

# Studies in "Paradise Lost."

By MARY A. WOODS.

## V. — MILTON'S SATAN.

"So call him now : his former name  
Is heard no more in Heaven."

EVERY student of Milton will find matter for dissent in what other students have said or written of him. But few will dissent from the popular verdict that Satan is the most interesting character in *Paradise Lost*. It does not follow from this that he is the hero of the poem. The hero of a poem is its central figure; the character on whose fate the action of the story depends. Such a character is often, as in the *Æneid*, comparatively passive and uninteresting. In *Paradise Lost* the hero is undoubtedly Adam. He does not appear till the Fourth Book; but his existence is hinted at in the First, and the whole object of the detailed account of the rebellion and exile of the Angels is to suggest a motive for his creation, on the one hand, and for his temptation, on the other. Nor is the story as unsymmetrical as it appears to be; the poem is not overweighted by its prelude. The episode of the loss of Paradise, from the first appearance of the hapless pair to their fall, occupies the central six Books. The rest is prologue and epilogue: what preceded this episode in Heaven and Hell; what followed, or was to follow it, on Earth.

But if Satan only exists, dramatically speaking, for the sake of Adam, he is far more interesting in himself. Adam interests us as Milton's ideal of unfallen man, but his removal from the ordinary conditions of humanity makes it difficult to feel the personal interest in him which belongs to a character taken from actual life. He is a type, rather than a man. Satan is far more human, as we generally understand the word. He is to all interests and purposes a man, with human passions, misgivings, fluctuations, the struggle of two natures within him. He fulfils the conditions under which we know man now: he has sinned and suffered, and the sin has not—at least, until we take our final leave of him—utterly quenched the good. Nay, even when we meet him again, 4000 years later, lowered, degraded, irretrievably serpentine, we can scarcely believe that his words are all hypocrisy—

"Though I have lost  
Much lustre of my native brightness, lost  
To be beloved of God, I have not lost  
To love, at least to contemplate and admire  
What I see excellent in good, or fair,  
Or virtuous: I should so have lost all sense."<sup>1</sup>

It is this humanness in Milton's Satan which, while it secures our interest, necessarily provokes our criticism. How, we ask, can such a character be regarded as a personification of evil? How can one who, to the last, is not devoid of impulses to good deserve the unqualified hate and scorn which is due to evil only?

To the first of these questions there is, as it seems to me, an obvious answer. It is hardly an answer to say that Milton was compelled by dramatic necessity to make his Satan (as he makes his God) a human being, swayed by human impulses. For he might at least have made him an Iago or a Barabbas, creations far more "diabolical" than his own. Nor is it an answer to say that Milton was influenced by an instinctive sympathy with rebellion. For Milton, as we have seen already, has no sympathy with rebellion against God. The strength of his attitude against earthly tyranny lies in the fact that we regard it as a usurpation of the one Supreme Authority, and submission to it as a form of idolatry. It is true that he puts into the mouth of Satan words that Prometheus might have used, or his own Samson, or he himself, in the proud lonely years that followed the Restoration—

"What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost: the unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge; immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield;  
And what is else not to be overcome."<sup>2</sup>

And again—

"The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven,  
What matter where, if I be still the same?"<sup>3</sup>

Such words have the true Miltonic ring. But it does not follow that Milton either sympathises or

<sup>1</sup> *P.R.* i. 377-382.

<sup>2</sup> *P.L.* i. 105-109.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* i. 254-256.

intends us to sympathise with the speaker. The courage he attributes to Satan is the fading brightness that marks him "Archangel ruined"; the sunset glow that lingers when the sun is gone. Only by degrees will the darkening landscape give token of the night that is coming.

