

THE ROOTS OF MILTON'S RADICALISM

A Study of Puritan and Humanist Elements
in the Cambridge Period

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Radicalism is the product of an age of change. When established institutions and principles cease to be accepted as necessary or desirable, and are subjected to critical scrutiny or uncritical attack, men are driven to a search for the ultimate authorities for their principles, which search is the essence of radicalism. The seventeenth century in England was a hotbed for such radical questionings, for then the implications of the Reformation were working themselves out, along with the economic developments which had conditioned the Reformation; and this religious and economic change precipitated revolutionary political upheavals. During the period radical reforms were being effected in Church, economy and state. The nationalist state Church, which had supplanted the 'universal' Catholic Church in the previous century, was evolving its creeds and ceremonies and its relations to state and society; the economic structure was in process of transformation from a mediaeval sustenance economy to modern capitalism; and largely as a consequence of these developments, the long established monarchy was temporarily overthrown. In such circumstances men were driven either to a reactionary defence of tradition,

or to 'radical' advocacy of one of the experimental programs which claimed to be, more truly than traditional systems, in harmony with human nature and the structure of society.

The subject of this thesis is the factors in Milton's youth conditioning his resort to such a revolutionary program. There is no question that Milton became a radical, that he pursued in his maturity a program of extreme political and religious reform; the manifestations of his political radicalism have been dealt with at length in such studies as Don Wolfe's Milton in the Puritan Revolution, and his religious radicalism is a concern of every study of the theology of Paradise Lost. But these studies are based, often I believe unsoundly, on interpretations of Milton's youth as it conditioned that radicalism; and it is my purpose in this thesis to determine the tendencies influencing the young Milton in terms of which his later development must be understood. Specifically, I am concerned to evaluate the effect on the development of Milton's radicalism of the two predominant intellectual forces of the age, Puritanism and humanism. There can be no question that he was influenced by both during his life; but error is possible, and even fairly common, as to which had priority in his early development. I am convinced that such studies as Wolfe's err in attributing an exaggerated influence to Puritanism in Milton's early years. Such an error will inevitably falsify any account of

the later development leading to Milton's ultimate radicalism, for his final radical faith was the product of the impact of later experiences upon his earliest beliefs and ambitions.

The final criterion in such a study as this must be Milton's own youthful writings. His later autobiographical writings, and the more or less contemporary biographies, throw some light on the issue, but I believe their evidence has been exaggerated. I shall treat them first (in Chapter Three), mainly with the aim of revealing how little support they provide for any theory about Milton's youth. Chapter Four will deal with the environment at Cambridge, which must be considered in preparation for the study of the prolusions since it influenced Milton's expressions of his aims and ideals in them. But the conclusive evidence offered in support of the thesis' contention will be the prolusions themselves, for they provide the most coherent and comprehensive picture of the mind of the youthful Milton. They establish beyond any doubt that Milton began his development towards radicalism with a powerful humanist bias; and it is the purpose of the thesis to prove that all other evidence, in autobiography, biography and early environment, is, contrary to some current critical opinion, wholly in harmony with this view of Milton's early years, and quite incompatible with the assumption of any significant Puritan influence on Milton before the end of his college career.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF MILTON'S RADICALISM

...in the latter part of his life he was not a professed member of any particular sect among the Christians, he frequented none of their assemblies, nor made use of their peculiar rites in his family.

Jonathan Richardson, Life of Milton.

Milton's radicalism in his old age, only vaguely suggested by Toland's perhaps shocked statement, was a much more profound and pervasive thing than non-attendance at religious gatherings or non-observance of particular rites. His radical tendencies were not even exclusively religious, for, while the mediaeval synthesis of the political and religious aspects of life was fast disintegrating, it was still sufficiently vital that religious radicalism almost inevitably included political radicalism; and Milton had a radical political program. Along with the most extreme Puritan sects, and in defiance of Luther and Calvin, he extended the principle of Christian liberty to include political liberty as well as freedom of conscience. The form of state which his political theory implied is outlined by Woodhouse in the

following quotation:

His is a laissez-faire state... It should guarantee the absolute separation of the ecclesiastical and political functions, removing from the church all state support and all power of persecution. It should guarantee complete freedom of discussion. It should provide for a state-supported, but not, of course, a compulsory, system of education - this, apart from the maintenance of order, being the one positive duty assigned to the state. ...Positive laws he regards as a necessary evil: their function is wholly negative, to "prevent the frauds of the wicked." ...The ideal state is that represented by Eden, to be able to live without law because "our reason is our law".¹

This is unquestionably, in terms of Milton's times, politically radical, but any attempt to account for Milton as simply an exponent of extreme and speedy political reform would be doomed to failure. For while allowance must be made for the influence of political developments, and of economic and social factors on it, Milton's political program sprang directly from his religious beliefs.

Even when considered narrowly in terms of his religion, however, Milton's radicalism cannot be easily defined. It is possible to discover affinities with the radical sects, as Woodhouse does in a similar insistence by Milton and the Quakers on complete abrogation of the Mosaic Law, moral as well as ceremonial, and its replacement by a dependence on an 'inner light'.² But while many such similarities can be

1. A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Milton, Puritanism, and Liberty", The University of Toronto Quarterly, Vol. IV, No. 4, July, 1935, p. 494f.

