMSON. O, that torment should not be confined
To the body’s wounds and sores,
With maladies innumerable
In heart, head, breast, and reins,
But must secret passage find
To the inmost mind,
There exercise all his fierce accidents,
And on her purest spirits prey,
As on entrails, joints, and limbs,
With answerable pains, but more intense,
Though void of corporal sense!
My griefs not only pain me
As a lingering disease,
But, finding no redress, ferment and rage;
Nor less than wounds immedicable
Rankle, and fester, and gangrene,
To black mortification.
Thoughts, my tormentors, armed with deadly stings,
Mangle my apprehensive tenderest parts,
Exasperate, exulcerate, and raise
Dire inflammation, which no cooling herb
Or medicinal liquor can assuage,
Nor breath of vernal air from snowy Alp.
Sleep hath forsook and given me o’er
To death’s benumbing opium as my only cure;
Thence faintings, swoonings of despair,
And sense of Heaven’s desertion.
I was his nursling once and choice delight,
His destined from the womb,
Promised by heavenly message twice descending.
Under his special eye
Abstemious I grew up and thrived amain;
He led me on to mightiest deeds,
Above the nerve of mortal arm,
Against the Uncircumcised, our enemies:
But now hath cast me off as never known,
And to those cruel enemies,
Whom I by his appointment had provoked,
Left me all helpless, with the irreparable loss
SAMSON AGONISTES.

Of sight, reserved alive to be repeated
The subject of their cruelty or scorn.
Nor am I in the list of them that hope;
Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless.
This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard,
No long petition—speedy death,
The close of all my miseries and the balm.

CHORUS. Many are the sayings of the wise,
In ancient and in modern books enrolled,
Extolling patience as the truest fortitude,
And to the bearing well of all calamities,
All chances incident to man's frail life,
Consolatories writ
With studied argument, and much persuasion sought,
Lenient of grief and anxious thought:
But with the afflicted in his pangs their sound
Little prevails, or rather seems a tune
Harsh, and of dissonant mood—from his complaint,
Unless he feel within
Some source of consolation from above,
Secret refreshings that repair his strength
And fainting spirits uphold.

God of our fathers! what is Man,
That thou towards him with hand so various—
Or might I say contrarious?—
Temper'st thy providence through his short course;
Not evenly, as thou rul'st
The angelic orders, and inferior creatures mute,
Irrational and brute?
Nor do I name of men the common rout,
That, wandering loose about,
Grow up and perish as the summer fly,
Heads without name, no more remembered;
But such as thou hast solemnly elected,
With gifts and graces eminently adorned,
To some great work, thy glory,
And people's safety, which in part they effect:
Yet toward these, thus dignified, thou oft,
Amidst their hight of noon,
Changest thy countenance and thy hand, with no regard
Of highest favours past
From thee on them, or them to thee of service.
SAMSON AGONISTES.

Nor only dost degrade them, or remit
To life obscured, which were a fair dismissal,
But throw'st them lower than thou didst exalt them high—
Unseemly falls in human eye,
Too grievous for the trespass or omission;
Oft leav'st them to the hostile sword
Of heathen and profane, their carcasses
To dogs and fowls a prey, or else captivated,
Or to the unjust tribunals, under change of times,
And condemnation of the ingrateful multitude.
If these they scape, perhaps in poverty
With sickness and disease thou bow'st them down,
Painful diseases and deformed,
In crude old age;
Though not disordinate, yet causeless suffering
The punishment of dissolute days. In fine,
Just or unjust alike seem miserable,
For oft alike both come to evil end.
So deal not with this once thy glorious champion,
The image of thy strength, and mighty minister.
What do I beg? how hast thou dealt already!
Behold him in this state calamitous, and turn
His labours, for thou canst, to peaceful end.
But who is this? what thing of sea or land—
Female of sex it seems—
That, so bedecked, ornate, and gay,
Comes this way sailing,
Like a stately ship
Of Tarsus, bound for the isles
Of Javan or Gadire,
With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,
Sails filled, and streamers waving,
Courted by all the winds that hold them play;
An amber scent of odorous perfume
Her harbinger, a damsel train behind?
Some rich Philistian matron she may seem;
And now, at nearer view, no other certain
Than Dalila thy wife.

SAMSON. My wife! my traitress! let her not come near me.

CHORUS. Yet on she moves; now stands and eyes thee
About to have spoke; but now, with head declined, [fixed,
Like a fair flower surcharged with dew, she weeps,
SAMSON AGONISTES.

And words addressed seem into tears dissolved,
Wetting the borders of her silken veil.
But now again she makes address to speak.

DALILA.

DALILA. With doubtful feet and wavering resolution
I came, still dreading thy displeasure, Samson;
Which to have merited, without excuse,
I cannot but acknowledge. Yet, if tears
May expiate (though the fact more evil drew
In the perverse event than I foresaw),
My penance hath not slackened, though my pardon
No way assured. But conjugal affection,
Prevailing over fear and timorous doubt,
Hath led me on, desirous to behold
Once more thy face, and know of thy estate,
If aught in my ability may serve
To lighten what thou suffer’st, and appease
Thy mind with what amends is in my power—
Though late, yet in some part to recompense
My rash, but more unfortunate, misdeed.

SAMSON. Out, out, hyæna! These are thy wonted arts,
And arts of every woman false like thee,
To break all faith, all vows, deceive, betray;
Then, as repentant, to submit, beseech,
And reconcilement move with feigned remorse,
Confess, and promise wonders in her change—
Not truly penitent, but chief to try
Her husband, how far urged his patience bears,
His virtue or weakness which way to assail:
Then, with more cautious and instructed skill,
Again transgresses, and again submits;
That wisest and best men, full oft beguiled,
With goodness principled not to reject
The Penitent, but ever to forgive,
Are drawn to wear out miserable days,
Entangled with a poisonous bosom-snake,
If not by quick destruction soon cut off,
As I by thee, to ages an example.

DALILA. Yet hear me, Samson; not that I endeavour
To lessen or extenuate my offence,
But that, on the other side, if it be weighed
By itself, with aggravations not surcharged,
Or else with just allowance counterpoised,
I may, if possible, thy pardon find
The easier towards me, or thy hatred less.
First granting, as I do, it was a weakness
In me, but incident to all our sex,
Curiosity, inquisitive, importune
Of secrets, then with like infirmity
To publish them—both common female faults—
Was it not weakness also to make known
For importunity, that is for naught,
Wherein consisted all thy strength and safety?
To what I did thou show'dst me first the way;
But I to enemies revealed, and should not!
Nor should'st thou have trusted that to woman's frailty:
Ere I to thee, thou to thyself wast cruel.
Let weakness, then, with weakness come to parle,
So near related, or the same of kind;
Thine forgive mine, that men may censure thine
The gentler, if severely thou exact not
More strength from me than in thyself was found.
And what if love, which thou interpret'st hate,
The jealousy of love, powerful of sway
In human hearts, nor less in mine towards thee,
Caused what I did? I saw thee mutable
Of fancy; feared lest one day thou would'st leave me
As her at Timna; sought by all means, therefore,
How to endear, and hold thee to me firmest:
No better way I saw then by importuning
To learn thy secrets, get into my power
Thy key of strength and safety. Thou wilt say,
'Why, then, revealed?' I was assured by those
Who tempted me that nothing was designed
Against thee but safe custody and hold.
That made for me; I knew that liberty
Would draw thee forth to perilous enterprises,
While I at home sat full of cares and fears,
Wailing thy absence in my widowed bed;
Here I should still enjoy thee, day and night,
Mine and love's prisoner, not the Philistines',
Whole to myself, unhaunted abroad,
Fearless at home of partners in my love.
SAMSON AGONISTES.

These reasons in Love's law have passed for good,
Though fond and reasonless to some perhaps;
And love hath oft, well meaning, wrought much woe,
Yet always pity or pardon hath obtained.
Be not unlike all others, not austere
As thou art strong, inflexible as steel.
If thou in strength all mortals doth exceed,
In uncompassionate anger do not so.

SAMSON. How cunningly the sorceress displays
Her own transgressions, to upbraid mine!
That malice, not repentance, brought thee hither
By this appears. I gave, thou say'st, the example,
I led the way—bitter reproach, but true;
I to myself was false ere thou to me.
Such pardon, therefore, as I give my folly
Take to thy wicked deed; which when thou seest
Impartial, self-severe, inexorable,
Thou wilt renounce thy seeking, and much rather
Confess it feigned. Weakness is thy excuse,
And I believe it—weakness to resist
Philistian gold. If weakness may excuse,
What murtherer, what traitor, parricide,
Incestuous, sacrilegious, but may plead it?
All wickedness is weakness: that plea, therefore,
With God or man will gain thee no remission.
But love constrained thee! Call it furious rage
To satisfy thy lust. Love seeks to have love;
My love how could'st thou hope, who took'st the way
To raise in me inexpiable hate,
Knowing, as needs I must, by thee betrayed?
In vain thou striv'st to cover shame with shame,
Or by evasions thy crime uncover'st more.

DALILA. Since thou determin'st weakness for no plea
In man or woman, though to thy own condemning,
Hear what assaults I had, what snares besides,
What sieges girt me round, ere I consented;
Which might have awed the best-resolved of men,
The constantest, to have yielded without blame.
It was not gold, as to my charge thou lay'st,
That wrought with me. Thou know'st the magistrates
And princes of my country came in person,
Solicited, commanded, threatened, urged,
Adjured by all the bonds of civil duty,
And of religion—pressed how just it was,
How honourable, how glorious, to entrap
A common enemy, who had destroyed
Such numbers of our nation: and the priest
Was not behind, but ever at my ear,
Preaching how meritorious with the gods
It would be to ensnare an irreligious
Dishonourer of Dagon. What had I
To oppose against such powerful arguments?
Only my love of thee held long debate,
And combated in silence all these reasons
With hard contest. At length, that grounded maxim,
So rife and celebrated in the mouths
Of wisest men, that to the public good
Private respects must yield, with grave authority
Took full possession of me, and prevailed;
Virtue, as I thought; truth, duty, so enjoining.

SAMSON. I thought where all thy circling wiles would end;
In feigned religion, smooth hypocrisy!
But, had thy love, still odiously pretended,
Been, as it ought, sincere, it would have taught thee
Far other reasonings, brought forth other deeds.
I, before all the daughters of my tribe
And of my nation, chose thee from among
My enemies, loved thee, as too well thou knew'st,
Too well; unbosomed all my secrets to thee,
Not out of levity, but overpowered
By thy request, who could deny thee nothing;
Yet now am judged an enemy. Why, then,
Didst thou at first receive me for thy husband—
Then, as since then, thy country's foe professed?
Being once a wife, for me thou wast to leave
Parents and country; nor was I their subject,
Nor under their protection, but my own;
Thou mine, not theirs. If aught against my life
Thy country sought of thee, it sought unjustly,
Against the law of nature, law of nations;
No more thy country, but an impious crew
Of men conspiring to uphold their state
By worse than hostile deeds, violating the ends
For which “our country” is a name so dear—
SAMSON AGONISTES.

Not therefore to be obeyed. But zeal moved thee;  
To please thy gods thou didst it! Gods unable  
To acquit themselves and prosecute their foes  
But by ungodly deeds, the contradiction  
Of their own deity, Gods cannot be—  
Less therefore to be pleased, obeyed, or feared.  
These false pretexts and varnished colours failing,  
Bare in thy guilt, how foul must thou appear!

DALILA. In argument with men a woman ever  
Goes by the worse, whatever be her cause.

SAMSON. For want of words, no doubt, or lack of breath!  
Witness when I was worried with thy peals.

DALILA. I was a fool, too rash, and quite mistaken  
In what I thought would have succeeded best.  
Let me obtain forgiveness of thee, Samson;  
Afford me place to show what recompense  
Towards thee I intend for what I have misdone  
Misguided. Only what remains past cure  
Bear not too sensibly, nor still insist  
To affict thyself in vain. Though sight be lost,  
Life yet hath many solaces, enjoyed  
Where other senses want not their delights—  
At home, in leisure and domestic ease,  
Exempt from many a care and chance to which  
Eyesight exposes daily men abroad.  
I to the lords will intercede, not doubting  
Their favourable ear, that I may fetch thee  
From forth this loathsome prison-house, to abide  
With me, where my redoubled love and care,  
With nursing diligence, to me glad office,  
May ever tend about thee to old age,  
With all things grateful cheered, and so supplied  
That what by me thou hast lost thou least shalt miss.

SAMSON. No, no; of my condition take no care;  
It fits not; thou and I long since are twain;  
Nor think me so unwary or accursed  
To bring my feet again into the snare  
Where once I have been caught. I know thy trains,  
Though dearly to my cost, thy gins, and toils.  
Thy fair enchanted cup, and warbling charms,  
No more on me have power; their force is nulled.
So much of adder's wisdom I have learned,
To fence my ear against thy sorceries.
If in my flower of youth and strength, when all men
Loved, honoured, feared me, thou alone could hate me,
Thy husband, slight me, sell me, and forego me,
How would'st thou use me now, blind, and thereby
Deceivable, in most things as a child.
Helpless, thence easily contemned and scorned,
And last neglected! How would'st thou insult,
When I must live uxorious to thy will
In perfect thraldom! how again betray me,
Bearing my words and doings to the lords
To gloss upon, and censuring frown or smile!
This jail I count the house of liberty
To thine, whose doors my feet shall never enter.

DALILA. Let me approach at least, and touch thy hand.

SAMSON. Not for thy life! Lest fierce remembrance
My sudden rage to tear thee joint by joint. [wakes
At distance I forgive thee; go with that;
Bewail thy falsehood, and the pious works
It hath brought forth to make thee memorable
Among illustrious women, faithful wives;
Cherish thy hastened widowhood with the gold
Of matrimonial treason: so—farewell.

DALILA. I see thou art implacable; more deaf
To prayers than winds and sea. Yet winds to seas
Are reconciled at length, and sea to shore:
Thy anger, unappeasable, still rages,
Eternal tempest never to be calmed.
Why do I humble thus myself, and, suing
For peace, reap nothing but repulse and hate,
Bid go with evil omen, and the brand
Of infamy upon my name denounced?
To mix with thy concernments I desist
Henceforth, nor too much disapprove my own.
Fame, if not double-faced, is double-mouthed,
And with contrary blast proclaims most deeds;
On both his wings, one black, the other white,
Bears greatest names in his wild aery flight.
My name, perhaps, among the Circumcised—
In Dan, in Judah, and the bordering tribes,
SAMSON AGONISTES.

To all posterity may stand defamed,
With malediction mentioned, and the blot
Of falsehood most unconjugal traduced.
But in my country, where I most desire,
In Ecron, Gaza, Asdod, and in Gath,
I shall be named among the famousest
Of women, sung at solemn festivals,
Living and dead recorded, who, to save
Her country from a fierce destroyer, chose
Above the faith of wedlock bands; my tomb
With odours visited and annual flowers—
Not less renowned than in Mount Ephraim
Jael, who, with inhospitable guile,
Smote Sisera sleeping, through the temples nailed.
Nor shall I count it heinous to enjoy
The public marks of honour and reward
Conferr’d upon me for the piety
Which to my country I was judged to have shown.
At this whoever envies or repines,
I leave him to his lot, and like my own.

CHORUS. She’s gone—a manifest serpent by her sting
Discovered in the end, till now concealed.

SAMSON. So let her go. God sent her to debase me,
And aggravate my folly, who committed
To such a viper his most sacred trust
Of secrecy, my safety, and my life.

CHORUS. Yet beauty, though injurious, hath strange
After offence returning, to regain
Love once possessed, nor can be easily
Repulsed, without much inward passion felt,
And secret sting of amorous remorse.

SAMSON. Love-quarrels oft in pleasing concord end;
Not wedlock-treachery endangering life.

CHORUS. It is not virtue, wisdom, valour, wit,
Strength, comeliness of shape, or amallest merit,
That woman’s love can win, or long inherit;
But what it is, hard is to say,
Harder to hit,
Which way soever men refer it,
(Much like thy riddle, Samson) in one day
Or seven though one should musing sit.
If any of these, or all, the Timnian bride
Had not so soon preferred
Thy paranymp, worthless to thee compared,
Successor in thy bed,
Nor both so loosely disallied
Their nuptials, nor this last so treacherously
Had shorn the fatal harvest of thy head.
Is it for that such outward ornament
Was lavished on their sex, that inward gifts
Were left for haste unfinished, judgment scant,
Capacity not raised to apprehend
Or value what is best
In choice, but oftest to affect the wrong?
Or was too much of self-love mixed,
Of constancy no root infixed,
That either they love nothing—or not long?
Whate'er it be, to wisest men and best
Seeming at first all heavenly under virgin veil,
Soft, modest, meek, demure—
Once joined, the contrary she proves, a thorn
Intestine, far within defensive arms
A cleaving mischief, in his way to virtue
Adverse and turbulent; or by her charms
Draws him awry, enslaved
With dotage, and his sense depraved
To folly and shameful deeds, which ruin ends.
What pilot so expert but needs must wreck,
Embarked with such a steers-mate at the helm?
Favoured of Heaven who finds
One virtuous, rarely found,
That in domestic good combines!
Happy that house! his way to peace is smooth:
But virtue which breaks through all opposition,
And all temptation can remove,
Most shines, and most is acceptable above.
Therefore God's universal law
Gave to the man despotic power
Over his female in due awe,
Nor from that right to part an hour,
Smile she or lour:
So shall he least confusion draw
On his whole life, not swayed
By female usurpation, nor dismayed.
SAMSON AGONISTES.

But had we best retire? I see a storm.

SAMSON. Fair days have oft contracted wind and rain.

CHORUS. But this another kind of tempest brings.

SAMSON. Be less abstruse; my riddling days are past.

CHORUS. Look now for no enchanting voice, nor fear
The bait of honeyed words; a rougher tongue
Draws hitherward; I know him by his stride,
The giant Harapha of Gath, his look
Haughty, as is his pile high-built and proud.
Comes he in peace? What wind hath blown him hither
I less conjecture than when first I saw
The sumptuous Dalila floating this way:
His habit carries peace, his brow defiance.

SAMSON. Or peace or not, alike to me he comes.

CHORUS. His fraught we soon shall know; he now arrives.

HARAPHA.

HARAPHA. I come not, Samson, to condole thy chance,
As these perhaps, yet wish it had not been,
Though for no friendly intent. I am of Gath;
Men call me Harapha, of stock renowned
As Og, or Anak, and the Emims old
That Kiriathaim held. Thou know’st me now,
If thou at all are known. Much I have heard
Of thy prodigious might and feats performed,
Incredible to me, in this displeased,
That I was never present on the place
Of those encounters, where we might have tried
Each other’s force in camp or listed field;
And now am come to see of whom such noise
Hath walked about, and each limb to survey,
If thy appearance answer loud report.

SAMSON. The way to know were not to see, but taste.

HARAPHA. Dost thou already single me? I thought,
Syves and the mill had tamed thee. O that fortune
Had brought me to the field where thou art famed
To have wrought such wonders with an ass’s jaw!
I should have forced thee soon wish other arms,
Or left thy carcass where the ass lay thrown;
So had the glory of prowess been recovered
To Palestine, won by a Philistine
From the unforeskinned race, of whom thou bear'st
The highest name for valiant acts. That honour,
Certain to have won by mortal duel from thee,
I lose, prevented by thy eyes put out.

SAMSON. Boast not of what thou would'st have done, but what then thou would'st; thou seest it in thy hand.

HARAPHA. To combat with a blind man I disdain,
And thou hast need much washing to be touched.

SAMSON. Such usage as your honourable lords
Afford me, assassinated and betrayed;
Who durst not with their whole united powers
In fight withstand me single and unarmed,
Nor in the house with chamber-ambushes
Close-banded durst attack me, no, not sleeping,
Till they had hired a woman with their gold,
Breaking her marriage-faith, to circumvent me.
Therefore, without feign'd shifts, let be assigned
Some narrow place enclosed, where sight may give thee
Or rather flight, no great advantage on me;
Then put on all thy gorgeous arms, thy helmet
And brigandine of brass, thy broad habergeon,
Vant-brace and greaves and gauntlet; add thy spear,
A weaver's beam, and seven-times-folded shield;
I only with an oaken staff will meet thee,
And raise such outcries on thy clattered iron,
Which long shall not withhold me from thy head,
That in a little time, while breath remains thee,
Thou oft shalt wish thyself at Gath, to boast
Again in safety what thou would'st have done
To Samson, but shalt never see Gath more.