This last thought suggests the real answer to our objection that Milton's Satan is not a personification of evil. Milton does not for a moment suppose him to have been so. He accepts the tradition by which the Archfiend was originally good,—nay, the greatest and brightest of the Angels,—and consistently makes his descent a gradual one—

"Neither do the spirits damned  
Lose all their virtue."<sup>1</sup>

The steps of this descent have been often traced, but it may be interesting to trace them once more. They illustrate the symbolism by which, throughout the poem, Milton makes light the emblem of goodness, and darkness of evil; from the Heaven whose darkest night is twilight to the Hell whose brightest day is "darkness visible." In accordance with this symbolism (it is more than possible that Milton regarded it as fact), the physical brightness of the Angels is in exact correlation with their goodness. When we first see Satan, before the outbreak of rebellion—

"Great indeed  
His name, and high was his degree in Heaven;  
*His countenance as the morning-star*, that guides  
The starry flock."<sup>2</sup>

The allusion, of course, is to the name Lucifer, "light-bringer," which suggests the special brightness that distinguished him. But the "pride"—generated we know not how—which was at the root of his crime is already at work within him; to produce baneful fruit, when thought has been wedded to act, in the proclamation of rebellion. In the midst of the Assembly,<sup>3</sup> on the morning of battle, we see him again—

"All on a sudden miserable pain  
Surprised thee, dim thine eyes and dizzy swam  
In darkness, while thy head flames thick and fast  
Threw forth; till on thy left side opening wide,  
*Likest to thee in shape and countenance bright* . . .  
Out of thy head I sprung."

<sup>1</sup> *P.L.* ii. 482, 483.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 706-709.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *P.L.* ii. 749-751 with v. 767, etc. But it is extremely difficult to fit in the episode of Sin and Death (which yet, for the purposes of the story, must be taken as real) with other incidents of the poem.

Satan, like his offspring Sin, is still bright; but the momentary transformation is significant of the moral crisis which will gradually cast its spell over his entire being. He is next seen in battle, to all appearance strong and radiant as ever. Abdiel may exclaim—

"O Heaven! that such resemblance of the Highest  
Should yet remain, where faith and realty  
Remain not! Wherefore should not strength and  
might  
Then fail when virtue fails, or weakest prove  
When boldest, though to sight unconquerable?"<sup>4</sup>

But the conflict hangs for two days "in even scale"; for we are told of Michael and Satan—in words addressed by the Almighty to the Messiah—

"Equal in their creation they were formed,  
Save what sin hath impaired: *which yet*  
*hath wrought insensibly*, for I suspend their doom."<sup>5</sup>

Yet, even before the interference of the Messiah turns the scale of battle, "sin hath impaired" somewhat. For Satan has for the first time known pain; and his followers at least fear and flight as well. Nor have they retained their ethereal lightness—

"Purest at first, now gross by sinning grown."<sup>6</sup>

The slow deterioration thus hinted at is accelerated by the shock of that tremendous fall, when—

"Nine days they fell; confounded Chaos roared  
And felt tenfold confusion in their fall  
Through his wide anarchy: so huge a rout  
Encumbered him with ruin. Hell at last  
Yawning received them whole, and on them closed."<sup>7</sup>

When Satan first sees his friend Beelzebub after that ghastly catastrophe, he does not recognise him—

"If thou beest he—but O how fallen! how changed  
From him who, in the happy realms of light,  
Clothed with transcendent brightness, didst outshine  
Myriads, though bright!"<sup>8</sup>

Satan himself, though he still outshines his comrades, does so—to borrow Milton's splendid simile—as the sun in eclipse may yet outshine the lesser lights. His countenance is darkened, and his cheek furrowed with care and the scars of battle. He is surrounded, indeed, with a sort of dusky grandeur. His throne in Pandemonium

"Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *P.L.* vi. 114-118.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* vi. 690-692.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* vi. 660, 661.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* vi. 871-875.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* i. 84-88.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 2.