2. Ibid., p. 488.

found, it is not possible to discover any one consistent system of radical Puritanism in Milton's late writings. Woodhouse points out that there was always an important respect in which he was opposed to all forms of Puritanism; he did not base his system on "a peculiar religious experience" (as did the Puritan sects), but on "an ethical condition" (which is the mark of his humanism).¹ But even insofar as he remained Protestant as distinct from humanist, his thought was not towards the end predominantly in harmony with that of the Puritan extremists; he inclined more towards Arminianism than to any of the extreme sects. Nevertheless he was a thoroughgoing radical in his religious beliefs, and the essence of his radicalism was his eclecticism, which was the product of an extreme individualism. He finally recognized no authority, under God, but his own 'inner light'.

For a detailed explication of Milton's radicalism a thorough study of his theology would be necessary; but a rough and ready indication of his position at different periods of his life can be found in the overt connections which he formed with the different Puritan parties. The associations with these groups was, in fact, a significant aspect of his radicalism, for experiences in them led to his final religious position. The Puritan parties were tried and

1. Ibid., p. 498.

found wanting; in the troubled years during which they had made their unhappy attempt to establish the City of God, Milton worked with them, and eventually found them all inadequate to the exalted demands of his spirit. He was finally driven to a faith which was completely personal, still Puritan only in that it was the logical culmination of the schismatic trend inherent in Protestant theology.

The clearest expression of this ultimate radicalism is found in Milton's last pamphlet, Of True Religion, Heresy, Schism, Toleration, published in 1673. That his final religious stand was fundamentally Puritan, in the sense that it was an absolute individualism, the logical outcome of Luther's first step pushed to illogical ends, is clear from his definition of "true religion", which, he says,

is the true worship and service of God, learned and believed from the word of God only. No man or angel can know how God would be worshipped and served unless God reveal it: he hath revealed it us in the holy scriptures by inspired ministers, and in the gospel by his own Son and his apostles, with strictest command, to reject all other traditions or additions whatsoever...¹

However orthodoxly Protestant this may sound, it soon becomes apparent that Milton had gone far beyond the narrow Puritanism of any sect. Turning, in his explanation of the nature of heresy, to the various Protestant sects, he writes:

What! are Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Socinians, Arminians, no heretics? I answer, All

1. F. A. Patterson, The Student's Milton, p. 914. All quotations from Milton's writings, other than the prologues, are taken from this text.

these may have some errors, but are no heretics. Heresy is in the will and choice professedly against scripture; error is against the will, in misunderstanding the scripture after all sincere endeavors to understand it rightly... The Lutheran holds consubstantiation; an error indeed, but not mortal. The Calvinist is taxed with predestination, and to make God the author of sin; not with any dishonorable thought of God, but it may be overzealously asserting his absolute power, not without pleas of scripture. The anabaptist is accused of denying infants their right to baptism; again they say, they deny nothing but what the scripture denies them. The Arian and Socinian are charged to dispute against the Trinity, they affirm to believe the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, according to scripture and the apostolic creed... The Arminian, lastly, is condemned for setting up free will against free grace; but that imputation he disclaims in all his writings, and grounds himself largely upon scripture only. It cannot be denied, that the authors or late revivers of all these sects or opinions were learned, worthy, zealous, and religious men as appears by their lives written, and the same of their eminent and learned followers, perfect and powerful in the scriptures, holy and unblamable in their lives; and it cannot be imagined that God would desert such painful and zealous laborers in his church, and oftentimes sufferers for their conscience, to damnable errors and a reprobate sense, who had so often implored the assistance of his Spirit...¹

Here Puritanism had gone far beyond the narrowly Puritan; such a position was incompatible with consistent adherence to any sect. Only the Romish heresy, anathema to him from his earliest years, lay outside his tolerance. This was the aged Milton, the perfect radical.

A clarification of the forces which produced this radicalism is obviously vital to an understanding of Milton. But,

1. Ibid., p. 915f.

as in so many phases of Miltonic scholarship, there is no general agreement. Two of the leading authorities on Milton offer opinions which provide a convenient framework for the consideration of the problem. Hanford says:

the true source of all (Milton's) later radicalism (was) in humanistic culture rather than in the more specific and practical traditions of politics and religion, pointing to Erasmus and not to Luther as his progenitor.¹

Barker takes up this suggestion, and tentatively shifts the emphasis to Puritanism. "Humanism", in his opinion, "is only one of the sources of his radicalism. Another (and perhaps more important) was Puritanism itself, for it also had a radical significance".²

It will be my purpose in this thesis to support Hanford's view, to prove that humanism was a primary force in Milton's development in a sense in which Puritanism was not. I shall attempt to show that, while Milton's life centred around a conflict between humanism and Puritanism, humanism came first, and but for its frustration, Puritanism might never have played an important part.