HARAPHA. Thou durst not thus disparage glorious art
Which greatest heroes have in battle worn,
Their ornament and safety, had not spells
And black enchantments, some magician's art,
Armed thee or charmed thee strong, which thou from Heaven
Feign'dst at thy birth was given thee in thy hair,
Where strength can least abide, though all thy hairs
SAMSON AGONISTES.

Were bristles ranged like those that ridge the back
Of chafed wild boars or ruffled porcupines.

SAMSON. I know no spells, use no forbidden arts;
My trust is in the Living God, who gave me, 1140
At my nativity, this strength, diffused
No less through all my sinews, joints, and bones,
Than thine, while I preserved these locks unshorn,
The pledge of my unviolated vow.
For proof hereof, if Dagon be thy god,
Go to his temple, invoke his aid
With solemnest devotion, spread before him
How highly it concerns his glory now
To frustrate and dissolve these magic spells,
Which I to be the power of Israel's God 1150
Avow, and challenge Dagon to the test,
Offering to combat thee, his champion bold,
With the utmost of his godhead seconded:
Then thou shalt see, or rather to thy sorrow
Soon feel, whose God is strongest, thine or mine.

HARAPHA. Presume not on thy God. Whate'er he be,
Thee he regards not, owns not, hath cut off
Quite from his people, and delivered up
Into thy enemies' hand; permitted them
To put out both thine eyes, and fettered send thee 1160
Into the common prison, there to grind
Among the slaves and asses, thy comrades,
As good for nothing else, no better service,
With those thy boisterous locks; no worthy match
For valour to assail, nor by the sword
Of noble warrior, so to stain his honour,
But by the barber's razor best subdued.

SAMSON. All these indignities, for such they are
From thine, these evils I deserve and more,
Acknowledge them from God, inflicted on me 1170
Justly, yet despair not of his final pardon,
Whose ear is ever open, and his eye
Gracious to re-admit the suppliant:
In confidence whereof I once again
Defy thee to the trial of mortal fight,
By combat to decide whose god is God,
Thine, or whom I with Israel's sons adore.
HARAPHA. Fair honour that thou dost thy God, in trusting
He will accept thee to defend his cause,
A murtherer, a revolter, and a robber!

SAMSON. Tongue-doughty giant, how dost thou prove
me these?

HARAPHA. Is not thy nation subject to our lords?
Their magistrates confessed it when they took thee
As a league-breaker, and delivered bound
Into our hands; for hadst thou not committed
Notorious murder on those thirty men
At Ascalon, who never did thee harm,
Then, like a robber, stripp'dst them of their robes?
The Philistines, when thou hadst broke the league,
Went up with armed powers thee only seeking,
To others did no violence nor spoil.

SAMSON. Among the daughters of the Philistines
I chose a wife, which argued me no foe,
And in your city held my nuptial feast;
But your ill-meaning politician lords,
Under pretence of bridal friends and guests,
Appointed to await me thirty spies,
Who, threatening cruel death, constrained the bride
To wring from me, and tell to them, my secret
That solved the riddle which I had proposed.
When I perceived all set on enmity,
As on my enemies, wherever chanced,
I used hostility, and took their spoil,
To pay my underminers in their coin.
My nation was subjected to your lords!
It was the force of conquest; force with force
Is well ejected when the conquered can.
But I, a private person, whom my country
As a league-breaker gave up bound, presumed
Single rebellion, and did hostile acts!
I was no private, but a person raised,
With strength sufficient, and command from Heaven,
To free my country. If their servile minds
Me, their deliverer sent, would not receive,
But to their masters gave me up for nought,
The unworthier they; whence to this day they serve.
I was to do my part from Heaven assigned,
And had performed it if my known offence
Had not disabled me, not all your force.—
These shifts refuted, answer thy appellant,
Though by his blindness maime for high attempts,
Who now defies thee thrice to single fight,
As a petty enterprise of small enforce.

HARAPHA. With thee, a man condemned, a slave
Due by the law to capital punishment? [enrolled,
To fight with thee no man of arms will deign.

SAMSON. Cam'st thou for this, vain boaster—to survey me,
To descant on my strength, and give thy verdit?
Come nearer; part not hence so slight informed;
But take good heed my hand survey not thee.

HARAPHA. O Baal-zebub! can my ears unused
Hear these dishonours, and not render death?

SAMSON. No man withholds thee; nothing from thy hand
Fear I incurable; bring up thy van;
My heels are fettered, but my fist is free.

HARAPHA. This insolence other kind of answer fits.

SAMSON. Go, baffled coward, lest I run upon thee,
Though in these chains, bulk without spirit vast,
And with one buffet lay thy structure low,
Or swing thee in the air, then dash thee down,
To the hazard of thy brains and shattered sides.

HARAPHA. By Astaroth, ere long thou shalt lament
These braveries, in irons loaden on thee.

CHORUS. His giantship is gone somewhat crest-fallen,
Stalking with less unconscionable strides,
And lower looks, but in a sultry chafe.

SAMSON. I dread him not, nor all his giant brood,
Though fame divulge him father of five sons,
All of gigantic size, Goliath chief.

CHORUS. He will directly to the lords, I fear,
And with malicious counsel stir them up
Some way or other yet further to afflict thee.

SAMSON. He must allege some cause, and offered fight
Will not dare mention, lest a question rise
Whether he durst accept the offer or not;
And that he durst not plain enough appeared.
Much more affliction than already felt
They cannot well impose, nor I sustain,
If they intend advantage of my labours,
The work of many hands, which earns my keeping,
With no small profit daily to my owners.
But come what will—my deadliest foe will prove
My speediest friend, by death to rid me hence;
The worst that he can give to me the best.—
Yet so it may fall out, because their end
Is hate, not help to me, it may with mine
Draw their own ruin who attempt the deed.

CHORUS. O how comely it is, and how reviving
To the spirits of just men long oppressed,
When God into the hands of their deliverer
Puts invincible might,
To quell the mighty of the earth, the oppressor,
The brute and boisterous force of violent men,
Hardy and industrious to support
Tyrannic power, but raging to pursue
The righteous, and all such as honour truth!
He all their ammunition
And feats of war defeats,
With plain heroic magnitude of mind
And celestial vigour armed;
Their armouries and magazines contemns,
Renders them useless, while
With winged expedition
Swift as the lightning glance he executes
His errand on the wicked, who, surprised,
Lose their defence, distracted and amazed.

But patience is more oft the exercise
Of saints, the trial of their fortitude,
Making them each his own deliverer,
And victor over all
That tyranny or fortune can inflict.
Either of these is in thy lot,
Samson, with might endued
Above the sons of men; but sight bereaved
May chance to number thee with those
Whom patience finally must crown.

This Idol's day hath been to thee no day of rest.
Labouring thy mind
SAMSON AGONISTES.

More than the working day thy hands.—
And yet, perhaps, more trouble is behind;
For I descry this way
Some other tending; in his hand
A sceptre or quaint staff he bears,
Comes on amain, speed in his look.
By his habit I discern him now
A public officer, and now at hand.
His message will be short and voluble.

OFFICER.

OFFICER. Ebrews, the prisoner Samson here I seek.

CHORUS. His manacles remark him; there he sits.

OFFICER. Samson, to thee our lords thus bid me say:
This day to Dagon is a solemn feast,
With sacrifices, triumph, pomp, and games;
Thy strength they know surpassing human rate,
And now some public proof thereof require,
To honour this great feast and great assembly.
Rise therefore with all speed, and come along,
Where I will see thee heartened and fresh clad,
To appear as fits before the illustrious lords.

SAMSON. Thou know'rt I am an Ebrew; therefore tell them
Our law forbids at their religious rites
My presence; for that cause I cannot come.

OFFICER. This answer, be assured, will not content them.

SAMSON. Have they not sword-players, and every sort
Of gymnic artists, wrestlers, riders, runners,
Jugglers and dancers, antics, mummers, mimics,
But they must pick me out, with shackles tired,
And over-laboured at their public mill,
To make them sport with blind activity?
Do they not seek occasion of new quarrels,
On my refusal, to distress me more,
Or make a game of my calamities?
Return the way thou cam'st; I will not come.

OFFICER. Regard thyself; this will offend them highly.

SAMSON. Myself! my conscience, and internal peace.
Can they think me so broken, so debased
SAMSON AGONISTES.

With corporal servitude, that my mind ever
Will descend to such absurd commands?
Although their drudge, to be their fool or jester,
And, in my midst of sorrow and heart-grief,
To show them feats, and play before their god—
The worst of all indignities, yet on me
Joined with extreme contempt! I will not come.

OFFICER. My message was imposed on me with speed,
Brooks no delay: is this thy resolution?

SAMSON. So take it with what speed thy message needs.

OFFICER. I am sorry what this stoutness will produce.

SAMSON. Perhaps thou shalt have cause to sorrow indeed.

CHORUS. Consider, Samson; matters now are strained
Up to the hith, whether to hold or break.
He's gone, and who knows how he may report
Thy words by adding fuel to the flame?
Expect another message, more imperious,
More lordly thundering than thou well wilt bear.

SAMSON. Shall I abuse this consecrated gift
Of strength, again returning with my hair
After my great transgression, so require
Favour renewed, and add a greater sin
By prostituting holy things to idols,
A Nazarite, in place abominable,
Vaunting my strength in honour to their Dagon?
Besides how vile, contemptible, ridiculous,
What act more execrably unclean, profane?

CHORUS. Yet with this strength thou serv'st the Philis-
Idolatrous, uncircumcised, unclean.

SAMSON. Not in their idol-worship, but by labour
Honest and lawful to deserve my food
Of those who have me in their civil power.

CHOR. Where the heart joins not, outward acts defile not.

SAMSON. Where outward force constrains, the sentence
But who constrains me to the temple of Dagon, [holds:
Not dragging? The Philistian lords command:
Commands are no constraints. If I obey them,
I do it freely, venturing to displease
God for the fear of man, and man prefer,
SAMSON AGONISTES.

Set God behind; which, in his jealousy,
Shall never, unrepented, find forgiveness.
Yet that he may dispense with me, or thee,
Present in temples at idolatrous rites
For some important cause, thou need'st not doubt.

CHOR. How thou wilt here come off surmounts my reach.

SAMSON. Be of good courage; I begin to feel
Some rousing motions in me, which dispose
To something extraordinary my thoughts.
I with this messenger will go along—
Nothing to do, be sure, that may dishonour
Our Law, or stain my vow of Nazarite.
If there be aught of presage in the mind,
This day will be remarkable in my life
By some great act, or of my days the last.

CHORUS. In time thou hast resolved: the man returns.

OFFICER. Samson, this second messenger from our lords
To thee I am bid say: Art thou our slave,
Our captive, at the public mill our drudge,
And dar'st thou, at our sending and command,
Dispute thy coming? Come without delay;
Or we shall find such engines to assail
And hamper thee, as thou shalt come of force,
Though thou werst firmer fastened than a rock.

SAMSON. I could be well content to try their art,
Which to no few of them would prove pernicious;
Yet, knowing their advantages too many,
Because they shall not trail me through their streets
Like a wild beast, I am content to go.
Masters' commands come with a power resistless
To such as owe them absolute subjection;
And for a life who will not change his purpose?
(So mutable are all the ways of men!)
Yet this be sure, in nothing to comply
Scandalous or forbidden in our Law.

OFFICER. I praise thy resolution. Doff these links.
By this compliance thou wilt win the lords
To favour, and perhaps to set thee free.

SAMSON. Brethren, farewell. Your company along
I will not wish, lest it perhaps offend them
SAMSON AGONISTES.

To see me girt with friends; and how the sight
Of me, as of a common enemy,
So dreaded once, may now exasperate them
I know not. Lords are lordliest in their wine;
And the well-feasted priest then soonest fired
With zeal, if aught religion seem concerned;
No less the people, on their holy-days,
Impetuous, insolent, unquenchable.
Happen what may, of me expect to hear
Nothing dishonourable, impure, unworthy
Our God, our Law, my nation, or myself;
The last of me or no I cannot warrant.

CHORUS. Go, and the Holy One
Of Israel be thy guide
To what may serve his glory best, and spread his name
Great among the Heathen round;
Send thee the Angel of thy birth, to stand
Fast by thy side, who from thy father's field
Rode up in flames after his message told
Of thy conception, and be now a shield
Of fire; that Spirit that first rushed on thee
In the camp of Dan,
Be efficacious in thee now at need!
For never was from Heaven imparted
Measure of strength so great to mortal seed,
As in thy wondrous actions hath been seen.—
But wherefore comes old Manoa in such haste
With youthful steps? Much livelier than erewhile
He seems; supposing here to find his son,
Or of him bringing to us some glad news?

MANOA. Peace with you, brethren! My inducement
Was not at present here to find my son, [hither
By order of the lords new parted hence,
To come and play before them at their feast.
I heard all as I came; the city rings,
And numbers thither flock: I had no will,
Lest I should see him forced to things unseemly.
But that which moved my coming now was chiefly
To give ye part with me what hope I have
With good success to work his liberty.

CHORUS. That hope would much rejoice us to partake
With thee. Say, reverend sire; we thirst to hear.
SAMSON AGONISTES.

MANOA. I have attempted, one by one, the lords,
Either at home, or through the high street passing,
With supplication prone and father's tears,
To accept of ransom for my son, their prisoner. 1460
Some much averse I found, and wondrous harsh,
Contemptuous, proud, set on revenge and spite—
That part most reverenced Dagon and his priests:
Others more moderate seeming, but their aim
Private reward, for which both God and State
They easily would set to sale: a third
More generous far and civil, who confessed
They had enough revenged, having reduced
Their foe to misery beneath their fears;
The rest was magnanimity to remit, 1470
If some convenient ransom were proposed.—
What noise or shout was that? It tore the sky.

CHORUS. Doubtless the people shouting to behold
Their once great dread, captive and blind before them,
Or at some proof of strength before them shown.

MANOA. His ransom, if my whole inheritance
May compass it, shall willingly be paid
And numbered down. Much rather I shall choose
To live the poorest in my tribe, than richest
And he in that calamitous prison left. 1480
No, I am fixed not to part hence without him.
For his redemption all my patrimony,
If need be, I am ready to forego
And quit. Not wanting him, I shall want nothing.

CHORUS. Fathers are wont to lay up for their sons;
Thou for thy son art bent to lay out all:
Sons wont to nurse their parents in old age;
Thou in old age car'st how to nurse thy son,
Made older than thy age through eye-sight lost.

MANOA. It shall be my delight to tend his eyes, 1490
And view him sitting in his house, ennobled
With all those high exploits by him achieved,
And on his shoulders waving down those locks
That of a nation armed the strength contained.
And I persuade me God hath not permitted
His strength again to grow up with his hair
Garrisoned round about him like a camp
Of faithful soldiery, were not his purpose
To use him further yet in some great service—
Not to sit idle with so great a gift
Useless, and thence ridiculous, about him.
And, since his strength with eye-sight was not lost,
God will restore him eye-sight to his strength.

CHORUS. Thy hopes are not ill founded, nor seem vain,
Of his delivery, and thy joy thereon
Conceived, agreeable to a father's love;
In both which we, as next, participate.

MANOA. I know your friendly minds, and—O, what noise!
Mercy of Heaven! what hideous noise was that?
Horribly loud, unlike the former shout.

CHORUS. Noise call you it, or universal groan,
As if the whole inhabitation perished?
Blood, death, and deathful deeds, are in that noise,
Ruin, destruction at the utmost point.

MANOA. Of ruin indeed methought I heard the noise.
O! it continues—they have slain my son.

CHORUS. Thy son is rather slaying them: that outcry
From slaughter of one foe could not ascend.

MANOA. Some dismal accident it needs must be.
What shall we do—stay here, or run and see?

CHORUS. Best keep together here, lest, running thither,
We unawares run into danger's mouth.
This evil on the Philistines is fallen:
From whom could else a general cry be heard?
The sufferers, then, will scarce molest us here;
From other hands we need not much to fear.
What if, his eye-sight (for to Israel's God
Nothing is hard) by miracle restored,
He now be dealing dole among his foes,
And over heaps of slaughtered walk his way?

MANOA. That were a joy presumptuous to be thought.

CHORUS. Yet God hath wrought things as incredible
For his people of old; what hinders now?
SAMSON AGONISTES.

MANOA. He can, I know, but doubt to think he will;
Yet hope would fain subscribe, and tempts belief.
A little stay will bring some notice hither.

CHORUS. Of good or bad so great, of bad the sooner;
For evil news rides post, while good news baits.
And to our wish I see one hither speeding—
An Ebrew, as I guess, and of our tribe.

MESSENGER.

MESSENGER. O, whither shall I run, or which way fly
The sight of this so horrid spectacle,
Which erst my eyes beheld, and yet behold?
For dire imagination still pursues me.
But providence or instinct of nature seems,
Or reason, though disturbed and scarce consulted,
To have guided me aright, I know not how,
To thee first, reverend Manoa, and to these
My countrymen, whom here I knew remaining,
As at some distance from the place of horror,
So in the sad event too much concerned.

MANOA. The accident was loud, and here before thee
With rueful cry; yet what it was we hear not.
No preface needs; thou seest we long to know.

MESSENGER. It would burst forth; but I recover breath,
And sense distract, to know well what I utter.

MANOA. Tell us the sum; the circumstance defer.

MESSENGER. Gaza yet stands; but all her sons are fallen,
All in a moment overwhelmed and fallen.

MANOA. Sad! but thou know'st to Israelites not saddest
The desolation of a hostile city.

MESSENGER. Feed on that first; there may in grief be
surfeit.

MANOA. Relate by whom.

MESSENGER. By Samson.

MANOA. That still lessens
The sorrow, and converts it nigh to joy.

MESSENGER. Ah! Manoa, I refrain too suddenly
To utter what will come at last too soon,
Lest evil tidings, with too rude irruption
Hitting thy aged ear, should pierce too deep. 1568

MANOA. Suspense in news is torture; speak them out.

MESSENER. Then take the worst in brief: Samson is
dead.

MANOA. The worst indeed! O, all my hope's defeated
To free him hence!—But Death, who sets all free,
Hath paid his ransom now and full discharge.
What windy joy this day had I conceived,
Hopeful of his delivery, which now proves
Abortive as the first-born bloom of spring
Nipt with the lagging rear of winter's frost!
Yet, ere I give the reins to grief, say first
How died he; death to life is crown or shame.
All by him fell, thou say'st; by whom fell he? 1580
What glorious hand gave Samson his death's wound?

MESSENER. Unwounded of his enemies he fell.

MANOA. Wearied with slaughter then, or how? explain.

MESSENER. By his own hands.

MANOA. Self-violence! What cause
Brought him so soon at variance with himself
Among his foes?

MESSENER. Inevitable cause—
At once both to destroy and be destroyed.
The edifice, where all were met to see him,
Upon their heads and on his own he pulled.

MANOA. O vastly over-strong against thyself! 1590
A dreadful way thou took'st to thy revenge.
More than enough we know; but, while things yet
Are in confusion, give us, if thou canst,
Eye-witness of what first or last was done,
Relation more particular and distinct.

MESSENER. Occasions drew me early to this city;
And, as the gates I entered with sun-rise,
The morning trumpets festival proclaimed
Through each high street. Little I had dispatched,
When all abroad was rumoured that this day 1600
Samson should be brought forth, to show the people
Proof of his mighty strength in feats and games.
SAMSON AGONISTES.

I sorrowed at his captive state, but minded
Not to be absent at that spectacle.
The building was a spacious theatre,
Half-round, on two main pillars vaulted high,
With seats where all the lords, and each degree
Of sort, might sit in order to behold;
The other side was open, where the throng
On banks and scaffolds under sky might stand: 1610
I among these aloof obscurely stood.
The feast and noon grew high, and sacrifice
Had filled their hearts with mirth, high cheer, and wine,
When to their sports they turned. Immediately
Was Samson as a public servant brought,
In their state livery clad: before him pipes
And timbrels; on each side went armed guards;
Both horse and foot before him and behind,
Archers and slingers, cataphracts, and spears.
At sight of him the people with a shout 1620
Rifted the air, clamouring their god with praise,
Who had made their dreadful enemy their thrall.
He patient, but undaunted, where they led him,
Came to the place; and what was set before him,
Which without help of eye might be assayed,
To heave, pull, draw, or break, he still performed
All with incredible, stupendious force,
None daring to appear antagonist.
At length, for intermission sake, they led him
Between the pillars; he his guide requested 1630
(For so from such as nearer stood we heard),
As over-tired, to let him lean awhile
With both his arms on those two massy pillars,
That to the arched roof gave main support.
He unsuspicous led him; which when Samson
Felt in his arms, with head a while inclined,
And eyes fast fixed, he stood, as one who prayed,
Or some great matter in his mind revolved:
At last, with head erect, thus cried aloud:—
"Hitherto, Lords, what your commands imposed 1640
I have performed, as reason was, obeying,
Not without wonder or delight beheld;
Now, of my own accord, such other trial
I mean to show you of my strength yet greater
As with amaze shall strike all who behold."
This uttered, straining all his nerves, he bowed,
As with the force of winds and waters pent,
When mountains tremble, those two massy pillars
With horrible convulsion to and fro;
He tugged, he shook, till down they came, and drew
The whole roof after them, with burst of thunder,
Upon the heads of all who sat beneath—
Lords, ladies, captains, counsellors, or priests,
Their choice nobility and flower, not only
Of this, but each Philistian city round,
Met from all parts to solemnize this feast.
Samson, with these immixed, inevitably
Pulled down the same destruction on himself;
The vulgar only scaped, who stood without.