When he leaves the conclave, he seems

“ Alone the antagonist of Heaven, nor less  
Than Hell's dread Emperor, with pomp supreme  
And God-like imitated state.”<sup>1</sup>

When he encounters Death at Hell-gates, he

“ stood  
Unterrified, and like a comet burned  
That fires the length of Opiuchus huge  
In the Arctic sky.”<sup>2</sup>

After his conference with Chaos, he

“ Springs upward like a pyramid of fire  
Into the wild expanse.”<sup>3</sup>

But his brightness is no longer that of the morning-star, but lurid and fitful. When he wishes to deceive Ariel, he has to borrow a lustre, inferior indeed to that of the Archangel, but far superior to the lustre he has retained—

“ And now a stripling cherub he appears,  
Not of the prime, yet such as in his face  
Youth smiled celestial, and to every limb  
Suitable grace diffused : so well he feigned.”<sup>4</sup>

But as soon as he is alone, his inward trouble pierces the thin disguise, and shows him as he is—

“ Each passion dimmed his face,  
Thrice changed with pale ire, envy, and despair,  
Which marred his borrowed visage, and betrayed  
Him counterfeit, if any eye beheld :  
For heavenly minds from such distempers foul  
Are ever clear.”<sup>5</sup>

And the change betrays him to Ariel, who

“ Saw him disfigured, more than could befall  
Spirit of happy sort ; his gestures fierce  
He marked, and mad demeanour.”<sup>6</sup>

This outward perturbation is the sign of a conflict which proves a crisis in Satan's history, and plunges him in a lower hell than the material hell of his exile. Now first, despairing of pardon, he has said definitely to evil—

“ Evil, be thou my good ! ”<sup>7</sup>

His fall henceforth is rapid and unmistakable. “ Think not,” says Zephon in Eden, when Ithuriel's spear has compelled the “ grisly king ” to present himself in his own likeness—

“ Think not, revolted spirit, thy shape the same,  
Or undiminished brightness, to be known  
As when thou stoodst in Heaven upright and pure.

That glory then, when thou no more wast good,  
Departed from thee ; and thou resemblest now  
Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foul.”<sup>8</sup>

The next crisis in his downfall is marked by his assumption, for purposes of malice, of the body of a serpent—

“ O foul descent ! that I, who erst contended  
With gods to sit the highest, am now constrained  
Into a beast, and, mixt with hestial slime,  
This essence to incarnate and imbrute,  
That to the height of Deity aspired.”<sup>9</sup>

The lower moral hell symbolised by this descent is shown in the new rule of action he propounds—

“ All pleasure to destroy  
Save what is in destroying : other joy  
To me is lost.”<sup>10</sup>

Yet his shape is still attractive. The serpent of Paradise is not the “ creeper ” of familiar experience. He approaches Eve—

“ Not with indented wave  
Prone on the ground, as since, but on his rear,  
Circular base of rising folds, that towered  
Fold above fold, a surging maze ; his head  
Crested aloft, and carbuncle his eyes,  
With burnisht neck of verdant gold, erect  
Among his circling spires.”<sup>11</sup>

But he both vitiates and is vitiated. He acquires a serpentine character which does not cease with his temporary transformation. We are told that **God** applies to him the doom of the serpent, and this is true not only of the mysterious “ bruising of the head,” but of the grovelling which henceforth marks him. For awhile he seems to triumph. He takes the form of “ an Angel bright,” and as he gradually reveals himself in his own shape to his infernal compeers, Milton hesitates whether to call his radiance assumed or real—

“ His fulgent head  
And shape star-bright appeared, or brighter, clad  
With what permissive glory since his fall  
Was left him, or false glitter.”<sup>12</sup>

In either case, it is our last hint of the Archangel. Even as he sits enthroned—

“ His visage drawn he felt to sharp and spare ;  
His arms clung to his ribs, his legs entwining  
Each other ; till, supplanted, down he fell,  
A monstrous serpent on his belly prone,

<sup>1</sup> *P.L.* ii. 509-511.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 707-710.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 1013, 1014.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 636-639.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 114-119.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 127-129.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 110.