An understanding of the issue is impossible if tolerance is granted to the theory that there was no essential conflict between Puritanism and humanism. Milton himself, in his more

1. J. H. Hanford, "The Youth of Milton", in Studies in Shakespeare, Milton and Donne, p. 106.

2. Arthur Barker, Milton and the Puritan Dilemma, p. xxiv.

optimistic days at least, was thoroughly convinced that the two were compatible; indeed by a cheerful perversion of history he convinced himself that the Reformation was the source of the Renaissance and of "human learning":

...I recall to mind...how the bright and blissful Reformation (by divine power) struck through the black and settled night of ignorance and anti-christian tyranny... Then was the sacred Bible sought out of dusty corners where profane falsehood and neglect had thrown it, the schools opened, divine and human learning raked out of the embers of forgotten tongues...¹

We can overlook such an obvious falsification; but it is still possible for scholars to lose sight of the inherent opposition between humanism and Puritanism. Thus, Horton Davies, in The Worship of the English Puritans, writes:

From the Puritan elevation of the Scripture over the use of human reason, it would be wrong to conclude that the Puritans were anti-humanists. They shared with their opponents the rich cultural legacy of the Renaissance. Their leaders were all men of learning and many of them held high positions in the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge... It is erroneous to suppose that the Puritans despised the achievements of human reason because they subordinated them to the Divine Revelation.²

It is true that many of at least the early Puritans were humanists; Milton's own tutor, Thomas Young, certainly was, along with many of the early Puritan propagandists at the Universities. But these men were transitional figures, rooted

1. The Student's Milton, p. 442. (From the pamphlet, "Of Reformation in England".)

2. Horton Davies, The Worship of the English Puritans, p.5.

in the old culture, and not aware of the implications of their break from it.¹ Later full-fledged Puritans were as likely to be narrow bigots as broadly cultured humanists, and perhaps more likely to be practical businessmen than either. The alliance between Puritanism and humanism was prolonged by the practical need of the Protestant faith for education, which was especially necessary since the Protestant's salvation depended on his ability to read and understand the Bible. But the education which the Puritan required, while at first it had to lean upon the existing educational tradition, was essentially quite a different thing from humanistic training, and in the end, secularized and universalized, it was to come to threaten the very continuance of education on humanistic principles.

In Milton's day this threat was already beginning to be apparent in Puritan attacks on University education. In his own college of Christ's, some time after he had left it, alarm was felt by the conservative college heads at the rise to control of the government of the Independent party, which seemed to them to threaten "to envelope and crush within its folds all academic learning, which it contemned as a tedious acquisition whereof its own inspired prophets and their followers had alike no need".² This was not an isolated statement.

1. Cf. Douglas Bush, The Renaissance and English Humanism, p. 83f.

2. J. Bass Mullinger, The University of Cambridge, vol. 3, p. 447.

One of the fellows of Christ's found it necessary to defend in a pamphlet the views:

That the teaching of the Spirit is not enablement enough to the Ministry. That Philosophy, Arts and Sciences accomplish a Minister. That Tongues are necessary to a full understanding of the Scriptures... That the Institutions of the University for the supply of the Ministry is according to Christian prudence and the duty of a Christian state.¹

The attack of the Puritan forces, led by Dell, master of Caius College, was not as extreme as the statements of the alarmed defenders suggest. Dell by no means advocated the restriction of the curriculum to Bible study (as, however, some Puritan extremists did). When Dell and his supporters turned to a consideration of their own program, they were reasonable and even progressive. Moreover, their attack was directed primarily against the more narrowly scholastic aspects of University training. Dell writes:

...the Gospel of Christ understood according to Aristotle, hath begun, continued and perfected the mysterie of iniquity in the outward Church.²

But in the same passage he clearly indicates the root of the opposition between Puritan and humanist educational ideals. "The Gospel of Christ understood according to Aristotle" is "humane learning mingled with divinity". Humanism's desire for an integration of human and divine into a synthesis in

1. Ibid., p. 449.

2. Ibid., p. 454.

which neither need be slighted is thus firmly disallowed.

Man's nature is essentially evil; sinful human reason's attempts to interpret scripture can only lead to error.

Milton himself, never fond of the Universities or their studies, developed this same attack with the same implication of an essential split between divine and human learning in a late pamphlet.¹ Last of a lengthy series of quotations from scripture illustrating what the minister needs to qualify for his work, he lists, from 1 Tim. 14.14:

"The gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, and the laying on of the hands of the presbyter." These are all the means, which we read of, required in scripture to the making of a minister. All this is granted, you will say; but yet that it is also requisite he should be trained in other learning: which can be nowhere better had than at the universities. I answer, that what learning, either human or divine, can be necessary to a minister, may as easily and less chargeably be had in any private house. How deficient else, and to how little purpose, are all those piles of sermons, notes and comments on all parts of the Bible, bodies and marrows of divinity, besides all other sciences, in our English tongue, many of the same books which in Latin they read at the university?... But papists and other adversaries cannot be confuted without fathers and councils, immense volumes, and of vast charges(?) I will show them therefore a shorter and a better way of confutation: Tit. 1. 9, "Holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince gainsayers:" who are confuted as soon as heard, bringing that which is either not in scripture or against it.²

Milton could still in this pamphlet assure his readers that

1. "Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings Out of the Church", published in 1659.

2. The Student's Milton, p. 897.

he was not speaking "in contempt of learning". But he was not the Milton who years earlier discovered the roots of the Renaissance and its human learning in the Reformation; and before many more years he was to renounce, in Paradise Regained, the classical authors who had been a chief delight and guide in his youth. There he had finally to acknowledge, with bitter regret, that his divine and human authorities were incompatible, that he must choose between them.