CHORUS. O dearly bought revenge, yet glorious! Living or dying thou hast fulfilled
The work for which thou wast foretold
To Israel, and now liest victorious
Among thy slain self-killed;
Not willingly, but tangled in the fold
Of dire Necessity, whose law in death conjoined
Thee with thy slaughtered foes, in number more
Than all thy life had slain before.

I SEMICHOR. While their hearts were jocund and sublime,
Drunk with idolatry, drunk with wine
And fat regorged of bulls and goats,
Chaunting their idol, and preferring
Before our living Dread, who dwells
In Silo, his bright sanctuary,
Among them he a spirit of phrenzy sent,
Who hurt their minds,
And urged them on with mad desire
To call in haste for their destroyer:
They, only set on sport and play,
Unweetingly importuned
Their own destruction to come speedy upon them.
So fond are mortal men,
Fallen into wrath divine,
As their own ruin on themselves to invite,
Insensate left, or to sense reprobate,
And with blindness internal struck.
SAMSON AGONISTES.

2 SEMICHOR. But he, though blind of sight,
Despised, and thought extinguished quite,
With inward eyes illuminated,
His fiery virtue roused
From under ashes into sudden flame,
And as an evening dragon came,
Assailant on the perched roosts
And nests in order ranged
Of tame villatic fowl, but as an eagle
His cloudless thunder bolted on their heads.
So Virtue, given for lost,
Depressed and overthrown, as seemed,
Like that self-begotten bird
In the Arabian woods embost,
That no second knows nor third,
And lay erewhile a holocaust,
From out her ashy womb now teemed,
Revives, refloishes, then vigorous most
When most unactive deemed;
And, though her body die, her fame survives,
A secular bird, ages of lives.

MANOA. Come, come; no time for lamentation now,
Nor much more cause. Samson hath quit himself
Like Samson, and heroically hath finished
A life heroic, on his enemies
Fully revenged, hath left them years of mourning,
And lamentation to the sons of Caphtor
Through all Philistian bounds; to Israel
Honour hath left and freedom, let but them
Find courage to lay hold on this occasion;
Go himself and father's house eternal fame;
And, which is best and happiest yet, all this
With God not parted from him, as was feared,
But favouring and assisting to the end.
Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast; no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise, or blame; nothing but well and fair,
And what may quiet us, in a death so noble.
Let us go find the body where it lies
Soaked in his enemies' blood, and from the stream
With lavers pure, and cleansing herbs, wash off
The clotted gore. I, with what speed the while
(Gaza is not in plight to say us nay),
Will send for all my kindred, all my friends,
To fetch him hence, and solemnly attend,
With silent obsequy and funeral train,
Home to his father's house. There will I build him
A monument, and plant it round with shade
Of laurel ever green and branching palm,
With all his trophies hung, and acts enrolled
In copious legend, or sweet lyric song.
Thither shall all the valiant youth resort,
And from his memory inflame their breasts
To matchless valour and adventures high;
The virgins also shall, on feastful days,
Visit his tomb with flowers, only bewailing
His lot unfortunate in nuptial choice,
From whence captivity and loss of eyes.

CHORUS. All is best, though we oft doubt
What the unsearchable dispose
Of Highest Wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close.
Oft He seems to hide his face,
But unexpectedly returns,
And to his faithful champion hath in place
Bore witness gloriously; whence Gaza mourns,
And all that band them to resist
His uncontrollable intent.
His servants He, with new acquist
Of true experience from this great event,
With peace and consolation hath dismiss,
And calm of mind, all passion spent.
NOTES


PREFACE.

1 Tragedy, as it was antiently composed, &c. In a description of Athens, Paradise Regained, iv. 261, et seq., the poet speaks of—

“What the lofty grave tragedians taught
In chorus or iambic, teachers best
Of moral prudence, with delight received,
In brief sententious precepts, while they treat
Of fate, and chance, and change in human life;
High actions and high passions best describing.”

“Tragic strength must be based on exclusive self-reliance. Now exclusive self-reliance is the spirit that goes before a fall; and it is one of the functions of tragedy to illustrate, by the conflation of a fatal reverse, the insufficiency of such merely human strength, and the madness latent in such pride.” (Edinburgh Review, No. 153, p. 356.)

9 Things of melancholy hue, &c. A practice introduced by Paracelsus about the year 1530. “Thus yellow things, as saffron, &c., were given in liver complaints, from their analogy of colour to the bile.”

15 A verse of Euripides. φθειροντων ἡν ιχνεια δηλαι κακαι. The author is not Euripides, but Menander.

17 Pareus. “A Calvinist theologian (1548–1622).” (B.)

Revelation. “And the Apocalypse of St. John is the majestic image of a high and stately tragedy, shutting up and intermingling her solemn scenes and acts with a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies; and this my opinion the grave authority of Pareus, commenting that book, is sufficient to confirm.” (From Milton’s Reason of Church Government urged against Prelaty.) Observe the stately music of Milton’s periods, in prose as in poetry.

22 Dionysius the elder. “Tyrant of Syracuse. Born B.C. 431, died 367. The most famous of those who bore the name. He repeatedly contended for the prize of tragedy at Athens, and
succeeded just before his death in bearing away the first prize at the Lenaea.” (C. C.)

23 Augustus Caesar...his Ajax. “See Suetonius, Vita Augusti, lxxxv.” (C. C.)

26 Seneca. “Lucius Annaeus Seneca, born a few years before Christ; died A.D. 65. It is still open to question whether the ten tragedies which go under his name were really written by him.” (C. C.)

28 Gregory Nazianzen. “One of the most famous of the Greek Fathers, who played a very important part in the religious controversies of the fourth century. Born at Arianzus, near Nazianzus, of which place his father was bishop; died A.D. 389 or 390. The play which Milton alludes to was an attempt to Christianize the Greek drama. The work is little better than a cento of verses, principally from Euripides.” (C. C.)

31 To vindicate tragedy, &c. Milton has a lofty sense of the superiority of his own tragedy to those of the day. Dryden almost boasts of his “comic stuff.” In the preface to the Spanish Friar he says, “I dare venture to prophesy that few tragedies, except those in verse, shall succeed in this age if they are not enlightened with a course of mirth.” Shakespeare strikes a different note to either, in those bursts of the most tragic humour of Lear and of Hamlet.

40 That which Martial calls, &c. “An allusion to a passage in the preface to the second book of the Epigrams, ‘Video quare tragedi epistolam accipiant, quibus pro se loqui non licet.’ It was usual on the Greek and Roman stage to prefix prologues or ‘excusations of the author’ to comedies, but not to tragedies.” (C. C.)

45 Still in use among the Italians. “As in the dramas of Andreini, Lancetta, and other contemporaries of Milton. Italian tragedy, from its first appearance in the hands of Galeotto del Carretto, in 1502, continued to cling to the Greek model.” (C. C.)

50 Apo leymenon. “A Greek word—ἀπολεйμενον, ‘loosed from,’ i.e. from the fetters of, strophe, antistrophe, or epode; monostrophic (μονοστροφικός) meaning literally ‘single stanzaed;’ i.e. a strophe without answering antistrophe. So alloestrophic (ἀλλωστροφικός) signifies stanzas of irregular strophes, strophes not consisting of alternate strophe and antistrophe.” (C. C.) Special acknowledgment is due to Mr. Churton Collins for these notes on the Preface, which seemed to me better than I could make, or find elsewhere.

59 Beyond the fifth act. Cf. Horace, Ars Poetica, 189, “Neve minor, nee sit quinto producior actu Fabula.”

64 Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. We must always recollect that Milton was, so to speak, soaked with the literature of Greece and Rome. For instance, he constantly uses words in the sense of the Latin word from which they are derived.
NOTES.

THE ARGUMENT.

6 Equals. Lat. ‘aequales;’ i.e. ‘men of his own age.’
18 Persuaded inwardly. Observe the constant reference to ‘inward light’ in all that Milton writes. Much has been written on Milton’s notion of his own inspiration. I think he felt that God was ever present with him while he wrote, and in a peculiar sense in which He was not present to others; for his work was on high and holy matters, after a life of preparation, and with special invocation of Divine assistance. But I do not think that he considered himself to be inspired in the sense in which he probably considered the writers of the Bible to be inspired, whose narratives he is careful to follow, often even in their very words; yet where these writers are brief or obscure, I think that he may have felt his amplification of their story to have been specially guided and directed by the Holy Spirit—to be, in fact, not necessary for doctrine, but singularly desirable for instruction. Cf. that glorious passage Paradise Lost, i. 17 et seq., and note on line 1689.
25 And by accident probably means ‘and, for so it fell out.’ The phrase is, “Let me die with the Philistines” (Judges xvi. 30), wherein a certain natural indifference to his own fate seems implied. Cf. also lines 1657–58 of the Tragedy.

THE TRAGEDY.

1 SAMSON AGONISTES; i.e. Samson in the exhibition of his athletic powers. These titles are generally for distinction, and common in Greek plays. “Milton had also designed a previous part of Samson’s story as a tragedy, under the title of Samson πυρσοφόρος or Τχρυσης, Samson after his first marriage revenging himself on the Philistines.” (D.)
1–4 A little onward lend thy guiding hand
To these dark steps.

ἡγοθ πάτουθε, θήγωλε, ὃς τυφλὸς πολ. — Eur. Phænissa, 841. So blind Ædipus, at Colonus, is conducted by his daughter; so blind Milton sat, in old age, before his house-door in the sun. Cf. note on line 1491.
6 Mr. Churton Collins says, “Else enjoined me; ‘at other times.’ The Latin alias, with which it is etymologically connected. Thus Sax. elles, Germ. alles, Goth. alis. Cf., for the sense in which it is here used, Paradise Lost, viii. 96—

‘There first received,
His beams, unactive else, their vigour find.’”
7-8 Prisoner. Imprisoned. Keightley points out the play on words “in the Hebrew manner.”

11 With day-spring born; i.e. ‘new born at break of day.’

13 Paradise Lost, i. 462.

16 The popular voice. “Here in the Latin sense, the noise made by the people. So in Paradise Lost, ii. 313, ‘For so the popular voice inclines;’ i.e. the vote given by the people.” (C. C.)

20 Found; i.e. ‘am I found.’

22 Observe the pathetic reference to his own past life. No poet is so autobiographical as Milton, not even Dante. Dante’s thought is often of others, oftenest of that other—the half indeed, and far more than the half, of himself. Milton’s magnanimous egotism seldom admits thought of others.

23 et seq. The history of Samson should be carefully read in the book of Judges before attempting the tragedy. Milton, as usual, in dealing with Holy Writ, sticks very closely to his text.

24-25 Judges xiii. The fiery column is the chariot, and Josephus says much the same; but it is difficult to get this meaning into the words.

28 Presence. Abstract for concrete, imitating a common usage in Greek tragical poetry; thus παρουσία for ὁ παρών, &c.

And from some great act, &c. Perhaps there should be a comma after act. The words might then mean, ‘And as though departing after having done some great act, or after having revealed some benefit.’ The general sense of lines 25–29 is easy to see; but to explain several of the words and clauses in connection with their context is perhaps impossible.

33 Captived (Newton and others). ‘Made a captive.’


39 Judges xiii. 5.

41 Some think the following pauses are intended in this line: Eyeless—in Gaza—at the mill—with slaves.

48 In what part . . . how. The common mode of expression would be, ‘In such part . . . so.’ Milton here seems to imitate the Greek use of the relative (ὅπος, ἧδος, &c.) where we use the demonstrative.

Bereft me; i.e. ‘taken (rest, A.S. reafian, ‘to rob’) from me.’ The word is now only used, as in line 85, with a personal subject. We say, “I am bereft of a thing,” but not, “Something is bereft me.”

50 The first reference among many to his weakness in yielding, and to a woman. There is doubtless in most of such passages an undercurrent of reference to his own domestic life.


ἀλλ’ ἄνδρα χρῆ, κάν ὁμοία γεννήσῃ μέγα,

dokeίν πεπείν ἄν, κάν ἀπὸ σμικροῦ κακοῦ (by weakest subtleties).

—Soph. Ajax, 1099.
NOTES.

58–9 It is a common notion to suppose some great gift of God liable at any moment to be lost, owing to the weakness of that to which it lies.

66–109 For the best commentary on this splendid passage read lines 18–24; Paradise Lost, vii. 25–27; iii. 1–55; in the Sonnets, On his Blindness, and To Cyriack Skinner upon his Blindness; also a letter to Oldenburgh, July 6, 1654, to which Warton calls attention, where Milton pathetically remarks, in speaking of some intended work, "Siquidem per valetudinem et hanc luminum orbitatem omni senectute graviorem licuerit." Regarding the metre, see note on line 606, et seq.

70 A noble line. Prime. Genesis i. 3.


80 A line with the old poetic vigour and splendour of Paradise Lost. Notice the contrast between the quick pistol shots of the "dark, dark, dark" (to which De Musset's rapid and repeated "qui donc," in the Nuit de Dicembre, is the nearest match I know), and the full-mouthed "blaze." I am told that the best possible illustration of these words is the tenor solo, "Total Eclipse," in Handel's Oratorio of Samson.

81 Irrecoverably dark. "Note here, as in Greek tragedy, as emotion gathers passion the iambics break into lyrics." (C. C.)

85 Bereaved. Cf. line 48, and note.

Prime. Cf. line 70, and note.

87–89 These three lines express darkness where "no light of sun or moon or any star appears," and the allusion is to the period between the disappearance of the old moon and the appearance of the new new moon. "Quem diem alii interlunii, alii silentis Lune appellant." (Plin. N. H. i. 16, 39, quoted by Mr. Churton Collins.) 'Silent moon' is the Latin luna silens; the moon in conjunction, when she turns her dark side to the earth. The moon is spoken of as silent because she is as yet invisible; an instance of transference of meaning by association of ideas from sound to sight. So the lean she-wolf impels Dante to that dark valley "where the sun in silence sets," Inferno, i. 60.

"The interlunar cave (i.e. the hollow where the moon is supposed to rest during this time of conjunction) is apparently a creation of the poet's own imagination, and he terms it vacant, either simply as empty of light, or 'quia luna ibi vacat opere et ministerio suo.'" (Plin. N. H. xvi. 39.) (K.)

92 Cf. Paradise Lost, iii. 1–6. Without pressing too strongly the expressions "co-eternal beam," "God is light," "bright effulgence of bright essence," we may take it that Milton rather inclines to a belief that light is co-eternal with the Almighty—is the ever-existing effulgence of an essence increate; hence, as here, is a property of life or soul, itself an emanation from the
SAMSON AGONISTES.

95 Obvious. One of Milton's Latinisms. *Obvious* = 'exposed;' *obnoxious*, line 106, from Latin *obnixius* = 'liable to.'

100 *A living death,* and line 102, *a moving grave,* are instances of *Oxymoron* [ὀξύμορον, 'pointedly foolish;' as substantive, ὀξύμορον, ῥό, 'a remark that seems to contradict itself.' (Liddell and Scott.)] *Oxymoron* is common in Greek—γάμος γάμος, δορα δορα, &c.; less common in Latin. In *Paradise Lost,* iv. 314, we have "honour dishonourable," and in ii. 622, 624—

"A universe of death;... Where all life dies, death lives. . . ."

"Living death" is a very common expression.

105 *Obnoxious.* See note, line 95.


112-113 *Psalm* xxxv. 15.

115 ἐνα, ἐνα, λευτον ἢνος ἀβδηλς τιθε. (Eur. Orest. 139.)

118 *Diffused.* A Latinism equivalent to 'stretched at ease,' &c.

Here the notion is of lack of due constraint, he is lying anyhow.

"Fusaeque erant toto languida membra toro."

—Ovid. *Pontic Epistles,* bk. iii. ep. iii. st. 8.

"Yet goodly court he made still to his dame,
Foured out in loosenesse on the grassy ground."

—*Faerie Queene,* bk. i. canto 7. st. 7.

122 *Weeds.* "Garments, clothes (A.S. wēd); very common in poetry even now." (C. C.)

128 *Judges* xiv. 5-6.

129 *Embattled.* Cf. the splendid line, *Paradise Lost,* i. 129, "That led the embattled seraphim to war." When Milton wrote *embattled,* or *imbattled,* he probably meant 'in battle array' (deriving the word from battle, with which it is not connected). *Embattled* means 'fortified with battlement.' From O. French *bastiller,* connected with *bastir* (bâtier), to build.

133 Properly *Chalybēan,* and possibly so here, in which case the *y* will be slurred or elided in reading the line. "The Chalybes, a people of Asia Minor, possessing excellent iron mines, and celebrated as ironworkers." (M.) It sounds strange to hear a Danite Chorus talk of the Chalybes, but among poets Milton at least freely takes such license. This is one of the references to which Dr. Johnson objected. Cf. note on line 1699.

134 *Adamantine proof.* 'Proof as being adamant.' [Adamant (a 'not,' άδαμω 'I subdue'), 'something unsubduable,' 'the hardest metal.'] Cf. *Paradise Lost,* i. 285, "His shield, ethereal temper." A loose apposition.
NOTES.

136 *Insupportably*; i.e. "in a manner not able to be endured, withstood." Latin *non tolerandum*. Cf. *Faerie Queene*, bk. i. canto vi. st. 11—

"That, when the knight he spyde, he gan advance,
With huge force and insupportable mayne."

—Quoted by Thyer.

Foot advanced, subject to *spurned*, l. 138.

139 Lion; i.e. 'lionlike.'


"Ramped and roared the lions."—Leigh Hunt. A lion rampant is a lion reared on his hind legs.

*Turned* here seems to equal 'writhed.'

141 *Groveling* is really an adverb, and may be so used here.

The verb to *grovel* is erroneously formed from this word.

144 Palestine. As being the country of the Philistines. Cf. line 1099.

145 *Ramah-leki*; i.e. 'casting away of the jaw-bone.'

*Judges* xv. 17.

147 *Azza.* The same as Gaza.

*Massy.* Cf. the magnificent passage in *Paradise Lost*, ii. 170, *et seq.*, where the portress opens hell-gate—

"Then in the key-hole turns
The intricate wards, and every bolt and bar
Of massy iron or solid rock with ease
Unfastens."

Though there is nothing in this fine chorus to equal such a passage as that from which this extract is taken, yet there is in it too a suggestive word-music. It opens with words whose *sound* suggests quiet approach, and the sound of the words in lines 125-6, and the following lines, is particularly well suited to the picture which the words present to us of the mighty Samsen. Sandys tells us that *Azza* or Gaza means 'strong;' so here too the sound and sense of the line will agree.


149 *No journey of a sabbath-day.* The Rabbins generally fix this space at 2000 cubits; that is, about a mile. (Cruden.) Five furlongs= a sabbath-day's journey, *Acts* i. 12 (Oxford Bible). See also *Exodus* xvi. 29. "The distance from Gaza to Hebron was about thirty miles." (C. C.)

150 refers to Atlas, a chain of mountains in Northern Africa. Atlas was king of Mauritania. "Ayant refusé l'hospitalité à Persée, celui-ci fit briller à ses yeux la tête de Méduse et le métamorphosa en montagne. Comme cette montagne est très élevée, on a supposa qu'Atlas avait été condamné à soutenir le ciel sur ses épaules." (Larousse.) There are other traditions.

151 *I.* The Corypheüs (κορυφαῖος, -a, -on, 'at the head;'


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δ κορυφάως, 'the man at the head;' κορυφή, 'the head'), the leader of the Chorus (as in a Greek play). Cf. my, line 124.