<sup>8</sup> *P.L.* iv. 835-840.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* ix. 163-167.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* ix. 477, 478.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* ix. 496-502.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* x. 449-452.

Reluctant, but in vain ; a greater power  
Now ruled him, punished in the shape he sinned,  
According to his doom."<sup>1</sup>

And though we are told that the degradation is only temporary and intermittent, to be repeated, "some say," at yearly intervals, yet it is our last view of Satan, and is certainly intended to mark for us, as far as *Paradise Lost* is concerned, the nadir of his fall.

But our second question remains unanswered. How can Milton's Satan, being a character of mixed evil and good, deserve the unqualified hate which is due to evil only? For it is noticeable that though his descent is gradual, there is no graduation in the horror that he inspires. From the moment that he declares himself against God, he is lost : lost to hope, and lost to pity. His first false step excites not the sorrow, but the derision of his Maker—

"The Eternal Eye, whose sight discerns  
Abstrusest thoughts, from forth His holy mount,  
And from within the golden lamps that burn  
Nightly before Him, saw without their aid  
Rebellion rising . . .  
And, *smiling*, to His only Son thus said."

And He proceeds ironically—

"Nearly it now concerns us to be sure  
Of our omnipotence, and with what arms  
We mean to hold what anciently we claim  
Of Deity or empire : such a foe  
Is rising, who intends to erect his throne  
Equal to ours, throughout the spacious North!"<sup>2</sup>

Abdiel, it is true, condescends to argue and even remonstrate with the rebel ; but any possible effect of his words is precluded, one would think, by the denunciation which regards him as doomed already—

"O alienate from GOD, O spirit accurst,  
Forsaken of all good ! I see thy fall  
Determined . . . decrees  
Against thee are gone forth without recall."<sup>3</sup>

In the heat of the contest that ensues, the language on both sides is abusive and defiant. This is natural enough. It is only in presence of defeat that our human instincts demand a suspension of insult. But Milton has no such instincts—

"The fierce foe hung on our broken rear  
Insulting, and pursued us through the deep."<sup>4</sup>

Gabriel, when he encounters Satan in Paradise, not only rebukes, but taunts him, "disdainfully, half-

smiling," and mocks his futile efforts to escape from pain—

"So judge thou still, presumptuous, till the wrath  
Which thou incurrest by flying, meet thy flight,  
Sevenfold, and scourge that wisdom back to hell  
Which taught thee yet no better that no pain  
Can equal anger infinite provoked."<sup>5</sup>

It is this mocking attitude, as distinguished from honest indignation, this scorn and hate, directed not, like the poet's, against scorn and hate themselves, but against a being not all bad, suffering, despairing, at the mercy of the stronger, that revolts us in spite of ourselves. It is worst when, in *Paradise Regained*, we find it on the lips of Christ. In answer to the boast of Satan that he has forced an entrance into the presence of God, the Saviour taunts him with his ruin—

"Thou com'st indeed,  
As a poor miserable captive thrall  
Comes to the place where he before had sat  
Among the prime in splendour, now deposed,  
Ejected, emptied, gazed, unpitied, shunned,  
A spectacle of ruin or of scorn  
To all the host of Heaven."<sup>6</sup>

How are we to explain this attitude on Milton's part? We can only say that it is consistent with what we know of his theology. As GOD, in his view, may be invested with attributes which are, to human thinking, inhuman, and yet demand an unquestioning homage ; so Satan, the "adversary" of GOD, may retain much that we now call human, and yet deserve unqualified hate. Throughout the poem, the criterion of right is loyalty to GOD ; and by this is meant something not only deeper and more personal than loyalty to goodness, but different in its nature. It is, in fact, mere military obedience to the dictates of an absolute chief. Goodness, as men count goodness, may even interfere with this loyalty. The distinction is remarkably illustrated by the case of the fall of Adam. Milton, as we have seen, regards the prohibition imposed on him as a purely arbitrary one, forbidding what is innocent in itself, as a test of loyalty. Under what impulse does Adam disobey this command? Under one of passionate devotion and self-sacrifice. If he cannot save the woman he loves, at least he will suffer with her—

"How can I live without thee? how forego  
Thy sweet converse, and love so dearly joined,  
To live again in these wild woods forlorn?"