If it is argued that there is no essential conflict between Puritanism and humanism, it is impossible to understand the source of this struggle in Milton. His life is the conclusive proof that humanism and Puritanism cannot exist side by side, that eventually they must come into conflict and a decision must be made between the requirements of reason and the demands of an unreasoning God.¹

This inevitable opposition of humanism and Puritanism was the central issue in Milton's intellectual development towards radicalism. It is patent that Puritanism was a vital factor in that development. What part humanism had to play is not perhaps so readily apparent. It is my purpose to show that it did play the most vital part, as Hanford suggests. In spite of a current tendency in Miltonic criticism to fit Milton

1. See in this connection H. J. C. Grierson, Cross Currents in English Literature of the XVIIth Century, pp. lxi, 191f, 184f; and M. M. Knappen, Tudor Puritanism, p. 478.

into the Puritan tradition from his childhood, I believe that humanism came first and that Puritanism was not a significant factor until after college, that Milton was born and brought up to be not a Puritan sectary but a great Renaissance poet, and that his failure to achieve this ambition, his successive frustrations in an increasingly unfavorable environment, led directly to his final radicalism. It was only because he was not working, as he at first assumed, in a still vital and inclusive cultural synthesis that he was compelled to resort to the obviously vital Puritan sects in a vain attempt to find a basis for the works which he had at first planned on the foundations used by Spenser and Shakespeare. Those foundations were no longer intact, and for all the magnitude of his achievements, Milton failed to find sound new ones; Paradise Lost is not the universal epic which he visualized in his youth and which might still have been possible then. The radicalism of his old age was an expression of his bitterness in his defeat.

There is a danger in such studies as this, which must centre their attention in a man's ideals, that it will come to appear that the subject was no more than a complex of ideas. However important the principles and ideas of Puritanism and humanism were in Milton's intellectual and spiritual life, it would be fatal to forget that Milton was first of all a human being, and often a distressingly human one. The part played by Milton's human frailty in his development is, how-

ever, another problem. Our concern is the contribution of the forces of Puritanism and humanism, the two most important intellectual factors in his life, towards the development of the aged radical, who, in his human incarnation, when his servant, "a very honest silly fellow, and a zealous and constant follower of these (Puritan) teachers...came from the Meeting...would frequently ask him what he had heard, and divert himself with ridiculing their fooleries or (it may be) the poor fellow's understanding; both one and the other probably" until "the good creature" left his service.¹

The "good creature" was suffering from a development that began many years before. Milton's progress towards radicalism can be traced back through every phase of his career to his college days. His association with the Independents, which ended, with the collapse of the Puritan cause, in the final frustration of all his political hopes, was only the last stage. He had been compelled to join the Independents when he discovered that the "new presbyter" offered threats to his independence even more unendurable than the restrictions of the prelates, which restrictions in turn had led to his alliance with the Presbyterians. But even before he engaged in these successive conflicts with prelates, Presbyterians and Independents, the humanistic outlook which was the root of Milton's radicalism was being shaped in the young

1. J. Richardson, quoted in The Student's Milton, p. xlv

student at St. Paul's and Cambridge, whose most striking expressions of intransigency, the proclivities, are the special concern of this paper. The key to the understanding of the aged radical must be found in his childhood and youth when the forces that conditioned his life took form.

CHAPTER III

THE EVIDENCE OF BIOGRAPHY

The autobiographical and biographical materials on Milton are the most profitable resort for the defenders of the theory that Milton's thought must have been strongly influenced by Puritanism from the first. A careless evaluation of the apparently fairly copious contemporary sources suggests that decisively Puritan influences were brought to bear on Milton's childhood. The truth is, as a revaluation of the available biographical and autobiographical materials will show, that they are not sufficient to establish any theory on the net result of religious influences in Milton's childhood background and training.

This revaluation will be limited to a consideration of the evidence of Puritan influences and tendencies in the biographies and in autobiographical writings. Humanism demands no consideration here for two reasons. In the first place, following chapters will present conclusive evidence that at college Milton was so deeply imbued with humanistic learning and viewpoints that a prolonged study of humanistic literature in his earlier years must be assumed. Secondly, the question of the humanistic influences present in Milton's childhood is not in itself controversial. Critics may hesi-

tate over the relative influence of the humanistic and Puritan elements in the environment; but they do not question the presence of powerful humanistic influences. The results of the English Renaissance were still clearly apparent in the cultural life of the early seventeenth century. In the schools, and to a lesser extent in the Universities, as we shall see later,¹ humanistic learning was still a powerful force, alongside the old scholasticism and the new Baconian science. There is no question of Milton's susceptibility to this humanistic learning. There is clear and unquestioned evidence in the autobiographical passages in the pamphlets, and overwhelming evidence throughout his other writings, that classical learning was pursued by the young student with the utmost eagerness and delight from his earliest years almost, if not quite, to the end of his life. Classical influence is predominant in his writings up to the end of the college years; and as will appear in our study of the prolusions, that classicism rose to the heights of an ardent and many-sided humanism during the college period. The case for humanism can rest, then, on the prolusions.