152, 156 Cf. line 102.

156-7 'Men often complain about their souls, i.e. themselves, when they can see, without cause; for blindness is so great an affliction, that other affictions are nothing to it.' Other explanations are given. Mr. Keightley says, "He alludes to those philosophers who regarded the body as the prison of the soul;" and Mr. Churton Collins says, "Complain means to commiserate."

159 Real. Pronounced as a dissyllable. A strong word. Conventional usage has detracted from its force, and now we either pronounce it very emphatically, or add another adjective to it.

161 To incorporate; i.e. 'to dwell in the body with.'

163 visual beam; i.e. 'ray that gives light, and causes objects to be visible.' (K.)


166-9 i.e. 'the rarer thou art, by so much the lower thou art fallen.' For how much instead of so much, cf. note on line 48.

170-5 Here speaks the Puritan. Cf. Macaulay's Battle of Naseby; Scott's Peveril of the Peak (Handy Volume edition), p. 346. The passage conforms to those parts of the Greek choruses, especially in Euripides, whom Milton chiefly follows, where the Coryphæus moralizes. May we venture to say that even Euripides in such passages was never more dull, or less musical. It seems almost incredible that such a master of "musical delight" as Milton could have written the last five lines of this chorus, with their miserable rhymes, and the extraordinary jumble at the end.

172 Sphere of fortune. Fortune is represented as standing on a revolving sphere, or as turning a wheel.

181 Eshtaol and Zora. Towns of the tribe of Dan (Joshua xix. 41), hence appropriate; Zora the birth-place of Samson (Judges xiii. 2), hence appropriate; the scene where Samson first was moved by the Spirit (Judges xiii. 25), hence appropriate; both in a valley (Joshua xv. 33), hence the propriety of the words "fruitful vale." Above all, Eshtaol and Zora help to make a most musical line, and Milton's admirable habit is to choose his proper names with regard to their sound.

182-4 Or if—a thing which is better—we may bring consolation to be a salve to thy sores.

182 To visit or bewail. Calton suggests with probability that Milton dictated and, not or.

184 Salve to thy sores. Todd quotes John Lydgate's Testament—"Mekely with Davyd have mercy upon me, Salve all my soores that they nat cancred be;"

and others of the older poets.
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Apt words have power to swage. Newton quotes Horace, Epistles, i. 1. 34-5—

"Sunt verba et voces, quibus hunc lenire dolorem
Possis, et magnam morbi deponere partem."

So Tennyson says in In Memoriam—

"But for the unquiet heart and brain
A use in measured language lies;"

but in his case it is the sufferer himself who thus, by giving in verse a necessarily limited and definite expression to his grief, gets it, as it were, into compass.

Swage for assuage. So scape for escape, &c.

190 Bear in their superscription. ‘On their face friend is written; but it is a counterfeit face, a face pretending to be something which it is not.’ The metaphor of coin is, of course, kept up in superscription.

191-3 Johnson’s famous letter to Lord Chesterfield, Job xix. 13, 14, et seq., and Psalm xii. 9, well express the sentiment of this passage. There may be a reference to Milton’s own experience after the Restoration.

196 Blindness. Cf. line 66. But it is merely that his mood is different.

198 Shipwrecked. ‘We have both wreck and wrack in Milton; wreck, Samson Agonistes, 1044; but more frequently wrack (so or as rack, shipwrackt, &c.).’ (M.)

200 Gloriously rigged; i.e. with strength. Or, quite possibly, the reference is actually to his hair, in which the strength lay. Hair is a Bible symbol of strength.

205 Job xxx. 9.

207 Mean. Probably here in its sense of ‘a mean or middle between two extremes.’ ‘My strength was immeasurable; my wisdom merely that of an ordinary man, moderate, middling.’

209 Transverse; i.e. ‘crooked,’ ‘out of the straight path’—continuing the metaphor of the ship.

210 Tax not divine disposal.

Andρων δρ᾽ έστιν ένδικων τε καὶ σοφῶν
ἐν τοίς κακοῖς μὴ τεθυμασθαι θεοῖν.—Æschylus.

Wisest men. There is an emphasis, as Todd remarks, on wisest. [The poet is doubtless thinking of himself amongst other wise men who have been deceived in and by women.] Cf. line 759, et seq., and a passage in the Tetrachordon, where, speaking of marriage choices, he says, ‘The best and wisest men, amidst the sincere and most cordial designs of their hearts, do daily err in choosing.’

216 Philistine women. We are not told that Samson wedded Dalila, but Milton assumes this throughout, save perhaps in line 537. Cf. note thereon.

218 A poor line, especially as closing the passage.
219–20 'And she pleased me, but that I sought to wed the daughter of an infidel did not please my parents.' Judges xiv. 1–3.

222–3 Judges xiv. 4. From intimate impulse. A very terse expression. Something within drove me on. That something was the divine inspiration, to which too, in some sense at least, Milton himself laid claim. See a note on the words "persuaded inwardly," in the Argument; and line 1689, and note.

227 Cf. note on line 216.

228 Fond (old fonned) = 'foolish.' From p. p. of the old verb fonde, 'to make foolish.' Love sometimes renders those who love foolishly indulgent, hence the modern sense of the word.

229 Vale of Sorek. Probably a valley in Dan, south of Ekron, and trending towards the sea-coast.

230 Specious. (Latin speciosa.) 'Handsome,' 'captivating.' [Species, 'appearance,' 'beauty.]

Accomplished; i.e. 'completely furnished.'

"And from the tents
The armourers accomplishing the knights,
With busy hammers closing rivets up,
Give dreadful note of preparation."

—Shakespeare, Henry V. iv. i, Chorus.

235–6 Cf. lines, 403–4, et seq.; also Judges xvi. 16–17.

Peal. 'A loud noise.' Now chiefly used of a trumpet's peal, a peal of bells. Der. peal, short for appeal, O. French a-peler (ad-pellare), to 'call upon.' A is the O. French form of Latin ad. (Sk.) Speaking of sesquipedalian words, we have, "Peace! the peal begins." (Shakespeare, Love's Labour's Lost, v. 1.)

236 To a woman. Milton considered that the woman should be subject to the man. Cf. Paradise Lost, iv. 288–309, and numberless other passages in the prose works as in the poetical.

246 Deliverance offered; i.e. 'the deliverance which was offered. It does not mean (Israel's governors did not consider) that deliverance was offered.

247 Ambition. Lat. ambitionem [ambire, made up of root amb (Greek ἀμφι, 'around,') and ire, 'to go'], 'going about,' 'canvassing.'

249 They persisted deaf. A Greek idiom. 'They persisted in remaining deaf.' Cf. Paradise Lost, ix. 792, "And knew not eating death."

253 Etham, or Etam. Judges xv. 8. About two and a half miles south of Bethlehem.

255 What advantaged best; i.e. 'to the best advantage.'

256 Judges xv. 11, et seq.

258 Judah. Judges xv. 11.

268–275 A clear reference to Milton's own times, with probable special reference, in lines 272–276, to Cromwell, or, as Professor Masson seems to think, to Milton's self. Cf. the
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sonnet To the Lord General Cromwell. The licensor, if he read the passage, may have put a charitable construction on it, (cf. Introduction, pp. ix. x.): his various publications certainly prove that he could have been no friend to the sentiments expressed in it, yet so expressed as to render it difficult to take exception to them.

271 Milton's whole notion of a worthy life for a man or for a nation is a life of strenuous liberty. Cf. Paradise Lost, iv. 294.

277 et seq. Judges viii. 4-8.

282 et seq. Judges xii. i-6.

Ingrateful. So written also in Paradise Lost, v. 407; ix. 1164; but ungratefully Vac. Ex. 78.


284 By his shield and spear. Judges xi. 32, 33.

286 et seq. Judges xii. 4-6. Notice the rimes which end lines 286-89. 'This sort of riming jingle is common in Shakespearian blank verse at the end of a colloquial passage, or of a soliloquy, and one such couplet is more common than two. Cf. Richard III. iv. 4—

"Farewell, York's wife, and queen of sad mischance:—
These English woes shall make me smile in France."

291-2 'My countrymen may neglect me with impunity, but they may not with impunity neglect the deliverance which God had proposed to have wrought through me.'

293 Chorus. This chorus, apart from the fact that it is a fine one, is valuable as giving hints of Milton's theology. The ways of God are just, and able to be proved just to men. This all but atheists know, and atheists are fools. Yet some men doubt, because God appears at times to contradict His own edicts; but God made our laws (i.e. His laws for us) to bind us, not Himself; for with His own laws He can best dispense. Thus God prompts this Nazarite, contrary to the obstriction (obligation) binding on him as an Israelite, and to his vow of strictest purity, to marry that unclean bride (cf. note on line 318) —unclean to him as being of another nation, not otherwise unclean. The particular edict—namely, that an Israelite must not marry one of another race—does not amount to a moral law; but careful students of Milton, and especially of the Treatise on Christian Doctrine, will, I think, agree with me that Milton means that the Almighty may, without immorality, act contrary to any edict that He has given, whether for our guidance or in explanation of His own nature, and whether of general or particular application, or at least that the Almighty may appear to us, using the best judgment of which we are capable, as so doing; and that our verdict must be, "It is the Lord."

Milton holds, in the Treatise mentioned, that when it is said,
of the Omnipotent and Omniscient Jehovah, “He feared,” “He rested,” “He repented,” it is best for us to conceive of God as so doing.

294 Milton tells us that his aim in writing *Paradise Lost* is to

“Assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.”

—*Paradise Lost*, i. 26.

295 *Think not God at all;* i.e. ‘think there is no God.’

296 *They walk obscure;* i.e. ‘unrecognized.’ Owing to their small numbers and unimportance, there is no school of them.

298 Cf. Psalm xiv. 1. Professor Masson calls attention to this short, rapid line riming with line 297, and being appropriate in sound.

299 A line of no force, added apparently to maintain the balance.

301 *Edict* (Lat. edictum). ‘The public announcement of the Praetor, in which he states, on entering office, the rules by which he will be guided in administration of the same.’

303 *Glory’s diminution.* “Majestatem populi Romani minuere” was to be guilty of high treason. God means what He says in the Bible in the simplest meaning of the language, and any wandering thought on His commands is to commit high treason against Him.

305 *Ravel.* As a bit of string, when untwisted, coils itself on itself.

308 *Prescript.* ‘Appointment.’

309 *Our laws.* Keightley says, *i.e. the law of Moses;* but the Chorus should utter general sentiments, and the sentiments of the poet; and I think a careful study of the Treatise of *Christian Doctrine* might tend to show the words to have a far wider signification.

313 *Legal debt.* ‘Debt due to the law.’

319 There is nothing about marriage in Numbers vi. 1–21, which contains the law regarding Nazarites. It was an unclean act for any Israelite to marry an alien, according to the Mosaic law.

327 *White as down.* A happier simile, as applied to locks, than the usual ‘white as snow.’ Cf. Burns, “Lassie wi’ the lint white locks.” (Lint, ‘scraped linen.’)

328 *Advise.* O.F. adviser. ‘Consider of.’

333 *Uncouth* (O.E. uncuƀ, p. part. of cunnan, with negative prefix) means literally ‘unknown.’ In L’Allegro, line 5, it is more than that. Here, I think ‘unusual’ is a sense we may apply, a sense too to be found in *Paradise Lost*, vi. 301, as Mr. Jerram points out in a note on *Lycidas*, 186. There and here is a notion of something monstrous and ugly. Recollect that the scene is laid “before the prison in Gaza,” and read lines
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117-123 and 1106-7. For the sense of 'unusual,' 'wild,' 'disorderly,' we may compare Sir Walter Scott's "Guy Mannering," Handy Vol. edition, p. 192—"The scene, though uncouth in the eye of a professed sportsman, had something in it wildly captivating."

335 Informed; i.e. 'guided.' Psalm xxxii. 9 (Prayer Book Version).

338 As signal. 'He was a sign of what men could be in highest state; now is a sign of what they can be in lowest state.'

341 To accentuate strongly the first syllable of invincible adds weight to the line. Cf. line 12, et seq.

343 Angels. "We have made this word a genitive, for such the poet evidently intended it to be." (K.)

345 There were only two combatants, Samson and the army opposed to him.

347-8 The meaning seems obscure. Possibly, 'to save himself against one armed coward at spear's length.' Possibly there is a reference to Samson's blindness, and the meaning is, 'if his antagonist were even a spear's length off he could not save himself.'

357 As a blessing. Either 'as being a blessing,' or 'as though a blessing.'

Pomp; i.e. 'display' (of strength).

Lines 356-60 are very peculiar in construction.

360 A scorpion's tail. 'The sting of the scorpion is in its tail; so at the end of favours there is evil for us.' Cf. lines 997-8 and note. For the whole line, cf. St. Luke xi. 12.

373 'Do not take the direction, the appointment of (possibly, according to an old legal use of the word, do not arraign) things reserved for the disposal of Providence.'

377 Who have profaned, &c. The Nazarite vow required that the hair should not be cut. In his case there was also a "mystery of God" involved in the fulfilment of this vow; for his God-given strength lay so far in his hair, that if that were cut he would lose it.

381 Surprised; i.e. 'taken unawares.'

382 Oft. Adverb for adjective. So "Thine often infirmities;"

so in Greek, τότε τόπος, 'the men of to-day,' &c.

384 Secret; i.e. the riddle. Judges xiv. 12-18.

Height. 'The condition of being high.' (Adj. high, with nominal suffix -th; cf. long-th.) So always, and correctly, spelt in Milton's poems, except in Arcades, line 75, height. This latter is the form which Shakespeare uses. For remarks on the spelling of this edition see Introduction, page xiv.

389 Cf. lines 216, 227. We may note (1) Milton considers Dalila to have been a harlot, Paradise Lost, ix. 1060; (2) he considers that Samson married her, which we are not told was so.
390 Scent. "Spelt sent in the original, and always so spelt in Milton." (M.) "The spelling (scent) is false; it ought to be sent." (Sk.) So, as the story goes, Juno conceived Mars by the scent of a flower.

391 Spurious. (Latin spurius.) 'Illegitimate.'

392 Assayed. See also line 1625. So spelt in Mid. English. Shakespeare has assay, Ben Jonson essayist. Essayed is the more correct form, from essaier. "Assay came in through the use of the O.F. asaier as another spelling of essaier." (Sk.)

394 Capital. Used in the double sense of 'chief,' and 'belonging to the head' (caput). Cf. Paradise Lost, xii. 383.

400 Notice the strong and reiterated expression of the feeling that he had been fooled, and by a woman; had lost his 'use and name and fame,' through his weakness. This sense of shame underlies most that Samson says; and to Milton too to be fooled by a woman is the thing that is most contemptible.

404 Compare the story of Merlin and Vivien as told by Tennyson.

Surcease. Surcease is not connected with cease. Professor Skeat says it is a monstrous corruption of sursis, or surside, past participle of surseoir, Latin supersedere, which itself, changing its meaning, came to have the sense of 'omit.'

407 I yielded. 'As he had before.' Cf. Judges xiv. 17, and and then Judges xvi. 16.

411, et seq. Every word is appropriate in this lofty and dignified passage.

415 Is. The subject of the verb is line 414. "These rags, this grinding," are parenthetical.

420 There is no reference in the Bible to disapproval on the parents' part in the matter of Dalila. Regarding her of Timnath, read Judges xiv. 3, and also verse 4, which tells us that "his father and his mother knew not that it was the Lord;" so we must suppose they were subsequently informed. Hereabouts Milton does not stick quite so closely as usual to Bible narrative. Lines 424, &c., suggest a doubt on Manoah's part that there was divine impulsion. Such and such like cases are frequent in sacred history and profane. Even Mary did not understand the divine impulse which drove our Lord to do something apparently undutiful, to stay behind on the return from Jerusalem. We may note there is a doubt whether Judges xiv. 4 means it was the Lord who sought an occasion against the Philistines, or Samson, instigated by the Lord, who did so. Line 315, et seq., would suit the former view; line 421, et seq., the latter.

424 I state not that. 'I do not say that that was so (or not).'

430 Tacit is superfluous so far as sense is concerned.

434 Judges xvi. 23.
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436 Pomp. Lat. pompa, ‘a solemn procession,’ perhaps here used in that sense. Perhaps so used in line 449; probably in line 1312.

439 Who slew’st them many a slain. Them is dative in commodi=‘to their hurt.’

442 Disglorified. Dis, a favourite prefix with Milton, as Todd points out. “Disespoused,” Paradise Lost, ix. 17; “dis-gospelling,” Apology for Smectymnu, &c. The prefix dis does not imply a negation, but the undoing of a former state.

444 ἐλαφρῶν, δοτις πνεύματων ἔωι πόδα
ἐχει, παραμεῖν νουθετεῖ τε τὸν κακὸς
πρᾶσσοντα.—Æsch. Prom. Vinct. 263, et seq.

449 Pomp. Cf. 436, and note.


454 Atheists. Used here, probably, not of those who denied the existence of a God, but of those who acted as though there were no God. Cf. Paradise Lost, i. 494-5, where priests, such as Eli’s sons, are said to “turn atheist.”

463 Me overthrown. In Old English the dative was the absolute case.

464 His deity. Notwithstanding Deut. iv. 18, Psalm cxv. 4, and other passages in the Bible, it seems that the Israelites believed in the existence of many false gods. Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and the hymn On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity, show that Milton did the same, following the old Israelitish belief, and also the opinion of the early Christians.

“It was the universal sentiment both of the church and of heretics, that the demons were the authors, the patrons, and the objects of idolatry.” (Gibbon, Decline and Fall, chap. xv.) Gibbon goes on to explain that the demons, or false gods, were “those rebellious spirits who had been... cast down into the infernal pit;” that one daemon was supposed to have assumed “the name and attributes of Jupiter, another of Æsculapius, a third of Venus...” Gibbon gives references showing the “unanimous opinion of the primitive church,” and Milton is undoubtedly orthodox in his belief. Cf. Paradise Lost, i. 373-521; and for Dagon, see lines 457, et seq.

466 Connive. (Lat. connivère.) To ‘wink at.’ “And the times of this ignorance God winked at,” Acts xvii. 30.

471 Blank. Originally blanch, ‘make pale.’ Cf. “the blank moon,” Paradise Lost, x. 656. Todd quotes Shakespeare, Hamlet, iii. 2, “Each opposite that blanks the face of joy.” And we may think of such expressions as “a blank look.”

472 Contrast this with the last speech of Manoa, who now is influenced by the enthusiasm of his son’s stronger mind.

477 Cf. 1 Kings xviii. 21.

Lord; i.e. supreme God.
491–6 To have revealed, et seq. An awkward, involved sentence.

Fact = 'deed.'

To be excluded = 'exclusion' (from). But how can a fact deserve exclusion from friendship? The meaning is—that 'a man who reveals secrets should be excluded,' &c. Cf. lines 499–500, where in like manner the poet passes in thought, but not in word, from the thing to the person, and there are many similar instances.

493 Other eleven-syllabled lines in *Samson Agonistes* are 494, 577, &c. "A verse may often have more than ten syllables . . . but it must carry so much sound as shall be a satisfactory equivalent for ten syllables." ("The Blank Verse of Milton," J. A. Symonds, *Fortnightly Review*, December, 1874.) This doctrine is true, if it does not mean more than this—that the extra syllable or syllables must not make the line, read with its context, unmelodious.

495 Blab. 'A tell-tale.' Cf. Comus, 138.

496 Cf. note on line 400.

496–7 "The mark of a fool set on his front!

But I God's secret have not kept, his holy secret"

"So printed in the original edition, and also in the second—only eight syllables in the first line, while there are thirteen in the second. In all recent editions the two lines are regularized by reading 'But I' as part of the first line, thus—

"'The mark of a fool set on his front! But I

God's secret have not kept, his holy secret'

I have preferred abiding by the original." (M.) I may add that I have thought it best to restore the note of exclamation after "front" which is in the first edition.

498–500 Cf. note on lines 491, et seq. 'A sin that Gentiles condemn to be confined to their abyss,' &c. (See Keightley.)