<sup>1</sup> *P.L.* x. 511-517.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 711-726.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 877-884.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 78, 79.

<sup>5</sup> *P.L.* iv. 912-916.

<sup>6</sup> *P.R.* i. 410-416.

Should God create another EVE, and I  
Another rib afford, yet loss of thee  
Would never from my heart. No, no! I feel  
The link of nature draw me: flesh of flesh,  
Bone of my bone thou art; and from thy state  
Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe."<sup>1</sup>

Adam is never so near to our hearts, never so human and lovable, as in this outburst. We are tempted to exclaim with Eve—

"O glorious trial of exceeding love,  
. . . declaring thee resolved  
(Rather than death, or aught than death more dread  
Shall separate us, linked in love so dear)  
To undergo with me one guilt, one crime!"

Nay, we are reminded—though at a distance—of the words of one greater than Adam, words of which Lord Bacon writes—

"If a man . . . have St. Paul's perfection, that he would wish to be an anathema from Christ for the salvation of his brethren, it shows much of a divine nature, and a kind of conformity with Christ Himself."<sup>2</sup>

But Milton has nothing but condemnation for a chivalry which he understands but does not share, and characteristically makes Adam's devotion to a woman an aggravation of his offence. Can we wonder that no natural goodness in Satan can serve even to palliate in the faintest degree the heinousness of his crime?

Yet it is Milton himself who is responsible for

our pity. He might have given us a Mephistopheles, or Dante's "Worm of Sin," and so precluded our sympathy; but the poet in him has proved stronger than the theologian, and, fascinated by his own conception of the slow ruin of a soul, he has invested his creation with a passion and a pathos which are only enhanced by his words of condemnation. He may express what abhorrence he will, but his Satan lives in our memories, not as the guileful serpent, but as the exiled chief, splendid in ruin, from whom the tears that his own fate could not provoke, burst forth irresistibly as he looks upon the partners of his crime—

"Millions of spirits for his fault amerced  
Of Heaven, and from eternal splendours flung  
For his revolt; yet faithful how they stood,  
Their glory withered."<sup>3</sup>

The exile may be cunning and cruel, but both cunning and cruelty are rooted in despair; and it is the despair, painted as only Milton can paint it, that impresses us most. Let him take his leave of us in words—more pathetic perhaps than any that have been quoted—from *Paradise Regained*—

"All hope is lost  
Of my reception into grace: what worse?  
For where no hope is left is left no fear.  
If there be worse, the expectation more  
Of worse torments me than the feeling can.  
*I would be at the worst; worst is my port,  
My harbour, and my ultimate repose.*"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P.L. ix. 908-916.

<sup>2</sup> Bacon's *Essays*: "On Goodness, or Goodness of Nature."

<sup>3</sup> P.L. i. 609-612.

<sup>4</sup> P.R. iii. 204-210.

## Some Elements in the Babylonian Religion and their Comparative Relationship to Judaism.

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JEWISH history is inseparably bound up with the Jewish religion; the gradual development of the one synchronises with the other. The history of the Hebrew people no longer stands alone, but has become absorbed into the broad arena of Oriental history, and its veracity is now attested by numerous confirmations from the histories of Egypt, Assyria, and Chaldea. Recent research has removed the Hebrew race from that abnormal position into which the irrefragable association between their history and religion had forced

them. A people with a mission, the people of a promise, they had come to be regarded by many as fenced about with a divine favour which removed them from the ordinary field of history, and forbade the study of their national life being conducted by the ordinary field of historical development. This fence is now removed, and the people—with the Hebrew historical literature—become a part, a most important part, of the great mass of material out of which we reconstruct the early chapters of the world's history. The removal of this motto of