It might seem that there should be even less question of the presence of strong Puritan influences in the childhood of the great Puritan pamphleteer and poet. A glance at critical writings reveals that it is dangerously easy to assume these

1. Below, p. 65.

Puritan influences, reading them back into Milton's childhood from his later years. Masson so assumes them, without ever giving the matter direct consideration.¹ A modern critic, Don Wolfe, actually assumes them, though he presents an impressive statement of his grounds which will provide a reference against which the evidence of the sources can be weighed:

A city home of Puritan inclinations, a neighborhood of wealthy merchants, a boyhood outlook of deep seriousness enhanced by Bible study, a Puritan master in his earliest school, two or three susceptible years at St. Paul's under the Calvinist Thomas Young, Cambridge study under Joseph Meade-- these influences were decisive.²

Wolfe is careful to qualify the decisiveness of these influences with an admission of tendencies in Milton's character which made unconditional adherence to Puritanism impossible for him; and the list is given as proof only that Milton must have been "inevitably a partisan of the Parliamentary faction". But even to this extent, the influences were not decisive in the case of Christopher Milton, John's younger brother, who shared almost all of them and who was, in view of his later ineffectual ways, surely no less susceptible to decisive influences than John. In spite of them Christopher was fighting with the King while John was beginning his career as a pamphlet writer; and in spite of them Christopher

1. David Masson, Life of Milton, vol. 1, p. 67.

2. Don M. Wolfe, Milton in the Puritan Revolution, p. 2.

professed at the end of his life to be a Catholic. Whether or not there were special factors in Christopher's case, it will appear from a consideration of the sources that Wolfe's statement is hasty, and supports no such conclusion as he implies.

A hasty examination might suggest that we are fairly well supplied with biographical and autobiographical materials on Milton. Certainly there is no such lack as in the case of Shakespeare. Milton wrote about himself, though some time after the period with which we are primarily concerned, and with special ends in view. Where there is a suspicion of a bias in his autobiographical notes, a check is provided by the biographies, or biographical materials, of four different writers, all contemporaries, and most of them in direct contact with their subject at one time or another. Nevertheless, the biographical material is neither bulky nor usually of the most useful kind for our needs. The quantity of it which bears on Milton's childhood is limited, and only a fraction of that offers any evidence as to Milton's religious background. It is possible to review the whole of this evidence in a few pages, and as it is the only direct indication of the influence of Puritanism on the boy and youth outside of his own writings, we will consider it in detail.

In three passages in the pamphlets Milton presents accounts of his early life. These accounts were written from ten to twenty years after he left college and, it must never

be forgotten, with the intention in each case of presenting his life in a special light; they are colored by the necessity of defending himself against violent attacks by his opponents in the pamphlet controversies. He never descended to a twisting of concrete facts; but he did resort to a type of misrepresentation which has a bearing on this study. He is scrupulous to claim to have done nothing which he did not do; but he is by no means perfectly honest in his statement of the motives for what he did. Whether he was consciously misleading is beside the point; he did state his motives in an unmistakably partial way. A revealing example appears in his Second Defence where he explains with impressive lucidity his reasons for writing his early pamphlets. He tells us that when complaints against the prelacy began to be widely voiced,

...I...wrote two books to a friend concerning the reformation of the church of England... When the bishops could no longer resist the multitude of their assailants, I had leisure to turn my thoughts to other subjects; to the promotion of real and substantial liberty... When, therefore, I perceived that there were three species of liberty which are essential to the happiness of social life--religious, domestic and civil; and as I had already written concerning the first, and the magistrates were strenuously active in obtaining the third, I determined to turn my attention to the second, or the domestic species. As this seemed to involve three material questions, the conditions of the conjugal tie, the education of children, and the free publication of thought, I made them objects of distinct consideration. I explained my sentiments, not only concerning the solemnization of marriage, but the dissolution, if circumstances rendered it necessary... I then discussed the principles of education in a summary manner, but sufficiently copious for those who attend seriously

to the subject... Lastly I wrote my Areopagitica, in order to deliver the press from the restraints with which it was encumbered...¹

Thus a flawless sequence of logical motives, by an astonishing series of coincidences, made it necessary that he should write against the prelacy, just after its abuses had forced him to leave the Church; that he should defend divorce, precisely during the period that his wife was separated from him; that he should present his views on education, at the very moment when, as he tells Mr. Hartlib, "I had not yet at this time been induced, but by your earnest entreaties and serious conjurements";² and that he should defend the liberty of the press, when his freedom to publish his divorce tracts was under attack.

There is no defence against the charge of disingenuousness here; in the reading of the pamphlets it is essential to keep in mind the specific purpose which Milton had in mind. Nevertheless, as the three autobiographical excerpts from the pamphlets are the only first-hand sources for information on Milton's childhood, and they have never been found guilty of a misstatement of concrete fact, their evidence is most valuable.

The first of these autobiographical digressions appears

1. The Student's Milton, p. 1147.

2. "Of Education", The Student's Milton, p. 725.

in The Reason of Church Government,¹ which was published in 1641. Throughout the autobiographical passage there is a heavy emphasis on literary aims and preparation for a life devoted to literature, which is in accordance with the purpose of the digression, for he was defending himself against the charge that he might be motivated by a "self-pleasing humour of vain-glory". His argument is that, since his gifts were so great and could have won so much more credit in efforts more ambitious than the pamphlets, he cannot be accused of any other motive than honest concern over the abuses which he is attacking. He proves his point very thoroughly. In a very sketchy outline of his early years he states as evidence the indications of literary talent which he gave while young, and traces the literary influences on him from the beginning. From the first, he tells us, he was "exercised to the tongues and some sciences"; he was successful in school and college, and feted in Italy. Everything seemed to suggest that he "might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die". Altogether he gives a detailed and convincing account of the circumstances which lay behind the statement (made ten years later), "My father destined me from a child to the pursuits of literature".²