500 So Tantalus was punished for divulging the secrets of his father Zeus. "Ob scelera animique impotentiorem."

509 Quit thee all his debt. 'Acquit (release) thee (dative) the debt owed to him' (his, objective genitive).

512 As Hezekiah sued for life, and received it, *2 Kings* xx, 1–6.

516–18 The meaning of the lines, as pointed, appears to be, 'Do not reject that offered means which who knows but God hath set before us, in order to return thee home.' The "offered means" would be explained by lines 481, et seq. Mr. Keightley's pointing is—

"Reject not then what offered means. Who knows

But God hath set before us to return thee

Home to thy country and his sacred house?"
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And on "what offered means" he writes, "i.e. whatever means may be offered." As always, Mr. Keightley is admirably clear; and it is after much wavering that I have kept on the whole to the pointing of the first edition, thinking, with Professor Masson, that the alteration is too arbitrary, and possibly too abrupt, and having in mind other somewhat similar sentences in Milton's poems—though it must not be supposed that special attention need be paid to the punctuation of the first edition, Milton being blind, and moreover very careless in the matter of punctuation.

522-531 When in strength . . . my affront. A long, complicated, parenthetical, but not very difficult sentence.

526 Divine instinct. Cf. note on line 223.

528 The sons of Anak. Deut. ii. 10; ix. 2; Num. xiii. 28. Blazed. Blase has the same root as blow.

"Let us blaze his name abroad,
For of gods he is the God."

—Milton's trans. of Psalm cxxxvi.

530-1 I walked about . . .
On hostile ground, none daring my affront.

Milton was probably thinking of Goliath, though Samson, of course, could not have been so thinking.

My affront. An objective use of the possessive adjective = 'affront offered to me.'

532 Swollen with pride. So Wolsey, Henry VIII. iii. 2—

"I have ventured,
Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,
This many summers in a sea of glory;
But far beyond my depth my high-blown pride
At length broke under me."

There is a notion of actual size, actual swelling, of a proud look and a somewhat high stomach.

533 Venereal trains. 'The enticements of love.' See note on line 932. The passage is admirably illustrated by Paradise Lost, xi. 580-687, in which observe line 624 for the word "trains."

537 Concubine. Perhaps here used for 'partner of my bed,' without any special significance. Observe again Samson's fierce contempt for his own conduct; his bitter feeling that he is "ridiculous," a laughing-stock—he who had been so great. So David felt when "the very abjects" mocked him in his time of humiliation.

Shore me. Cf. note on line 439.

540 Shaven. We may recollect those who were bidden to tarry at Jericho till their beards were grown. 2 Sam. x. 5.
541-557 Observe the rhythm and word-music of these lines. Note especially the “apt alliteration’s artful aid” of \( \text{f} \) and \( \text{r} \). Cf. Paradise Regained, ii. 358, et seq.—

“Fairer than feigned of old, or fabled since
Of fairy damsels, met in forest wide
By knights of Logres, or of Lyones,
Lancelot, or Pelleas, or Pellonore.”

543 Cf. Comus, 672-3, and “With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,” in Keats’ Ode to a Nightingale.

545 “Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man?” Judges ix. 13. “Milton’s version is more faithful, for the Hebrew substantives are both plural, and possibly meant men of all ranks, high and low; for Elohim frequently signifies princes, great men.” (K.)

546 Crystalline. The stress is on the second syllable.

547 Cf. Virgil, Georg. iii. 521—

“Non qui per saxa volutus
Purior electro campum petit amnis.”

548 Against the eastern ray. The morning ray of light, that strikes the current flowing towards it, making it glist.

549 Rod. ‘The ray or beam from the sun.’ In Comus, 340, called “rule.” Dunster refers to Eur. Suppl. 652, \( \lambda \alpha \mu \pi \rho \alpha \mu \varepsilon \nu \alpha \kappa \alpha \tau \iota \lambda \alpha \varphi \nu \gamma \alpha \iota \alpha \nu \) \( \nu \alpha \kappa \alpha \nu \) \( \sigma \alpha \phi \alpha \rho \zeta \) \( \varepsilon \beta \alpha \lambda \lambda \varepsilon \gamma \alpha \iota \alpha \nu \). So radius (Latin), ‘a rod,’ or ‘ray,’ rayon (Fr.), ‘a ray,’ or ‘spoke of a wheel.’

550 Clear milky juice. Clear and milky are an apparent or (may we say?) a real contradiction in terms. Perhaps we are to consider the words to mean ‘the clear stream was as good to him as milk.’ Or the poet may have had in his mind the milk-white froth, as it is sometimes called, of rushing water, which somewhat resembles frothing milk; but all explanations that I have seen or thought of are unsatisfactory to me. In Paradise Lost, v. 306, water as a pure refreshing beverage is called “milky stream.” Juice for water is perhaps less difficult. Mr. Keightley says, “He uses it with reference to the juice of the grape, to which he opposes it.” In Latin sucus, which means ‘moisture,’ or ‘juice,’ is used with lactis—sucus lactis, a draught of milk.

551 Refreshed. Probably here the participle, not, as Professor Mason takes it, ‘refreshed myself.’

553-4 So Milton, late in life, though no foe to temperate good cheer, drank a cup of water, but smoked a pipe, and so to bed.

557 In accordance with his Nazarite vow. Even his mother, before his birth, was to drink no wine nor strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. ( Judges xiii. 7.) Numbers vi. gives in full the conditions of Nazariteship. Cruden’s Concordance puts them more concisely: Nazarite signifies ‘consecrated,’ ‘sanctified.’
NOTES.

It is worth noticing that one might be so consecrated from birth, or even, as in Samson's case, before birth.

560 What boots it. Lydias, 64. We find the same root in better, and O.E. betan, 'to improve.'

562 Effeminately vanquished. 'Vanquished by a woman.'

563-572 With little doubt intensely autobiographical.

563 Cf. line 365, but this is a finer line. Quelled. Strong in sense, though not in sound.

564 To what = 'for what,' and corresponds to the Lat. dative cui rei, &c.

564-5 Serve my nation, &c.; i.e. 'serve my nation, and be a servant to (observe) the work,' &c. An instance of zeugma. The word serve suits the clause to which it belongs, and one of the ideas suggested by it suits the following clause.

568 These redundant locks. Milton too was conspicuous with redundant locks, and was distinctly regardful of his personal appearance. In the Second Defence, and in the soul-stirring sonnet To Cyriack Skinner, upon his Blindness, we have evidence of his desire not to be thought disfigured by loss of sight. In early life he was eminently handsome.


574 Draff. 'Refuse,' especially hogwash.

578 Annoy. Really a strong word. M.E. anōen, O.Fr. anoiir. Formed from sub. anoi, which in its turn was formed from Lat. in odio, in odio esse, in odio venire, &c. (Sk.)

579 A harsh line, as regards scansion.

582 From the dry ground. Judges xv. 18, 19. "Milton here follows (not our translation, but) the Chaldee paraphrase and the best commentators, who hold that God made a cleft in some of the ground or rock, in the place called Lehi; Lehi meaning both a jaw and a place so called." (N.) Samson Agonistes, Clar. Press.—R. C. Browne.

583 Can as easy. Adjective for adverb, as is common in Milton.

586 Why else, &c. Scarcely consistent with line 570.

589 A line with the old ring in it, which prepares us for what follows.

Frustrate; i.e. 'frustrated,' 'made vain.' (K.)

590-98 An autobiographical passage of exquisitely solemn sound, meaning, and sadness. The last four lines seem perfect,
and the last line haunts the reader, and will not be got rid of if
he has ears to hear. The quotation of this passage by Johnson
gives the lie to those critics who, seizing on one side of his
criticism of the tragedy, would have us believe that Johnson
was incapable of perceiving what he himself calls “the ever-
lasting verdure of Milton’s laurels.”

The “passage of striking beauty” quoted by Cumberland,
Johnson’s early assailant in this matter, is lines 547–552. Let
the shade of Milton decide which critic he would prefer.

591 Treat. Fr. traiter, Lat. tractare, ‘to handle.’
594 Genial. Lat. genialis, ‘kindly.’
595–6 “How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world.”

600 Humours black. Lat. humorem, Fr. humour, ‘moisture.’
“The four humours, according to Galen, caused the four tem-
peraments of mind; viz., choleric, melancholy, phlegmatic,
and sanguine.” (Sk.) Todd quotes Burton’s Anatomy of Melan-
choly (“melancholy” itself meaning “black humour’ or ‘black
bile’). “The spirits being darkened, and the substance of the
brain cloudy and dark, all the objects thereof appear terrible,
and the mind itself, by those dark, obscure, gross fumes,
ascending from black humours, is in continual darkness, fear,
and sorrow.”

605 Cf. lines 184–5.
606–50 Regarding this passage, Thyer remarks that “these
sudden starts of impatience are very natural, and the unequal
measure of the verse very well suited to it.” Cf. also note on
line 81.

610–11 Observe the rimes.

610 Reins. “The lower part of the back.” M.E. reims; O.F.
reins; Lat. renes, ‘the kidneys,’ ‘loins;’ Gk. φρένα (φρένα,
‘the parts about the heart, or about the liver’). Common
in the Psalms for the inward parts.

612 Fierce accidents; i.e. ‘the fierceness that belongs to tor-
ment’ (Lat. accido). “Perhaps (the word is used) in the sense
of attacks of disease.” (K.) Notice the use of “his” in this
line, and “her” in line 613. Here “torment” and “mind”
are to some extent personified, but Milton seldom uses “its,”
scarcely ever in poetry, and the word appears to have hardly
come naturally to writers of his day.

615 Answerable pains. ‘Pains which answer to (resemble)
the pains of the body.’ So we say of acute mental agony, “the
toothache of the mind.”

620 Immedicable. Lat. immediabilis, ‘incurable.’
623 Note this fine line, and cf. lines 18–20, et seq.
624 Apprehensive; “i.e. the parts that can apprehend, the
mind.” (K.)
NOTES.

627 Medicinal seems to have been Milton's usual spelling, and the word is so spelt in the first edition of Samson Agonistes.


633, et seq. Cf. line 23, et seq.

Thrived. Weak past tense for thrave.

Amain. From a = 'on,' 'with,' and magen, 'might.'

645 Repeated. 'Again and again made.' (M.)

652, et seq. "In the original edition there is a full-stop after 'frail life;' but there is a direction in the Errata to remove it." (M.) Thus "consolatories" appears meant to be in apposition to "the sayings of the wise," and to sum up the meaning of lines 652-6.

658 Much persuasion sought; i.e. 'persuasion sought out with pains.'

659 Lenient of grief. Cf. note 2 on line 184.

Observe the rhymes, 658-9.

660-2 Cf. the "vacant chaff well meant for grain," of In Memoriam; and Ecclesiasticus xxii. 6. "A tale out of season is as musick in mourning:" "but," adds the son of Sirach, "stripes and correction of wisdom are never out of time."

662 Mood (from modus) is a particular arrangement of intervals in the musical scale; perhaps Milton here combines and confounds the other 'mood' (of mind) Germ. mutth. Cf. Paradise Lost, i. 550—

"Anon they move

In perfect phalanx to the Dorian mood

Of flutes and soft recorders."

669 Contrarious. A form apparently introduced for the sake of the jingle with "various," and so far vicious.

672-5 Observe the rimes, which add variety, though scarcely dignity, to the passage.

674-7 Milton had a more than Horatian contempt for the crowd—the profanum vulgus—the uninstructed by thought and study. Cf. his "trivial and vulgar persons," &c., in the discourse on "Tragedy" prefixed to the Samson; also the two sonnets On the Detraction which Followed upon my Writing certain Treatises, and many other passages in the prose works as in the poetical. The former of the two sonnets mentioned is a good instance of Milton's occasional grotesque attempts at humour.

677 Heads. With thought of Lat. caput in its meaning of 'person,' 'man.' So we say "to count heads."

678, et seq. The poet is doubtless thinking of the great spirits of the Revolution—especially, with consciousness of his own dignity, of himself. It is probable that Milton considered he had played an important part in politics. At any rate, his cast
of mind resembles that of the man in the *Ethics* of Aristotle, who thinks himself worthy of great things, being worthy.

681 *Which in part they effect.* Cf. the references to the Licenser in pp. ix. and x. of the Introduction.

685 *Or them to thee of service.* "They also serve who only stand and wait." is more Christian in spirit, but *Samson* is not a Christian; and, without considering whether the doctrine of Christian humility as frequently expounded is the true Christian doctrine or not, *Milton* was no exponent of it in his own person.

688–91 Professor Masson remarks, "These four lines form a peculiar rhymed stanza." And that is certainly so, very peculiar indeed; not far removed from doggrel.

693–4 *Their carcasses to dogs and fowls a prey.* A translation of *Il.* i. 3–5—

\[ \text{πολλὰς δ' ἤθλιμοι ψυχὰς Ἀδὶν προσάφεν} \\
\text{ἡρῶν, αὐτῶν δὲ ἐλώρα τεῦχε κύνεσων} \\
\text{οἰΚωνοῦτε πᾶσι.} \]

694 Captive. Cf. line 33 and note.

695–6 Probably referring to the fate of the regicides; they could not refer to Samson. Cf. note on line 681.

696 Ingratitude. See line 282 and note. So "increate," *Paradise Lost,* iii. 6, &c.; and, per contra, "unsufferable," vi. 867; "untractable," x. 476.

697–704 So Milton, though scarcely poor, is in humble circumstances; so he experiences a crude (premature) old age, suffering the pain and deformity produced by gout. And so he cries, like an echo of the Chorus of some old Greek play—

"Just and unjust alike seem miserable,
For oft alike both come to evil end."

699 The diseases cause pain and deformity.

700 Crude. 'Unripe,' so 'premature.' In Virgil's "Cruda deo viridisque senectus," *Aeneid* vi. 304, the meaning is different.

701–2 Difficult lines, meaning perhaps, 'Though they have not lived a disorderly life, yet, without due cause, they suffer the same punishment which those who live dissolutely suffer.' Or, 'Though not contrary to God's order, arrangement, yet, without cause, they suffer,' &c.


715 Perhaps both Tarsus in Cilicia, or Tartessus (which is probably the Scripture Tarshish) in Spain, may have been present to the poet's mind; for the isles of Javan stands for Greece, Gadire (Tādelpa) for Gades or Cadiz. Javan was son
of Japheth, the reputed ancestor of Europeans. In Psalm lxxii. to we have, "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents." 2 Chron. ix. 21 tells us what the presents would be likely to be—"Ivory, and apes, and peacocks."

717–8 Bravery; i.e. 'finery.' So we say, 'to make a brave show.' So too we talk of a well-dressed woman 'sailing' along. Elsewhere Milton speaks with scorn, but no great wit, of the clergy "under sail, in all their lawn and sarcenet, their shrouds and tackle."—Of Reformation, ii.

719 Hold them play; i.e. 'have (make) them play.'

720 Amber scent. Ambergris, though quite a different substance, is called amber in early writers. (Sk.) Ambergris, called "grisamber" in Paradise Regained, ii. 344 (gris meaning 'grey'), was a perfume used in cooking. Cf. the passage of Paradise Regained just referred to. It is a substance of animal origin, found floating on the sea, or thrown up on the coast. Fuller, in his Worthies, speaks of it as worth £5 an ounce; but then that was best Cornwall, I think. When heated it gives off a peculiar perfume, and is good "on the top of a baked pudding." Cf. a note by Professor Masson on Paradise Regained, ii. 344; and Scott, Fortunes of Nigel (Handy Vol. edition), p. 342—"Zouns! sir, we would slit any nose that was turned up at us honest fellows. Ay, sir, we would slit it up to the gristle, though it had smelt nothing all its life but musk, ambergris, and court-scented water."

721 Harbinger. Lit. 'one who goes forward to provide harbour or lodging.' Ger. herberger. Cf. messenger for messager.

724 Dalila. So spelt throughout the tragedy. The Septuagint has Δαλίθα. Pronounce Dalilã. Observe how natural is all this scene between Samson and Dalila, recollecting that Samson is generally Milton, Dalila in many respects, both good and bad, Milton's conception of woman.

736 Fact= 'deed,' as in line 491.

737 Perverse. 'Un-toward.'

747 'My misdeed, which was more unfortunate even than rash.'

748, et seq. This whole scene should be compared, and may be in parts contrasted, with that famous scene in Paradise Lost, x. 867 to the end of the book. The opening of each is much alike, the close different indeed. There is much that is autobiographical in each, representing a like mood of thought and different moods of thought. I doubt not that Milton, in his usual maghannious mood, would rather apply to his first wife Paradise Lost, x. 937, et seq., than Samson Agonistes, 748–765. Throughout Dalila is admirably true to nature, and need by no means be considered as altogether bad.
748 The hyæna is said to imitate the human voice so artfully as to draw people to it, and then devour them.

"'Tis thus the false hyæna makes her moan,
To draw the pitying traveller to her den,
Your sex are so—such false dissemblers all."

—Otway, Orphan, ii.

Milton applies the comparison to a woman, but Otway to the men. (Newton.)

754 Chief. Cf. note on "easy," line 583.
755 The last syllable of "virtue" coalesces to some extent with "or." Cf. l. 814.
759-763 refers to Milton's reconciliation with his first wife, and probable subsequent quarrels. The reconciliation was in July or August, 1645, after she had left him two years. They lived together seven years, and had three daughters. Milton's nephew, Phillips, tells us how, when the poet was visiting a relative, his wife suddenly appeared and made submission, begging pardon on her knees, which friends, and "partly his own generous nature," induced him to receive. (See Professor Masson's note on the passage.) The scene is painted in undying words in the passage of Paradise Lost, specially referred to above in the note on lines 748, et seq.
760 With goodness principled; i.e. 'adopting goodness as their principle of action.'
775-6 Curiosity ... importune of secrets; i.e. 'curiosity, troubling in order to find out.' Cf. Paradise Lost, ix. 610; and Paradise Regained, ii. 404, "The importune tempter." "Of secrets" goes also with "inquisitive."
778 "He let his wisdom go for ease of heart." Professor Masson admirably refers to Paradise Lost, ix. 1155-1161. Both passages illustrate the saying, "There are few things which a woman despises more than a man who yields to her." Observe how throughout all Dalila's effort is to excuse herself, as is usually the case with a weak mind, of man or woman, in face of whatever woe it may have occasioned.
785 Parle. 'Treaty.' Paradise Regained, iv. 529. Or perhaps parley, as in Paradise Lost, vi. 296.
788 The gentler. 'The more gently.' Cf. note on line 583.
790-810 And what if love. So Merlin suggests to Vivien, that, if he tells her his secret, she may play him false.

"Not so much from wickedness
As some wild turn of anger, or a mood
Of overstrained affection, it may be,
To keep me all to your own self."

As some wild turn of anger, or a mood
Of overstrained affection, it may be,
To keep me all to your own self."
Dalilah's explanation is ingenious, and not discordant with the Bible narrative. Read Judges xvi. 15, "How canst thou say, I love thee?" et seq.

802 Hold; 'confined.'
803 That made for me; i.e. 'that (viz., your confinement) keeping you from going abroad on adventures) suited my plans.'
808 Mine and love's prisoner. Observe how much is said, and how exquisitely, in these four words. Compare—

"Tis almost morning, I would have thee gone,
And yet no further than a wanton's bird,
Who lets it hop a little from her hand,
Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
And with a silk thread plucks it back again,
So loving-jealous of his liberty."

—Romeo and Juliet, ii. 2.

812 Fond. Cf. line 228 and note.
814, et seq. The audacity of these lines amounts almost to genius. Dalilah has blinded Samson, and Samson is to pity her.
819, et seq. One would rather this speech were not spoken by a man to a woman. All the scene is marred by this, that Samson bandies words where there should be silence or dignified reproof. It is sad to say that Milton often did the same.
828 Impartial, self-severe, inexorable. Refer to—"which" (pardon). The pardon Samson grants himself is no pardon.
831 Philistine gold. Judges xvi. 5.
834-5 These fine lines well express the high principle of Milton's strenuous life.
840 i.e. 'knowing myself to be betrayed by thee.' Cf. the Greek use of the participle in such expressions as ἀνθυπαθέος. See Paradise Lost, ix. 792, "And knew not eating death."
842 Keightley suggests that Milton dictated, "And by evasions," &c. He points out that there is often confusion between and and or.
843, et seq. This speech is very full. In it Dalilah distinctly changes her ground. It is not now love that urged her, but patriotism and religious scruple. Here she gives Samson an advantage which he is quick to seize.
843 Determin'st . . . for. Used in the sense of the Greek καθίστω, 'to decide a thing to be so-and-so' (for=as='to be').
848 Constantest. (Cf. famousest, line 982, &c.) A form of superlative used by Milton, and in later times affected by Carlyle.
850 Thou know'st. Judges xvi. 5.
857, et seq. Dunster remarks that the priest is Milton’s own addition, and adds, “It is obviously a satire on the ministers of the Church,” which may be so.

860 Irreligious; i.e. ‘not conforming to our religion.’

865 Context. So always, with the accent on the second syllable, in Milton.

868 Respect. ‘Respect.’ Lat. respectus, ‘a looking at,’ ‘consideration.’ Observe the two extra syllables in this line; yet the effect is much that of a ten-syllabled line.

877–8 ‘Loved thee too well, as too well thou knew’st.’

881 Who. A long way from its antecedent “I” in line 876.

885-6 For the sentiment expressed in the lines, cf.—

“Thy going is not lonely; with thee goes
Thy husband; him to follow thou art bound;
Where he abides, think there thy native soil.”

—Paradise Lost, xi. 290.

886 Parents. Possibly the poet has his first wife in mind, who returned to her parents shortly after marriage, and refused to come home when sent for.

887 But my own. ‘I belonged to no one but myself,’ was independent.

891, et seq. ‘Men who induce others to act against natural law are impious, i.e. undutiful towards their fatherland, doing against it deeds worse than those of enemies. “Our country” is a name rightly dear to us so long as we may be justly proud of it; but men who so mar the honour of their country do violence to the reasons which make “our country” a dear name.’ Milton refers to the jus naturale and jus gentium of the Roman jurists, i.e., the law which is founded on the constitution of man, and is common to all civilized nations, as opposed to municipal law, the special laws which obtain in any particular State.

897 To acquire themselves; i.e. ‘to fulfil their object.’

897–9 The argument is that there is a natural religion which gods must not break, or they become ungodly. Yet Milton in other moods might be slow to admit this, and Dalilah might have mentioned episodes in the history of the Israelitish race apparently contradictory of the decision.

901 Pretexts.

905-6 These sarcastic lines, though natural, appear rather too colloquial and vulgar.

Peals. ‘See note to line 235.

907–27 The speech begins and ends admirably. Leaving argument, the man’s weapon, Dalilah betakes herself to entreaty and gentle persuasion, the woman’s. Yet part of the speech could scarcely have been uttered by a woman; no woman would have had so little tact as to have reminded Samson
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If his blindness. The poet seems to conceive of Dalila as having some real wish to make amends, or at least as having some real affection.

907–8 refer, I think, to line 906. Dalila has explained (lines 790–810) her reasons for so worrying Samson.

910 "He found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears," Hebrews xii. 17. (K.)

912 Misguided. Past part. agreeing with "I."

913 Too sensibly; i.e. 'with too much feeling.' Cf. the French sensible.

925 Tend about thee; i.e. 'tend thee.' "Tend" short for "attend." O.F. atendre, to 'wait,' 'attend.' (Sk.)

927 Least; i.e. 'as little as possible.'

928–37. The long dialogue evidently makes it very difficult to keep on a high level of thought and musical language.


933 Gins. 'Contrivances.' Fr. engin, Lat. ingenium.

934 Thyer remarks that this allusion to Circe and the Sirens is out of place. Dr. Johnson (Rambler, No. 140) has a similar criticism on such allusions, and especially on the allusion to the Phoenix (line 1699, et seq.). The warbling charms may be connected with "adder's wisdom" (line 936; Psalm lviii. 4, 5), and not refer to the Sirens; but the fair enchanted cup can scarce refer to any but Circe.

939 Could. So in the original, but altered into "could'st" in most of the editions since. (M.)

945 Uxorious. 'Devoted to,' 'dependent on' my wife.

948 Several editions have a comma after "censuring." Prof. Masson has a comma after "and." as well. These editions seem to consider the meaning to be, 'How would'st thou, in thy censure of me, frown or smile?' I have preferred to consider the meaning to be, 'How would'st thou censure my smile or frown?' We have just before, "How would'st thou gloss upon my words?"

Censuring; i.e. 'taking account of,' 'appraising.'

949 This jail. Pointing to the prison close at hand.

950 To='compared to.' So Eve, addressing Paradise—

"From thee How shall I part? And whither wander down Into a lower world, to this obscure And wild."—Paradise Lost, xi. 281, et seq.

951 Pretty, perhaps pathetic; and such touch might awaken sweet remembrance.
953 So Polyphemus, blinded by Hecuba, cries—

εἰτὲ ποῦ 'σθ', ὦ ἀρτάσας χερῶν
dιασπάσωμει καὶ καθαιμάξω χρᾶ.


Joint by joint certainly seems a strong expression.

955–9 are scarcely consistent with 954, which perhaps might well have been the conclusion.

963 Still; i.e. ‘continually,’ ‘abidingly.’ “The sense of still is ‘brought to a stall or resting-place.’” (Sk.) Lat. semper, not, as usually now, adhuc. The word is commonly so used in Milton and Elizabethan writers.

969 Concernments. Used nowhere else in Milton’s poems.
‘What concerns thee,’ ‘thy affairs.’

971–4 This conception of Fame (observe the gender, masculine) may be compared and contrasted with that of (1) the goddess Rumour or Fame, also with different-coloured wings—varis plumis. (Cf. Milton’s poem, In Quintum Novembris. (2) Chaucer’s goddess Fame in the House of Fame, attended by the wind-god Aeolus with two trumpets—a black, brazen trumpet (the Infamy or Slander trumpet), a gold trumpet (the trumpet of Praise). (3) Rumour, painted with many tongues, who speaks the Induction of Henry IV. (Part II.) (Cf. Prof. Masson’s note on the subject.)

972 Contrary. ‘Opposite,’ ‘different,’ ‘Fame with one mouth will proclaim your deeds, with the other mine.’ Pronounce the word contrāry as in the nursery rime. Lat. contrārius. The English language tends to throw the accent further back.

973–4 Observe the effective rime, used as in Shakespeare, to close the period.

981 Asdod. “The same delicacy of ear is even more apparent in his management of the sh sound. He has it often, of course; but it may be noted that he rejects it in his verse when he can. He writes... Silo for Shiloh (Samson Agonistes, 1674), Asdod for Ashdod (Samson Agonistes, 981), &c.” (M.)

982–4 ἀλλ’ ὡς γεγονός ἐκπρέπουσ’ εὐφυχλας,

πᾶσων γυναικῶν, ἵππη γυμνασίας
καὶ ἱππῶν ἕρμων καὶ θανάτῳ ἐσεὶ πολύ.

Eur. Herac. 597. (D.)

982 Famourest. Cf. note on constantest, line 848.

984 ‘I shall be recorded both whilst I am alive and when dead.’

987 And annual flowers. “With fairest flowers,

Whilst summer lasts and I live here, Fidele,

I’ll sweeten thy sad grave: thou shalt not lack
The flower that’s like thy face, pale primrose, nor
The azured harebell, like thy veins; no, nor
The leaf of egliantine, whom, not to slander,
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Out-sweetened not thy breath: the ruddock would
With charitable bill . . .

bring thee all this;

Yea, and furred moss besides when flowers are none,
To winter-ground thy corse.”—Cymbeline, iv. 2.

993 Piety. “The duteous affection of a son to his parent.”
So of Dalila to her Fatherland. Cf. “Pius Aeneas.”
995 ἵνα δὲ μὴ ταῦτ’ ἐστίν ἐν γυώμη φίλα,
κείσον τ’ ἐκείνα στεργέτω—καγὼ τὰδέ.—SOPH. Aj. 1038.

We say “replies at,” but not “envies at.”
996 Like. ‘Am pleased with.’
997–1009 As is usual, the various parties look at the matter
from their own points of view.
997–8 ‘She’s gone, and her sting, which was until now
concealed, is at the last discovered.’ Perhaps also there is a
poor attempt at a pun in the words “in the end,” a sting at the
end of a serpent’s tail being not uncommon in poetry and
sting,” in stanzas 18 and 17 of the first Canto of the Faerie Queene.
1003–1007 See note on 759–763.
1003–4 Beauty has power, which returns to regain love.
1008 “Amantium irae amoris integratio est.”—Terence, And.

iii. 3. 23. (N.)
1010–61 Read as a whole, this chorus is harmonious and
remarkably artistic. Lines 1010–17, and lines 1053–60, form
opening and closing stanzas, each having three rimes, and
each consisting of eight lines, each line riming with some other
line in its stanza. After line 1017 the rimes are less frequent
till line 1053 is reached, but they are here and there throughout,
giving variety to the chorus.

In rhythm and method this is a good imitation of the Greek
chorus, and the Greek chorus generally represents the poet’s
own views. Milton here expresses very definite conclusions at
which he had arrived regarding woman, and especially married
woman. Taking the Bible to mean what it says, the poet con-
sidered it a part of the divine institution that woman should
obey man. Moreover, he had been wronged, or conceived he
had been wronged, by his first wife, and he never forgot it, and
never entirely forgave it. Professor Masson shows how passages
in this chorus almost verbally resemble passages in the Divorce
pamphlets. Milton was an admirer of Euripides, and both are
spoken of as woman-haters; yet both spoke differently at dif-
terent times. All that Polyxena says is simple and noble, and
no cynic wrote lines 162–80 in Paradise Lost, xi. The gist of
the chorus is the rightful supremacy of man. Woe to him
who yields.
SAMSON AGONISTES.

1010, et seq. These lines read almost like a rhythmical translation of some chorus in Euripides.

1012 Inherit. 'Enjoy,' 'hold in possession;' so commonly in Shakespeare.

1014 Hit. Greek τυχέν.

1016 In one day or seven; i.e. 'hard to say (hit) in one day or seven.'

1020 Thy paramymph. Cf. Judges xiv. 20; xv. "Paranymph is 'bridesman,' or 'bridegroom's man'—the φίλος τοῦ νυμφίου, mentioned in John iii. 29." (M.) The word is used by Jeremy Taylor and others. "It is not the bride herself, but her father, that is said to have preferred him." (K.)

1030 Affect. Lat. affectare, 'to aim at.'

1034, et seq. I have endeavoured to punctuate so that the meaning should be, 'Seems to wisest men all heavenly,' &c. Some editions appear to consider the meaning to be, 'Once joined to wisest men,' &c. As punctuated, "once joined" means 'as soon as married.'

1034 Professor Masson quotes Milton's first pamphlet on Divorce, "The soberest and best-governed men are least practised in these affairs; and who knows not that the bashful muteness of a virgin may oft-times hide all the unliveliness and natural sloth which is really unfit for conversation?" Throughout the passage there is bitter reference to his first wife. "Adverse and turbulent," in line 1040, do not mean much more than 'opposed to virtue' (line 1039), and confusing it, causing disturbance in it.

1038 Intestine. Lat. intestinus, 'inward.'

1039 A cleaving mischief. Commentators see here a reference to the poisoned shirt sent to Hercules by his wife Deianira. Dryden has the same expression—

"When we lay next us what we hold most dear,
Like Hercules envenomed shirts we wear,
And cleaving mischiefs."—Aurungzebe, ii. i.

In his way to virtue adverse and turbulent. Todd quotes Eur. Orest. 604—

αἰεὶ γυναῖκες ἐμπρόσθιον ταῖς σύμφοραις
ἐφευραν ἄνδρων πρὸς τὸ δυστυχέστερον.

His; i.e. 'her husband's,' included in "wisest," &c.

1040-3 Or by her charms, &c. The whole of Tennyson's Merlin and Vivien is an admirable commentary on the sentiment of these lines.

1046-8 Cf. Proverbs xxxi. 10 to end of the book.

1048 Combines; i.e. with her husband.

1050-2 The connexion is, 'Happy the man who has a virtuous and obedient wife, but the husband who subdues his wife's opposition, and resists her seductions, is most meritorious.'
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1051 And all temptation; i.e. on the part of the wife to induce him to subordinate his judgment to hers.

1053-60 To sum up, man must be supreme. Yet we may compare a passage in the Tetrachordon, "Not but that particular exceptions may have place, if she exceed her husband in prudence and dexterity, and he contentedly yield; for then a superior and more natural law comes in, that the wiser should govern the less wise, whether male or female." Professor Masson refers to Paradise Lost, x. 144, et seq.; to which I should like to add Paradise Lost, xi. 621-36.

1066 Dr. Johnson objects to "honied words." Todd shows that the expression is used in Greek, Latin, Italian, and English poetry. Shakespeare, Henry V. i. 1, "His sweet and honied sentences."

1068 Harapha of Gath. Cf. 2 Sam. xxi. 16–22. "The four Philistine giants mentioned there are said to be sons of a certain giant in Gath called 'the giant;' and the Hebrew word for 'the giant' there is rapha or harapha. Milton has appropriated the name to his fictitious giant, whom he makes out in the sequel (1248, 1249) to be the actual father of that brood of giants." (M.)

1072 Habit; i.e. 'dress.'

1075 Fraught. Same as freight, 'burden;' i.e. 'what he is charged with.' "The change of vowel from au to ei was due to the influence of O.F. (and F.) fret. This F. fret is from O.H.G. frekt." (Sk.) "The word fraught (pronounced fracht) is still used in the north of Scotland; e.g. 'a fraught of water,' as much as can be carried at once from the well." (M.) "It is used here on account of the view of Dalila as a ship." (K.)

1080 Og. Deut. iii. 3. Anak, Emims. Deut. ii. 10-11.

1081 Kiriathaim. Gen. xiv. 5. "Shaveh Kiriathaim, or the plains of Kiriathaim, situated beyond Jordan, ten miles westward of Medeba, and afterwards belonged to Sihon, king of Heshbon." (Bagster's Polyglot Bible.)

1081–2 Thou knowest me now, if thou at all art known. "Not to know me argues yourselves unknown." (Satan to Ithuriel and Zepho, Paradise Lost, iv. 830.)

1087 Camp. 'Ground held by an army.' (Sk.)

1088–9 Of whom such noise hath walked about. Noise, or fame, report (Fr. bruit) is here half-personified. Cf. Virgil Aen. iv. 173, 'magnas it Fama per urbes.'

Survey. "Sc. and ascertain. Verb. præg." (K.) [Verbum praegnans—a verb which expresses one step in a process and implies another.]

1092 Single me. The probable meaning is, 'Invite me to single combat.' Cf. line 1222. Here the meaning can scarcely be 'Single me out.'
1093 *Gyves.* Professor Skeat compares W. *gyfyn,* ‘a fetter,’
‘gyve.’ “And Eugene Aram walked between,
With gyves upon his wrist.”
The gyves here are on the feet, not the hands. Cf. line 1235.

1097 *Is this line a giant’s ponderous joke?*

1099 *Palestine.* Cf. line 144 and note.

1105 *In thy hand; i.e. ‘in thy power.’* “In manibus terrae,”
[i.e. close to (at hand to) the shore]. Virg. *Georg.* ii. 45, is
referred to by Keightley, and there seems to be some of both
meanings here.

1108–29 A fine indignant passage.

*Such usage as; i.e. ‘this is the usage which.’*

1109 *Assassinated.* “The word was formerly used, as in
French and Italian, to denote an assault with murderous intent,
even if the intent were not accomplished; and its meaning is
here extended to maltreatment in general.” (Trench, quoted
by R. C. Browne.) Professor Skeat, quoting Brachet, says,
“Assassin, which is *assas* in Joinville, ... in Late Lat.
assassin, ... the name of a sect in Palestine in the thirteenth
century, the Haschischin, drinkers of haschisch, a decoction of
hemp. ‘The Scheik Haschischin, the Old Man of the Moun-
tain, roused his followers’ spirits by help of this drink, and sent
them to stab his enemies, especially the leading Crusaders.”

1113 *Close-banded.* ‘In a close band; or perhaps ‘in a secret
band;’ as we say, “Keep it close.”

1120–21 *Brigandine.* ‘A coat of mail’ (*Jfr.* xlvi. 4) worn
by brigands and others. *Habergeon.* ‘Mail for the neck and
breast.’ Dimin. of O.Fr. *hautere.* *Vant-brace.* ‘Mail for
the arms’ (avant bras). *Greaves.* ‘Leg-armour’ (O.F. *greve,
’shin’). *Gauntlet,* ‘glove of mail’ (O.F. and M.F. *gant,* ‘a
glove’). (Chiefly from Masson.)

1122 *A weaver’s beam.* With thought, of course, of Goliath’s
spear.

*Seven-times folded shield.* ἐπτάστημα ἀρρηκτον σάκος, Soph.
*Ajax,* 576. Ajax (Ovid, *Met.* xiii. 2) is “Clypei dominus sep-
templicis.”

1126 ‘Remains (in or to) thee.’

1132–4 So when, in *Anne of Geierstein,* English Arthur
bends the bow, which the Landamann himself could not bend,
removes the pole a hundred yards further, yet hits the mark, the
jealous Rudolph suggests that it is witchery.

1134 *Armed thee or charmed thee strong.* An allusion to
the belief held in the Middle Ages that the body could be
strengthened, weakened, rendered secure against wounds, &c.,
by spells. Hence champions in judicial combats were obliged
to make oath that they had not had recourse to such arts.
(Keightley and others.)
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1138 Ruffled porcupine.
   "And each particular hair to stand on end,
    Like quills upon the fretful porcupine."

1143 While I preserved; i.e. 'to last so long as I should
   have preserved.' Preterite subj.

1140-4 Note this, the common-sense explanation of Samson's
   strength; and especially observe line 1144.

1145, et seq.; also 1174-77. These lines recall the scene
   between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. (1 Kings xviii.
   21-24, &c.)

1149-51 These magic spells, et seq. Cf. note on line 1134.

1154-55 See, or rather to thy sorrow soon feel. Cf. 1117-18—
   "Where sight may give thee,
    Or rather flight."

1162 Comrades. So Polonius to Laertes—
   "Do not dull thy palm with entertainment
    Of each new-hatched, unfledged comrade."
   —Hamlet, i. 3.

1163-4 As good for nothing else. 'Thou and thy locks.'

1164 Boisterous locks (and in the prose works "a boisterous
   and bestial strength."—T.) There is a notion of animal
   strength and spirits in the word boisterous. Cf. line 1273. (Sir
   Walter Scott's jolly Clerk of Coppersmith, in Ivanhoe, is a
   good illustration of the better meaning of the word.) Read
   also lines 568-70.

1164-7, No worthy match, et seq., apply in some sense
   both to "thee" (line 1160) and "thy boisterous locks"
   (line 1164).

1167 The giant is quite Miltonesque in the poverty and
   vulgarity of his humour.

1168-9 Keeping the usual punctuation, 'All these indignities;
   aye, and they are indignities when they come from men of thy
   sort (or race).' Or perhaps we may insert a comma after "are,
   and consider the meaning to be, 'I deserve these indignities,
   these evils, which come from men of thy sort (or race).''

1172. Psalm xxxiv. 15.


1185-88 Judges xiv. 19.

1189-90 Judges xv. 9, 10.

1194 Your city. Should be Gath (line 1068), but by the
   Bible version seems to be Timnath (Judges xxiv. 2, 10), which
   was apparently near Gath, Gath being, I suppose, the principal
   city of the state.

1195 Politician lords; i.e. 'lords of your State.' Greek
   πόλις, 'a city.' Politician is not often used as an adjective.

1196 Under pretence, &c. "Josephus relates that, under the
   pretence of honour, these thirty companions were sent to watch
over him, lest he should commit any disturbance.” (T.) This
is not mentioned in the Scripture narrative.

1202 Wherever chanced (upon).
1211–21 May be the poet here has thought how he too had
been rejected. For his country’s sake he had left the “quiet
and still air of delightful studies,” and—worse lot than Samson’s
—few had observed it.

1213 If their servile minds. Cf. the sonnet commencing,
“I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs.”

1215 For nought; i.e. ‘as though I were worthless.’

1218 Known offence. ‘Offence that is well known,’ i.e. the
betrayal of his secret to Dalila.

1219 Not all your force. ‘My offence was the cause of my
being disabled, not the force you brought against me.’ Or,
perhaps, ‘Not all your force could have disabled me.’

1220 Appellant. ‘The challenger.’ The defendant, in like
manner, signifies ‘the person challenged.’ Thus in Shakespeare’s
King Henry VI. (Part II.) 2. 3.

“This is the day appointed for the combat;
And ready are the appellant and defendant.” (T.)

Throughout this scene with Harapha Milton makes much use of
that language of chivalry with which Sir Walter Scott’s novels
has made us so familiar. Milton, too, was fascinated by old
tales of knights and dames, especially by those of his own
country. In the account of his youth, which he gives in the
tract entitled An Apology against a pamphlet called “A Modest
Confutation, &c”—the poet writes: “Next (for hear me
out now, readers) that I may tell ye whither my younger feet
wandered; I betook me among those lofty fables and romances
which recount in solemn cantos the deeds of knighthood
founded by our victorious kings, and from thence had in
renown over all Christendom.” ‘Arthur’s Table Round’ was
one of those subjects which in his youth he had proposed to
celebrate.