It might seem that this emphasis on literary aims was

1. Ibid., p. 504. The autobiographical passage appears on pp. 524-7.

2. "Second Defence", Ibid., p. 1145.

inconsistent with the closing passage of the digression. There, as a final substantiation of his right to attack the prelacy, Milton states that he was destined "to (the Church's) service, by the intentions of my parents and friends...as a child, and in mine own resolutions". But while the apparent contradiction may be to some extent the result of Milton's habit of coloring circumstances to fit his ends, it is more significant as a revelation of Milton's attitude to religion. He saw no need for a dedication to the service of the Church to the exclusion of literary activities. He was still living, however unrealistically, in a world in which a life devoted to religion was by no means incompatible with one given to literary pursuits. That world was the Renaissance world, not the compartmented world of Protestantism with its segregation of the religious and the secular.

This statement of his intention to enter the Church is the only reference in The Reason of Church Government bearing on Milton's childhood religious background. It gives no evidence of specific tendencies towards Puritanism; indeed it suggests an acceptance of the Established Church as the proper institution for the achievement of the religio-literary ambitions of the young genius. He was still, in 1641 when the undertaking of serious literary activities had been so long delayed, considering what literary works were to be his model, but he gives no hint that there was any question in his childhood as to which sect he was to associate himself with.

There is, in fact, immediately following the reference to his being destined for the Church, a clear suggestion that such questionings did not appear until long after childhood. For in proceeding with his explanation of his withdrawal from the Church, he says that his plans were unaltered "till coming to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded the church...I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of swearing". There is a clear implication here that he was not aware of any "tyranny" in the Church until reaching maturity. When this maturity was reached will be considered later.

The second of the autobiographical passages in the pamphlets is in the Apology for Smectymnuus¹ which was published a year after The Reason of Church Government. Though it is concerned with an aspect of Milton's nature sometimes attributed to Puritanism, this excerpt has even less to reveal on Milton's early religious tendencies. The account of Milton's early education is given a new slant to make it serve as a defence of his character against charges of viciousness, which had been brought against him by pamphleteers. His early life appears, accordingly, as a careful training in the practice of virtue. He fills out some of the details of his early

1. Ibid., p. 540. The autobiographical sketch, pp. 548-50.

studies, but makes no comment on specific religious tendencies. Once again, however, literary activity and general religious influences are set side by side; Milton learned chastity first (in the order of telling) from classical authors (though he finds it necessary to make some qualifications as to the morality of some of their writings), and "last of all, not in time, but as perfection is last" from the Bible.

This is all the passage has to offer on the religious issue, but it provides its own answer to those who attribute Milton's emphasis on chastity to Puritan influences. He remarks (after doing justice to the part an undifferentiated Christianity had to play in fortifying his moral character), that his chastity was in any case well founded without his religious studies or his "moral discipline, learnt out of the noblest philosophy", by a "certain reservedness of natural disposition". This inherent reservedness, while it found an effective ally in the moral rigidity of Puritanism, is in itself a sounder basis of Milton's austere moral attitude than the Puritan principles which it may be made to represent.

Over ten years after the publishing of An Apology for Smectymnuus Milton turned once again to autobiographical digression in defence of his reputation, though this time

with less need for emphasis on chastity.¹ In its consistency with his earlier attitudes to morality, literature and religion, this passage speaks well for the general dependability of these self-revelations, aside from their slanting of motives for action. The outlines of his early life are slightly more clearly drawn than in the other pamphlets. He begins with a sketchy outline of his childhood in which appears the reference to his being "destined...from a child to the pursuits of literature" which was quoted above.² There is no reference to the religious influences in the early environment.

References to the Horton period and the continental tour throw some light on Milton's religious position in his late twenties. He tells us that his time at Horton was "devoted to the perusal of the Greek and Latin classics", though he made occasional visits to London for books and to study mathematics and music. This would seem to be still the unbiased pursuit of all knowledge which, we shall see, was his object at Cambridge. In his account of the continental tour there appears his first direct reference in these autobiographical passages to his faith. He mentions risks he ran in Rome as a result of speaking out in defence of the "reformed religion...in the very metropolis of popery". Since

1. "Second Defence", ibid., p. 1137. The digression is on pp. 1145-8.

2. P. 24.

he is opposing Catholicism and the "reformed religion", there is no reason for assuming that the latter was Puritanism rather than Protestantism.

The famous people whom he chose to visit during his tour are an interesting indication of his tendencies at the time.¹ First, he tells us, on his way through France, he called on Grotius. The Dutch Protestant was engaged at the time in forwarding a plan for the union of all the Protestant sects, except the Calvinists and Presbyterians, and was in contact with that arch-Anglican, Laud, to this end. Unfortunately we have no detailed information on Milton's meeting with Grotius. Then, in Italy, he associated at length and greatly to everyone's mutual delight, with various groups of academicians, poets, writers and intellectuals. These men were the Catholics, themselves tolerant, and even eager to hear Milton's religious views, before whom he defended the "reformed faith" (though, of course, they were not the men who threatened his safety). Finally, on his return trip through Geneva, he spent a week with John Diodati, a Calvinist theologian and the uncle of his friend, Charles Diodati (who had died shortly before). Thus, in his choice of contacts, Milton displayed the same inclusiveness, perhaps the same unconscious assumption of a universal, integrated society, which lay behind his indiscriminated literary-religious

1. In this paragraph what Milton has to say is supplemented with information drawn largely from David Masson, The Life of John Milton, vol. 1, pp. 752ff.

ambitions.