1222 Thrice: “As was the custom in challenges.” (M.) See
lines 1151, 1174–5.

1223 Enforce. Used for ‘force.’ As “enforct” is used for
‘forced’ in the line, “Adam now enforce to close his eyes.”—
Paradise Lost, xi. 419.

1224 Todd quotes the delightful old-world work of Vincentio
Saviolo [Of Honour and Honourable Quarrels, interlaced with
sundrie and pleasant Discourses, not unfit for all Gentlemen
and Captaines that profess Armes. Lond. 1595]: “They are
not to be admitted prooфе by armes, who have committed any
treason against their prince or countrie,” &c. “To these we
may also add freebooters, and all such as for any military dis-
order are banished. Likewise all theves, robbers, ruffians,
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1224 Enrolled. Lat. adscriptus, adscribo, to ‘enrol,’ ‘enter in a list.’

1225 Capital punishment. Perhaps this does not mean ‘death’ here, but ‘loss of all rights as a free man and citizen.’ The caput in Latin meaning not merely ‘head,’ or ‘life,’ but also ‘civil,’ or ‘political life.’

1227-30 Cf. line 1082, “Much have I heard,” to line 1090.

1230 Survey. Contrast with “survey” in line 1227, and observe “survey” in line 1089, &c. There is some attempt at a pun, ‘You’ve come to inspect me, mind my hands doesn’t inspect you.’

1231 Baal-sebub. 2 Kings i. 16. ‘Baal the fly god.’ “Harapha fitsly swears by this god, ‘the god of Ekron’;” and again (line 1242), “by the Phoenician goddess Astaroth.” (M.)

1234 Bring up thy van. This appears somewhat unnatural and pedantic.

1235 Cf. 1092-3.

1234 Astaroth. 1 Kings ii. 33. ‘The Phoenician moon goddess.’ Cf. notes on lines 1231 and 981.


1246 Sultry, or swelter (the older and fuller form). “Very hot.” (Sk.)

Chafe. See Professor Skeat on to chafe, which originally meant ‘to warm.’ “He was chauffid with win” (incaluisset mero).

Wyclif’s Esther i. 10. O.F. chaufer (M.F. chauffer) ‘to warm.’

1248 Cf. note on line 1068. Samson died B.C. 1120; Goliath, 1063; his four brothers, 1018. (Oxford Bible.)

In line 1249 Milton makes the “brood” now full-fledged. Hence (according to this calculation) Goliath (probably the eldest, and, say, twenty years old now) was some seventy-seven years old, or more, at death; whilst his four brethren had reached the respectable age of from 115 to 120 years or more, when David’s mighty men despatched them in the battles of the year 1018, after that Ishbi-benob, “he being girded with a new sword,” had well-nigh avenged on the king his brother Goliath’s death of some forty-five years before. (2 Sam. xxi. 15-22.)

Divulge him. “In its proper Latin sense, ‘spread abroad among the people.’” (C. C.)

1250-2 Lines apparently written to connect Harapha with the action of the tragedy.

1262 I have placed a dash after “will,” thinking the meaning to be probably, ‘Let whatever is to be, be,’ and that there is a
considerable pause after "will." Judging by the punctuation, this also seems to be Professor Masson's opinion; he places a semicolon after "will." Others put a comma after "will," when the meaning seems to be, 'Whatever happens, my deadliest foe,' &c.

1266-7 It may with mine, &c. Another hint, in accordance with the custom of Greek tragedy, of what Samson feels, though darkly, will happen. Cf. line 465, et seq.

1267 Draw . . . ruin. Ruin, Lat. ruina, 'fall,' 'downfall.' So Virgil, speaking of a tree felled on the mountain-side, "Tractitque jugis avolsa ruinam."

1268 A welcome ending to the scene with Harapha, which is not needed to advance the action of the tragedy, and is, moreover, not very interesting. The chorus is remarkably artistic and harmonious, and has in it many polished, forcible lines, fine in form, language, and thought. From line 1287 the subject does not lend itself to such vigorous treatment, and the poetry is on a lower level, yet still very artistic.

1273 Boisterous. Cf. line 1164, and note.

1278 Feats . . . defeats. Shakespeare, Milton, and other poets of the period are fond of these conceits.

1283 Expedition; i.e. 'speed.' 'With the speed of wing and lightning swiftness he executes.'

1284 A rapid, glancing line, as that which it refers to.

1287 Exercise; i.e. 'trial.' "Exercere" is so used by Virgil and others. "'Nate, Iliacis exercite fatis,'" Aen. iii. 182.

1292 Either of these is in thy lot; i.e. either a sudden, un expected attack upon his foes, with no armour of men, but God to help him; or, more probably (lines 1294-6), the self-victor of patient endurance.

1298 Labouring thy mind. Cf. Paradise Lost, xii. 18, "Labouring the soil," though the meaning of "labouring" may be quite the same.

1303 The sceptre or staff is the staff of office.

Quaint; i.e. 'curious,' 'unusual.' Cotgrave has "coin' quant, compt, neat, fine, spruce, smirke, snug, daintie, trim' tricked up." In Old Eng. quaint meant 'well-known,' as acquain; but the two meanings of cognitus ('known') and comptus ('trim') were confused.

1304 Amain. Cf. line 637, and note.

1307 Voluble. (Paradise Lost, iv. 594, volubil; but ix. 2 voluble, as here.) Lat. volubilis, lit. 'that is rolled' (of spee 'rapid,' 'fluent,' 'glib'). Here I think it means that, speaking as an officer to a captive, there will be little hesitation—he will be peremptory.

1308 Ebrews. So spelt in the original edition. The word spelt occurs three times in Samson Agonistes. It occurs tw
besides in Milton's poems (Paradise Regained, iv. 336, and Psalm cxxxvi. 50), both times as an adjective, and both times with the H. (From Professor Masson's note.)

1309 Manacles here means 'fetters for the feet.' Cf. line 1235.

1312 Triumph; i.e. 'warlike show or spectacle,' as in L'Allegro, 120, but here at least with idea of victory present. Cf. l. 434, et seq. Lat. triumphus; "a solemn and magnificent entrance of a general into Rome after having obtained an important victory."

Pomp; i.e. 'procession.'

"Holding true intelligence what follies
Had crept into her palace, shee resolved,
Of sports and triumphs under the pretext,
To have them mustered in their pomp and fulnesse."

—Jonson, Cynthia's Revels, iv. 6.

Quoted by T. Warton, who also well points out that Milton is often learned when it is not suspected, and that both here and in other passages he has applied pomp in the sense which it bore in relation to the Grecian festivals, where the πομπή, a principal part of the ceremony, was the spectacular procession. Cf. lines 436 (and note) and 449; also Paradise Regained, i. 457, and especially Paradise Lost, vii. 564, where, the work of creation ended, it is said of the Creator—

"Up He rode,
Followed with acclamation, and the sound
Symphonious of ten thousand harps, that tuned
Angelic harmonies: the earth, the air
Resounded
The heavens and all the constellations rung,
The planets in their station listening stood,
While the bright pomp ascended jubilant."

1313 Throughout the tragedy Samson is supposed to have more strength than other very strong men; he has still the vast limbs and muscles, though the spirit that animated them is gone. Cf. line 1260, which appears to refer to the whole period of his imprisonment; yet cf. also line 1355, and note. The various passages are not quite consistent, nor need they be, perhaps.

1317 Heartened; i.e. 'brightened up;' as we say, 'Keep a good heart,' 'look bright and cheerful;' for these will probably follow from that.

1323-32 Fine indignant lines, full, yet condensed and precise. There is probably some contemptuous thought of the holiday sports which the Puritans had suppressed, but which were revived under Charles II. The show given in honour of Amyas Leigh's return home from his first voyage Westward Hol well illustrates the passage. Todd has a long and interesting note on the several performers here mentioned.
1324 Gymnic artists. Gk. γυμνόποιος. 'Jugglers.' Chaucer, togelours. O.Fr. joglere, later jougleur; Lat. toculator (socus, 'a joke'), hence 'buffoons' or 'comic singers'; but here perhaps used in its present sense.

1325 Antic. Originally adj., same as 'antique.' Fr. antique, Lat. antiquus, also spelt anticus. (Sk.) In the old English farce the antics were buffoons, with a black face and a patch-work habit.

Mummers. 'Maskers,' 'buffoons.' Much the same as antics in dress, &c., who went about masquerading in parties (and still do in some places) at Christmas and other holiday times. Der. O.Dutch mom, monner (from the sound "mum" or "mom," used like the English "bo"), 'to frighten or amuse children.' (Sk.) We often see mothers hide or mask the face, with the hand or apron for instance, then shoot it out from behind the covering with this "bo," or in Holland "mum." From "mum" came "mummer," implying not merely a person saying "mum," but the action used in saying it. Hence a "masker," 'masquerader.' There is a most interesting connection between this "mum" and "mum" (Lat. mu, Greek μῶ), which expresses 'the least sound made with the lips.' Cf. also "mew," "murmur," &c.

Mimics. Mr. Keightley says, "The 'mimics' ('mimirs' first ed., corrected in Errata), stage-players; mimi.' Greek μίμος, 'an imitator,' 'actor.'

1329–30 'Do they not seek new quarrels, which will give an opportunity of distressing me more, if I refuse?'

1342 Joined; i.e. 'enjoined.'

1346 Stoutness; i.e. 'resolution.' Der. stout. A.S. stolt, cognate with Lat. stolidus, of which the original sense was 'firm.' (Sk.) So that other great writer of the Puritan period, recounting Mr. Greetheart's battle with Slaygood, tells us how "he let fly with such stoutness at the giant's head and sides, that he made him let his weapons fall from his hand; so that he smote and slew him, and cut off his head, and brought it away to the inn."

1347 Another hint of what may come. Cf. lines 465, et seq., and 1265, et seq.

1349 Highth. Cf. line 384 and note.

1351 By seems more properly to belong to report in line 1350, and the meaning to be, 'Who knows how he may add fuel to the flame by the manner in which he reports thy words.'

1353 A line bigger in words and sound than its sense will well bear.

1355 Cf. Judges xvi. 22. We must suppose a gradual return of Samson's unrivalled strength with his growing hair. Perhaps also that the Philistines considered Samson so disabled by being
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blinded that further precautions were needless; for, of course, the foot-shackles were nothing to Samson in his strength. As pointed out before, throughout the tragedy, Samson's strength, even with shorn head, is far greater than that of an ordinary man.

1359 Observe the line. For any Israelite to take part in sports honourable to Dagon would be a shame, but a Nazarite in the temple of Dagon!

1361 'They may make a drudge of me, they shall not make me a fool.' Always it is the fact that he has been befooled that most afflicts him.

1366 *Descire*; *i.e.* 'merit,' in the classical sense of *mereri*, 'to earn.'

1368 A suggestion well answered in the following line.

1375 *Which, in his jealousy.* "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God" (*Exodus* xx. 5); that is, a God who will not brook a rival.

1377-9 *Yet that he may dispense, &c.* As dispensation was granted to Naaman to bow himself in the house of Rimmon, when his master leaned on his hand. (2 *Kings* v. 18, 19.)

*Dispense with me... present* = 'may grant dispensation to me,'

1381-9 From line 1365 Samson begins to change his mind, yet the language of these lines strikes one as abrupt.

1387 *Aught of presage; i.e.* 'if there be anything presageful;' that is, 'if the presage in my mind be real presage.'

1392 *Bid.* For 'bidden.' Such shortened participles are frequently used; *e.g.* "chose," "broke," &c., for "chosen," "broken."

1396 *Engines.* Here probably in its usual sense to-day, or it may mean 'contrivances.' Cf. note on "gins," line 933.

1397 *As for that,* as so often in Milton.

1399-1409 The passage is best explained by a reference to the hints already given, that he feels in him some rousing motions to great action.

1402 *Tryal.* 'To draw along the ground.' Cf. Lat. *traheo,* 'to draw;' *trahea,* 'a sledge;' Fr. *traîllier,* 'to wind a yarn,' "I trayle, lyke as a gowne dothe behynde on the grounde."

(From Skeat's *Dictionary.*)

1408 *Yet this be sure, &c.,* connects with line 1403, the four intervening lines being parenthetic.

1410 *Doff; i.e.* 'do off,' just as 'don' is 'do on,' both being contractions.

1416 *Common enemy,* *i.e.* 'the enemy of all of them as a community.'

1418-19 Observe the Miltonic sneer at lords and priests.

1420 *If aught religion; i.e.* 'if religion in any way—at all.' Cf. the adverbial use of the Greek *τι*. 
SAMSON AGONISTES.

Before Puritan times, and after the Restoration, saints’ days and Sundays were kept not only by cessation from work, but also by feasts and sports, as now on the Continent.

1426 ‘I cannot warrant whether or no you should “expect to hear”’ (line 1423) any more of me.’

1427-37 Observe the rhythm of these lines, and their impressive tone of holy resignation. Note, too, the effect of the short lines occurring at intervals. The passage is a good imitation of the iambic measure in use in the Greek Chorus. On line 1429 Mr. Keightley has the following valuable note, “The metre of this verse is rather remarkable. It is not properly an Alexandrine, for it has not the casura in the middle, but a composition of three two-feet verses. It (that is the metre) has already occurred in the Ode on the Nativity, v. 164, and is not uncommon in Spenser.” An Alexandrine is, roughly speaking, a verse of six iambi, with a casura (pause at the end of a word) at the close of the third foot.

1430 Great. Used adverbially.


1434 And be now a shield of fire. A shield, as being his guardian spirit; of fire, as being “an angel of God, very terrible”—bright, too, to look upon; and as one who “rode up in flames after his message told of thy conception.”

1435 That spirit that first rushed on thee in the camp of Dan.

“...And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan,” Judges xiii. 25

1445 Peace with you, brethren. The Hebrew and Arabic form of salutation.

My inducement hither; i.e. ‘That which lead me hither.’

1447 Parted hence. Cf. line 1481, and note.

1448 Come, instead of go, brings the scene rather more graphically before us; puts us, as it were, on the spot with the lords and Samson.

Play here means ‘exert himself,’ ‘make trial of his strength.’ It often means ‘fight.’ 2 Sam. ii. 14. Thus, “sword-play.”

1453 ‘To give ye share with me in the hope which I have.’

1455-6 ‘To partake that hope with thee would much rejoice us.’ These inverted sentences are very common in Milton.

1456 Say = ‘speak.’

1457 Attempted; i.e. ‘made trial of.’ O.Fr. atempeter, older form atenter; Lat. attentare, ‘to try at.’ (Sk.)

1458 High street; i.e. ‘chief street;’ high, meaning ‘tall,’ ‘lofty,’ hence ‘chief.’ Cf. line 1599, where we have “each high street;” i.e. ‘each important street.’
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1459 _With supplication prone_ (Lat. _pronus_); i.e. 'bending forwards and downwards with supplication.'

1461–3 _That part most revered Dagon and his priests._ Perhaps brought in here of purpose. Milton detested priestcraft as he detested political tyranny. Each man must have full liberty of conscience himself to examine the truth of the creed in which he had been brought up, and to reject therein whatever was incompatible, in his own belief, with Holy Writ. In such an investigation he might trust to be guided by "the Holy Spirit," "the peculiar possession of each believer," even "a more certain guide than Scripture." Cp. the sonnets _On the New Forces of Conscience_, and _To the Lord General Cromwell_; and, for a full exposition of Milton's religious views, the _Treatise of Christian Doctrine_ discovered among State Papers in 1823, and translated by the Rev. C. R. Sumner.

There is probably running through the whole passage a thought of the treatment of their opponents by the now successful Royalists, who appear to be divided into three classes, those, "wondrous harsh," "set on revenge and spite," men who "most revered Dagon" (the Established Church?) "and his priests;" next, those who would sell "God and state" for a "private reward;" and lastly, men "more generous far and civil," who have had enough of vengeance.

1467 _Civil._ Lat. _civilis_, 'demeaning oneself as a citizen' (which necessarily implies consideration for the feelings and wishes of fellow-citizens).

1469 _To misery beneath their fears_; i.e. 'to such misery that they no longer feared him.' Cf. "So-and-so is beneath contempt."

1471 _Convenient._ Lat. _conveniens_, 'suitable.'

1472 We may observe the dramatic propriety of the line. Read lines 1473–5. Cf. line 1508, _et seq._

1474 Captive, as everywhere else in Milton's poetry, though we have "captived."

1481 _To part hence._ Cf. line 1447. Fr. _partir._ "In the middle ages 'Se partir d'un lieu' meant to separate oneself from a place, go away, hence to depart." (Brachet, quoted in Skeat's Dictionary.)

1484 _Not wanting him, I shall want nothing_; i.e. 'not being without him (having him), I shall be in want of nothing.' _Want_ is used here in its two senses—(1) connoting deficiency, (2) connoting need; their connection is easy to see.

1488 _Car'zt._ 'Hast care or forethought.'

1490–1503 Throughout the passage there is probably a general thought in the poet's mind of himself. Milton's locks are famous for their beauty, as those of Samson for the strength that went with them. Nor did he mean to sit idle (cf. the sonnet _On his Blindness_); and with _Paradise Lost_ completed,
he knew, though the world might not, that God had seen fit to “use him in some great service.” We may even wonder whether, had it not been for his blindness, Milton could so entirely have separated himself from the things of this world as to have produced Paradise Lost.

“An ancient clergyman of Dorsetshire, Dr. Wright,” found “John Milton, then growing old, in a small chamber, hung with rusty green, sitting in an elbow chair. . . . He used also to sit . . . at the door of his house near Bunhill Fields, in warm sunny weather, to enjoy the fresh air. And so, as well as in his room, he received the visits of people of distinguished parts, as well as quality.”

1503 To; i.e. ‘in addition to.’ Cf. the Greek use of ἐπί, the Latin use of ad, and such expressions as “Salt to his meat.”

1505-6 ‘Thy joy conceived from hopes of his delivery is agreeable to a father’s love.’ We may observe the conceit in “delivery” and “conceived.”

1507 As next; i.e. ‘next to you in our friendship for him.’

1508 There is rapidity and dramatic power in the sudden break, and in the exclamations, “O, what noise!” &c.

1512 Inhabitation. ‘Community,’ or ‘inhabitants;’ or more probably ‘world.’ (αἰτθόμεν, ‘the inhabited world.’)

1515 Ruin, i.e. ‘rushing, headlong, fall.’ See Paradise Regained, iv. 412–13—

“Water with fire
In ruin reconciled.”

Conventional usage must not make us forget the real force of such a word. Cf. the magnificent line in Tennyson’s Lucretius, “Ruining along the illimitable inane.” Among our poets, next to Milton, Tennyson, his student, perhaps best suggests sense by sound.

1519–20 These rimes in Manoa’s mouth, and at such a crisis, are surely in questionable taste.


1526–40 “Originally the Chorus ran on continuously thus—

‘not much to fear.
A little stay will bring some notice hither,
For evil news rides fast, while good news baits.
And to our wish I see one hither speeding—
An Ebrew, as I guess, and of our tribe.’

It appears to me that it may have been an afterthought with Milton to break up what was at first a continuous speech of the Chorus by inserting ten additional lines, distributed between the Chorus and Manoa, so as to prolong the suspense before the messenger arrives.” (M.) The lines are in the “Errata” of the original edition.

1527, &c. ‘What if, his eyesight having been restored by miracle (absolute case), he now be dealing dole?’
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1529 Dealing dole. An expression meaning 'dealing a portion' ('deal' and 'dole' being really the same word). Probably, however, Milton has the Latin word dolor, 'pain,' 'sorrow,' in his mind.

1531 Cf. lines 584-6, and 1535. It is scarcely necessary to point out that such changes in a man's mood are usual.

1535 Subscribe. Lit. 'write underneath.' So, 'sign one's name to,' 'agree.'

1537 Put 'howsoever' for 'so.'

1538 Rides post; i.e. 'with the speed of the post.' Baits; i.e. 'stops to bait his horses.' Bait, Scand., 'make to bite.' (Sk.)

1540 Ebrew. See note on line 1308.

1541 O, whither, &c. Such exclamations naturally attend circumstances of horror, and are common in dramatic compositions. So Polyphemus, when his children are killed before his eyes, and he himself is blinded, rushes on the stage crying, εύω, τά βάσιν, τά τρομείω, τά κέλευ δικαίωθαι; (Eur. Hec. 1056.) The Messenger is closely copied from the δερματος of Euripides.