A similarly ambiguous light is thrown on his religious position by his account of the reason for breaking short his tour. He says that on hearing of "the civil commotion" at home, he turned back from Sicily. He travelled homeward, with frequent and lengthy stops, through Italy, Switzerland and France. Upon his arrival in England, he says, "I again with rapture renewed my literary pursuits, and...calmly awaited the issue of the contest, which I trusted to the wise conduct of providence and to the courage of the people", (a course which hardly demanded his return, at however leisurely a pace; although it should be remembered in his defence that the account of the "civil commotion" which he received in Italy was probably exaggerated).

As he was speaking, in 1654, indubitably as a Puritan, it is easy to assume that the incidents of the trip and the reason for his return as recounted in the Second Defence were in harmony with Puritan principles; but in his defence of the reformed church, in the indiscriminate visits with Protestants of various shades and with Catholics, and in the return to England at a time of civil strife, there is nothing that identifies his position as distinctively Puritan.

He concludes the passage with a statement of the emergence of the Puritan cause which, in its implication of his late awakening to the need for reform, is in harmony with the reference in The Reason of Church Government to his reali-

zation "at some maturity" of the "tyranny" imposed on the Church.¹ Here, in the Second Defence, he says in a summing up of the situation in England on his return:

The vigor of the parliament had begun to humble the pride of the bishops. As long as the liberty of speech was no longer subject to control all mouths began to be opened against the bishops; some complained of the vices of the individuals, others of those of the order. They said that it was unjust that they alone should differ from the model of other reformed churches; that the government of the church should be according to the pattern of other churches, and particularly the word of God. This awakened all my attention and my zeal. I saw that a way was opening for the establishment of real liberty; that the foundation was laying for the deliverance of man from the yoke of slavery and superstition; that the first principles of religion, which were the first objects of our care, would exert a salutary influence on the manners and constitution of the republic; and as I had from my youth studied the distinctions between religious and civil rights, I perceived that if I ever wished to be of use, I ought at least not to be wanting to my country, to the church, and to so many of my fellow-Christians, in a crisis of so much danger; I therefore determined to relinquish the other pursuits in which I was engaged, and to transfer the whole force of my talents and my industry to this one important object.²

This perhaps cannot be interpreted to mean that Milton first adopted Puritan tenets after his return from the continental tour; but it does clearly state that his interest in the Puritan program of reform was aroused then, and it implies that he did not consider himself as involved in any pursuits which would characterize him as an active Puritan before that time.

1. See above, p. 26.

2. The Student's Milton, p. 1146f. The underlining is mine.

Thus, in the autobiographical material in the pamphlets there is nowhere any specific indication of Puritan affiliations before 1632, even though it would surely have been desirable for him to establish a long-standing connection with the Puritan cause if it had been possible. In the pamphlets there is nothing inconsistent with a theory that Milton was a conservative Anglican, with no Puritan tendencies, until near the end of his college career at least; that he then found it necessary to give up his plans to enter the ministry under the prelacy because of abuses which he became aware of in the ministry at that time; and that upon his return from the continent he saw in the Puritan cause a means of freeing the Church from its abuses and associated himself with the Puritans for that specific purpose.

The theory is untenable, of course, at least in that bald statement; further data available in the biographies will show that the situation was more complicated. But a careful consideration of this data is necessary to determine to what extent the theory needs to be modified.

As with the pamphlets, the four more or less contemporary biographies, or more accurately biographical sources, might give a misleading impression of a wealth of material on their subject. They are all short by modern biographical standards; the longest is not much more than twenty pages. Moreover they are not all independent accounts; two, though independent, are closely parallel, and the third is no more than a set of notes

prepared especially for the author of the fourth. None has more than a few paragraphs on Milton's childhood and youth. However, they provide the only direct evidence on this period outside of Milton's own writings, and must be sifted carefully for any evidence that they may give as to his religious background.

The biography which, in view of its authorship, should be most authoritative is that by Edward Phillips, published in 1694. Phillips was both nephew and pupil of Milton, and therefore had more immediate and prolonged contact with him than any of the others (with the possible exception of the author of the anonymous biography). Hanford points out that some reservations are necessary in the use of Phillips' biography, however, since Edward was only about twelve years old at the time of his studies with Milton, and was not at any age capable of understanding his gifted uncle.

His biography is certainly not a good one. He often resorts to commonplaces, and shows no great initiative in drawing upon outside sources. He openly acknowledges that his reference to Thomas Young is based on Milton's mention of the tutor in the fourth Elegy. The name of Milton's Cambridge tutor he says he "cannot call to mind". His account of Milton's relations with Edward King seem to be based on the fact that Milton wrote Lycidas, for he suggests

1. J. H. Hanford, A Milton Handbook, p. 4f.

that Milton was better acquainted with King than modern critics believe. The data relative to Milton's departure from Cambridge seems, too, to come from the pamphlets. The biography is obviously far from scholarly or even painstaking; much of it could be better written by a modern critic without Phillips' help.