1543 'Erst, used in the sense of 'lately,' 'just now;' properly soonest, -er, -st = soon-est, and is the superlative of A.S. er, 'soon.'

1553 Rueful cry. ("Ruthful," Troilus, v. 3; "ruthless," Measure for Measure, iii. 2.) Ruth (Scand.), 'pity.' Rueful cry, 'cry that rouses pity.' (Sk., &c.) The line in Troilus well illustrates the meaning of the word. Troilus says to Hector—

Let
The venomed vengeance ride upon our swords,
Spur them to ruthless work, rein them from ruth.

1555-70 The scene is unfolded with skill, and in accordance with dramatic custom.

1556 Distract. "M.E. distract, 'distracted.' . . . We find also distract as a p.p. 'Distracte were hei stithly' = 'they were greatly distracted.'"

1562 "Oh, I have fed upon this woe already,
And now excess of it will make me surfeit."

—Two Gentlemen of Verona, iii. 1.

1574-7 These lines may appear artificial, to modern ears at least. Yet 1577 is in itself a very beautiful line. We may observe, perhaps, several common sayings hereabouts—"Suspense is torture," "Take the worst in brief," "Death, who sets all free, has paid his ransom," "Give the reins to grief." "Death is the crown of life."

1585-6 'He had foes to fight with, why fight against himself?'
1587, et seq. Cf. note on "and by accident," in the notes on the Argument.

1590 Lastly; i.e. 'at the last.'
1596, et seq. The whole speech is natural, graphic, condensed. From its easy commencement the interest gradually increases till we see the mighty Samson before us at his patient tasks, then leaning as for rest and prayer, till with head erect he addresses the lords. There follows the description of the catastrophe, which has much of the breadth, force, and concentration of similar passages in Paradise Lost.

1596 Occasions. Lat. occasionem, ‘a happening.’ So “Occasions drew me” means, perhaps, no more than ‘I happened to go.’

1599 Each high street. Cf. note on “high street,” line 1458.

1605–6 Imagine half of an English theatre, with the gallery for its roof resting on two main pillars, and people on the gallery, with seats for those of rank underneath the gallery, but not in front of it; beyond the theatre stands the throng; between the throng and the theatre is Samson. Milton does not mention the people on the roof. Professor Masson has no comma after “round,” or hyphen between “half” and “round;” and we have, apparently, a theatre vaulted high half the way round it, instead of a theatre which is a semicircle, &c.

1608 Sort; i.e. ‘rank.’ Lat. sors, sortis, ‘lot,’ ‘chance,’ ‘fortune,’ ‘condition.’

1610 Banks; i.e. ‘benches;’ ‘a scaffold,’ original sense, ‘a stage for seeing.’

1611 Aloof. A nautical expression. The a = ‘on,’ as ‘abed,’ ‘aground,’ &c.; ‘aloof;’ or ‘on loof’ = Dutch te loof, i.e. ‘to windward,’ ‘to hold aloof;’ Dutch loef houden, ‘to keep to windward.’ In the description of the battle of Actium, in North’s Plutarch, we have “he was driven also to loof off (modern ‘luff’), to have more room.” (Sk.)

1612–14 Cf. lines 1421–2, and note.

1615–16 Cf. lines 1317–18.


“His strong phalanges march on either side;
And troope of cataphracts before him ride.”

1621 Rifed the air. Prospero says—

“To the dread rattling thunder
Have I given fire, and rifed Jove’s stout oak
With his own bolt.”—Tempest, v. 1.

The more common verb is “rive.” “Brutus hath rived my soul.”

1621 Glamouring their god. Lines 1620–21 recall to mind Acts xii. 21–22.

1623–4 ‘Came to the place where they led him.’

1625 Assayed. Assay, “chiefly used of the trial of metals
or weights. When used in the sense of 'attempt' it is generally spelt essay in Mod. E." But Chaucer and Gower use assay in that sense. O.Fr. asaier, another spelling of esaier, derived from sub. wall, 'a trial.' Lat. exagium, 'a weighing.' "A trial of exact weight." (Sk.)

1627 Stupendious. So Paradise Lost, x. 351, the only other place in the poems where the word occurs. Mr. R. C. Browne, in a note on the above, says, "Stupendious occurs in the Pagan Prince (1690) quoted in Nares 'The Stupendious Valour and Prowess of the Palatine,' and in Evelyn's Diary."

1628 Antagonist. Probably used here adjectively.


1634 Arched. Rather a favourite word with Milton. Always pronounced with the emphasis on the second syllable. Used with much effect of "roof" in the Nativity hymn, line 175, and in Paradise Lost, i. 726; of "groves," II Penseroso, 133; of "the swan," Paradise Lost, vii. 438.

1645 Strike. Dunster, Kightley, and others consider that there is an "ironical play on the word." Moreover, Samson was given to grim practical jokes suitable to his character.

1646-50 It were long to tell the several meanings which may be given to certain phrases in these lines, according as they are punctuated. Perhaps it is hypercriticism which has prevented commentators making "bowed" govern "pillars." I have ventured to read it so, chiefly because the passage sounds more musical to me as so read, and in so doing have followed the punctuation of the first edition, save in putting a semicolon after "fro"—though, recollecting that Milton was blind, and also careless about punctuation, the punctuation of the first edition is of little or no importance.

1647 As with the force of winds and waters pent. Cf. Paradise Lost, vi. 195; et seq.

1649 Convello, convulsim, 'to tear away,' 'pluck up.'

1659 Scaped. "'To scape,' more properly 'to escape,' is to 'slip out of one's cape.' Lat. ex cappa, 'out of one's cloak or cape.'" (Sk.)

1660 Warton points out that it is judicious to make the Chorus here speak. Manoa may be supposed incapable of speech at present.

1665 Not willingly. Cf. lines 1587-8, and note.

1667-8 In numbers more. Judges xvi. 30.

1669 Music is quite requisite to give this and the succeeding Semichorus due effect. Each Semichorus should chant to the other the lines assigned to it.
SAMSON AGONISTES.

Jocund. Chaucer has joconde. Everyone will remember, "How jocund did they drive their team afield!" in Gray's Elegy. Sublime. Lat. sublīmis, 'raised on high.' 'They were in good spirits.'

1674 By the Oxford Bible, the ark was at Shiloh from about B.C. 1444 (Joshua xviii.) to about B.C. 1141 (1 Samuel iv.). "Silo his," probably put for "Silo's." Cf. "For Jesus Christ His sake," in the prayer "For all sorts and conditions of men." "Illis" is required for the rhythm, and "Silo his" trips better off the tongue than the usual spelling, "Shiloh his," would do; also cf. note on line 981. "He probably terms it 'bright' on account of the Shekinah which was supposed to rest on the ark." (Keightley,) Shiloh appears to have been near Bethel. (Judges xxi. 19.)

1675 Spirit of phrenzy. The Greek 'Arη, 'vengeance.'

1676 Who hurt their minds. Todd quotes lines attributed to Euripides, δεν δὲ Δαλμών ἀνδρὶ προφύγῃ κακᾶ, τῶν νοῦν ἔβλαψε πρωτον. "Hurt" seems to mean 'rendered them (their minds) unfit to understand their interest.'

1680 Unweetingly. Paradise Regained, i. 126. "The form 'weet' (of the verb wit, 'to know') in Spenser's Faerie Queen, i. 3-6, is nothing but a corruption of 'wit.'" (Sk.)

1682-5 "Quem Deus vult perdere prius dementat." The origin of the line is not known. Cf. the sentiment expressed in the Greek line above (note on 1676).

1682 Fond. Cf. line 228, and note.

1685 To sense reprobate. 'Rejected,' as regards sense; i.e. 'incapacitated for perceiving their true interest.' There is thought of the terrible doctrine of reprobation. According to Calvin, "All men are not created for the same end, but some are foreordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation. So . . . we say, he was elected, that is, predestinated to life, or reprobated, that is, predestinated to damnation." This also was the doctrine of the Assembly of English and Scotch Divines, and of the Reformed Churches in France and in the Low Countries. See Predestination calmly Considered, by the Rev. John Wesley. Mr. Wesley, with Christlike sarcasm, and indignant eloquence, denounces the diabolical nature of the doctrine, and explains and expounds the matter in accordance with his reading of the Bible.

1687-9 These lines well describe the condition of Milton.

1688 Thought extinguished; i.e. 'thought (to be) extinguished.'

1689 With inward eyes illuminated. There is probably some thought of himself too. Cf. Paradise Lost, iii. 51, et seq. Such expressions are fairly common among the poets, especially among the Elizabethan poets, notably Spenser; but Milton, at least, uses them in a peculiarly definite and solemn sense. We
must always recollect that he laid claim to at least so much light from God's Holy Spirit as would be the portion of him who had devoted his life to the service of God and of God's people, and had been specially selected for the high purpose of writing a great epic poem. Cf. note on the words "persuaded inwardly," in the Argument.

1690 *Virtue.* Lat. *virtutem," 'manliness,' 'strength,' 'vigour,' 'bravery.'

1691 The image, it will easily be seen, is taken from the custom, in places where the fuel is wood or peat, of keeping the fire in by covering a live coal up with the ashes. This custom is frequently alluded to in the classics. Cf. Keightley.

1692-6 This difficult passage is variously explained. Keightley thinks, and gives his reasons for thinking, that Milton may have dictated "nor" where we have "and," which gets over the objection to "but" (line 1695), and which also shows how Samson did not come against his foes at night, but boldly in the day. Is it possible that the meaning may be something of this kind—"In so far as he attacked men at rest, secure on their benches, he was like a dragon, coming in the evening to attack tame fowls on nests and perches. In so far as he brought destruction unexpectedly on them from above, he was like an eagle, the bird of Jove—Jove who sometimes sends thunderbolts on our heads from a clear, cloudless, sky'? Perhaps there should, to suit such a meaning, be a semicolon after "fowl."

Professor Masson's note on the subject is interesting, but seems to miss a difficulty—a difficulty which I certainly have not got over—that a dragon is a winged serpent; hence there is not the contrast which we should expect between the dragon and the eagle. Read as written the metaphors are somewhat mixed, and the "but" has given and will give commentators many a headache.

"An evening dragon is a Latinism for a dragon in the evening." (C. C.)

1695 *Tame villatic fowl.* "Villaticas alites," Pliny, xxiii. 17. *Villa* (Lat.) is 'a country house,' 'farm.' Mr. R. C. Browne refers to the *Rambler,* No. 147, where the country youth visiting his uncle and aunt in Town exhibits "villatic (rustic) bashfulness."

1696 *His cloudless thunder bolted on their heads; i.e. 'sent thunderbolts on their heads out of a clear sky.'* The danger came on them unexpectedly, and from above. Thunder from a clear sky, as being something unexpected, and since thunder comes from Jove, is often referred to among the classics as something ominous. The notion of an eagle dashing from above like lightning on its prey is common in English and other literature.
1697–1707 "Observe the complexity of rhymes in this passage." (M.)

Observe too that lines 1697–1705 hinge on lines 1690–1. Just as a sod smoulders, but when roused bursts into flame, so does virtue or manliness, like the Phenix (see next note), rise revivified from the ashes of her past life.

1699–1707 Cf. Paradise Lost, v. 272–4, and Milton’s Epitaphium Damonis, 187–9; and for the fable of the Phenix see Ovid, Met. xv. 391, f. oll., Amor. ii. 6. 54; Pliny, Nat. Hist. x. 2. 2. There was only one Phenix at a time, which lived for five hundred or a thousand years, then raising a funeral pile, or perhaps setting fire to her nest, perished thereon amid the flames, and straightway rose again, fresh and young, “from out her cradle and her tomb.”

Dr. Johnson objects to the impropriety of such classical allusions. Certainly this is a very detailed description of that of which the Chorus cannot have heard. Probably more licence may be allowed to the Chorus in such matters than to an individual; moreover, the whole tragedy is built on the foundation of the Greek play. Besides, Milton always does and says what he thinks fit. Cf. note on line 934.

1700 Embost here means ‘sheltered in a wood.’ “O.F. embosquer (O.F. bosquet, ‘a little wood’); Low Lat. imboscare; Ital. imboscare.” (Sk.) Keightley points out that to emboss can also mean to ‘drive into a wood,’ and quotes, to show this meaning—“Like dastard curs that having at a bay
The salvage beast embost in weary chase.”

And Todd quotes—

—Faery Queen, iii. i. 22.

“And how the hart had upon length
So much embosed, I n’ot now what.”

(Where the word means ‘taken shelter in a wood.’)

1702 Erewhile; i.e. ‘a while before, ‘a while ago’; or perhaps, with Keightley, ‘for some time before.’

Holocaust. ‘A whole burnt-offering.’ Lat. holocaustum (Vulgate, Gen. xxii. 8); Gk. δόλκαυστος, neut. of δόλκαυστος, burnt whole. (Sk.)

1703 Teemed. Teem, to ‘bring forth,’ also to ‘be prolific.’

“Hyndre [her] of teeming.” (Sir T. More.) Teem, Middle English; i.e. from about 1200 to about 1500. (Sk.) Cf. Paradise Lost, vii. 453–5—

“The earth obeyed, and straight
Opening her fertile womb, teemed at a birth
Innumerable living creatures.”

1705 Unactive. See Paradise Lost, iv. 621, viii. 97; Paradise Regained, ii. 81; and cf. notes on lines 282, 696.

1706–7 refer both to virtue, which is to some extent personified, and to the Phenix.
NOTES.

Survives, besides its usual meaning, has here some meaning of ‘revives,’ ‘lives again;’ but the lines will scarcely bear a logical analysis—nor, perhaps, need they.

1707 A secular bird. Newton quotes Lactantius, who uses seculum for ‘a thousand years.’ Cf. note on line 1699. Perhaps here the word is used for ‘an age,’ ‘a long time.’

“In the whole of this Semichorus we may observe a great, but highly poetic, confusion of Samson and his virtues or energies with the objects to which they are likened.” (K.)

1713 Caphtor. (Amos ix. 7; Deut. ii. 23.) Crete, or perhaps Cyprus, from one of which the Philistines were supposed to have come.

1718 And which for and what = ‘and that which.’

1721, et seq. The Spartan mood is not inappropriate, though the “Come, come,” of line 1708 is perhaps a trifle discordant. Observe the union of stoicism and religious feeling, and note the classical and biblical images. Cf. the rites paid to the dead bodies of Patroclus and of Hector, Η. xviii., xxiv.

1722-4 There is no weakness, nothing contemptible, nothing we cannot praise, nothing to blame, &c., in a death so noble. Here again the several punctuations of the several editions give different shades of meaning to the passage.

1727 Lavers here means the water itself. ‘Let us wash off the clotted gore with water from the stream.’ Cf. λουρός, (1) ‘a bath,’ (2) bathing-place; (2) ‘water for bathing.’ “With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,” Lyricias, 175.

1728 ‘With what speed (I may).’

1729 Plight; i.e. ‘condition.’ Generally, and more correctly, ‘dangerous condition.’

1735 Cf. the opening lines of Lyricias.

1736 With all his trophies hung, and acts enrolled, &c. These lines closely resemble Virgil’s description of the funeral of Pallas, and of the dedication to Mars of the spoils of Mezentius, Æn. xi. Cf. especially lines 83-4—

“Indutosque jubet truncos hostilibus armis
Ipsos ferre duces, inimicaque nomina figi.”

And again, lines 5-8, et seq.—

“Ingentem quercum decisis undique ramis
Constituit tumulo, fulgentiaque induit arma,
Mezentici ducis exuvias; tibi, magne, tropæum,
Bellipotens:” &c.

1737 Legend; i.e. ‘inscription.’ “Drayton and others named their poetic histories of eminent persons their legends.” (K.)

1738-40 Samson Agonistes is not written without a patriotic, as a religious, purpose. Cf. Introduction, p. xii., and note at the foot of that page.

Adventures high. “A term of chivalry. ‘La alta aventura,’
Don Quixote. 'His youth was crowned with high and brave adventures,' Quarles, History of Samson (1632) p. 291." (T.)

1745, et seq. Cf. Psalm lxvii. 10. "Cf. Aeschylus, Supplices, line 90-109." (Th.) See concluding lines of Medea, Bacchae, and Helena of Euripides; and last six verses of Pindar's twelfth Pythian Ode. (Mr. Todd's note.) We may observe that pity and terror have been tempered and reduced to just measure. (See lines 4-5 of Milton's introduction to the poem.) There is, as Mr. Churton Collins remarks, a pious optimism in the Chorus, and the references given above will show that here, as elsewhere, Milton follows classical models, which require a tranquil conclusion. Doubtless there is too some thought of himself in the poet's mind when he writes these quiet, noble lines. Compare the last few lines of the sonnet On his Blindness.

1745, et seq. Some put a comma after "doubt," and appear to read, 'All what the dispose of Highest Wisdom brings about is best.' Milton, like Shakespeare, occasionally uses "what" for "that" or "which" ("All what I affirm," Paradise Lost, v. 107), but it does not seem desirable to suppose that meaning here.

1751 In place. Keightley says, and he is almost invariably right, "on this occasion," and adds, "this phrase is of frequent occurrence in Spenser."

1755 Acquisit; i.e. 'acquisition.' "His unjust acquista."

"Samson Agonistes is but a very indifferent subject for a dramatick fable. However, Milton has made the best of it. He seems to have chosen it for the sake of the satire on bad wives." (Warburton.)

"This I conceive to be the last of his poetical pieces; and it is written in the very spirit of the ancients, and equals, if not exceeds, any of the most perfect tragedies which were ever exhibited on the Athenian stage, when Greece was in its glory." (Newton.)
APPENDIX

[It has seemed well to give some translation of the classical quotations, because many people read 'Milton who know no Latin or Greek. The references are to the Notes. P. = Preface.]

15 (P.) 'Evil communications corrupt good manners.'
40 (P.) 'I see why writers of tragedy admit an "epistle," because they may not speak on their own behalf.'
1 'Lead on, my daughter, since to my darkened steps thou art as an eye.'
53 (1) 'Force void of counsel falls by its own weight.'
   (2) 'A man, though nature has made him big, must needs remember that he may fall even by a small mishap.'
66 'If my health and this loss of sight, a heavier calamity than old age, will allow.'
89 (1) 'Which day some call the day of the 'tween moons, others that of the silent moon.'
   (2) 'Because there the moon is relieved of her work and duty.'
115 'Hush, hush!—tread softly here.'
118 'And (my) languid limbs lay stretched along the couch.'
184 'There are words and spells therewith you may allay this pain, and rid yourself of a great portion of the malady.'
210 'Wise men and just in their misfortunes are not incensed against the Gods.'
303 'To be guilty of Æs majæstæ against the Roman people.'
444 'T is easy for one who is himself free from misfortunes to counsel him who fareth ill.'
500 'On account of his crimes and want of self-restraint.'
549 'A shining ray, the sun's bright rod, was smiting the earth.'
693 'Many valiant souls of heroes it sent down to Hades, and gave the men a prey to dogs and all birds.'
700 'The old age of a god is fresh and green.'
953 'Say where she is, that I may seize her with my hands and tear her in pieces and stain with blood her skin.'
982 'O thou that excellest all women in courage of soul, know that living or dying thou shalt be highest in our esteem.'
995 'But whosoever liketh not this counsel, let him be content with his opinion, as I am with mine.'
1008 'The quarrels of lovers are but a renewing of love.'
1039 'Wives are ever a stumbling-block amid the misfortunes of their husbands in the way of their greater hurt.'
1088 'Rumour goes through the great cities (of Lybia).'
1105 'Close to the shore.'
1122 (1) 'My sevenfold shield of proof;'
(2) 'Lord of the sevenfold shield.'
1267 'Uprooted from the mountain-side falls crashing down.'
1287 'O son, tried by Ilium's destinies.'
1421 'By allurements and the charms of novelty a spectator might be held, who had just left the sacrifice (=sacrificial banquet), and was now well-drunken and lawless.'
1541 'Alas! where shall I tread, where stand, whither direct my steps?'
1676 'When the Deity deviseth evil against a man, he first hurts his reason.'
1736 (1) 'Also he bids his captains carry stems of trees dressed in the armour of the enemy, and fix upon them the foemen's names.'
(2) 'He plants on a mound a mighty oak with boughs lopped away on every side, and arrays it in the gleaming arms stripped from the chieftain Mezentius; a trophy to thee, great Lord of War.'
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