References to the religious background are few and not very helpful. The most direct comment is one which appears in all four of the biographies in slightly varying form. It deals with the conversion of the elder Milton. Phillips' statement is that he "was cast out by his father, a bigoted Roman Catholic, for embracing when young the protestant faith, and abjuring the popish tenets".¹ Thus he distinguishes only Catholicism and an inspecific Protestantism, the one distinction which is clearly evident in Milton's early writings.

Phillips' account of Christopher Milton's behaviour is suggestive. In a brief note on Christopher he states without remark that Christopher kept "close to (the legal) study and profession" except during the Civil War, when he was "a great favorer and asserter of the King's cause, and obnoxious to the Parliament's side".² Phillips is writing, of course, long after the event, and passions have cooled; but it is remarkable that he seems so unconscious of the violent conflict that must

1. The Student's Milton, p. xxxii.

2. Ibid.

surely have been involved had Christopher come out of an environment as decisively Puritan as Wolfe suggests.

The reference to the elder Milton's conversion to Protestantism, and the note on Christopher are the only two items in the Phillips' biography which have any sort of bearing on the religious position of the young Milton.

There is, similarly, very little to our purpose in the parallel biographical sketch by an anonymous author which was discovered in 1889. Attempts have been made to identify the author; the elder Phillips brother, John, has been suggested,¹ as well as others who had direct contact with Milton. Certainly the author was someone much like Edward Phillips in respect to methods and to the body of material available to him. His treatment is similar, and equally non-committal on religious questions.

Four paragraphs cover Milton's life up to the end of his Cambridge studies. Once again the father's change of faith is mentioned; he was "disinherited about the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign by his father a Romanist...for reading the Bible."² This is little more than a repetition of Phillips' statement, except for the dating of the event, which is not

1. J. H. Hanford, A Milton Handbook, p. 5.

2. The Student's Milton, p. xvi.

supportable; Masson dates the conversion more than twenty years later,¹ and a reasonable chronology can hardly be worked out otherwise. In any case, the implications of the conversion for Milton's religious background are made no clearer here than in Phillips' account.

There is a suggestion of a religious emphasis in the home in a reference to early writings. The young Milton wrote, we are told, "several grave and religious poems" in addition to paraphrases of "some of David's psalms" (which may include the two we have).

When he comes to deal with the critical question of Milton's failure to enter the Church, the anonymous author says "he left the university, and, having no design to take up any of the particular learned professions, applied himself...to the diligent reading of the best classic authors, divine and human".² There is nothing here to suggest the reasons which Milton himself gave for his withdrawal from the Church; but the biographer may be covering his ignorance on the matter.

Considerably less non-committal, however, is the review of Milton's position in the politico-religious situation in 1640. After outlining Milton's activities up to the end of his continental tour, the writer continues:

It was now the year 1640, and the nation was much divided upon the controversies about church government, between the Prelatical party, and the Dissen-

1. David Masson, The Life of John Milton, vol. 1, p. 24.

2. The Student's Milton, p. xvii.

ters, or, as they were commonly then called, the Puritans. He had studied religion in the Bible and the best authors, had strictly lived up to its rules, and had no temporal concern depending upon any hierarchy to render him suspected, either to himself or others, as one that writ for interest; and, therefore, with great boldness and zeal offered his judgment, first in two Books of Reformation by way of address to a friend, and then, in answer to a bishop, he writ of Prelatical Episcopacy and The Reason of Church Government.¹

This echoes suspiciously of the pamphlets, particularly in its emphasis on Milton's disinterestedness. But if it has any significance in itself, it suggests rather impartiality than commitment to the Puritan cause before 1640. It is not wise to put too much emphasis on such a passage, however, for it is highly probable that when the biography was written it was not desirable to put any emphasis on Milton's Puritan affiliations.

For whatever reason, the anonymous biography is, like the Phillips' biography, almost wholly non-committal about Milton's early religious position.

The other two contemporary biographical sources are one, so far as original material is concerned. As Milton was 'incorporated' as an M. A. at Oxford, he qualified as the subject of a biography in the "Athenae et Fasti Oxoniensis", and a sketch was prepared for this purpose by Anthony Wood.

1. Ibid., pp. xviif.

Wood, however, had no contact with Milton, and he drew upon the anonymous biography reviewed above, and upon some first-hand notes prepared at his request by a Londoner, John Aubrey, who knew Milton and his family. These notes of Aubrey's, though far from constituting a biographical essay of any sort, are the only original source for firsthand data on Milton's youth other than the two biographies already considered.

Wood had little respect for Aubrey, (he referred to him as "roving and magotie-headed"); but Aubrey's notes have perhaps as much to offer as the two biographies on the question of Milton's early Puritanism. Aubrey repeats, with a piquant addition, the story of the disinheritance. He says, "his grandfather disinherited (his father) because he kept not to the Catholic religion. He found a Bible in English in his chamber".¹ (Woods says only: "Which grandfather being a zealous papist, did put away, or, as some say, disinherit, his son, because he was a protestant".)²

More important is the only source reference outside of Milton's own writings to a Puritan tutor. Edward Phillips, it will be remembered, referred to Thomas Young, but openly based his reference on Milton's correspondence with Young. Aubrey says: "His school-master then (apparently at ten years

1. Ibid., p. xxii.

2. Ibid., p. xxvi.

of age) was a Puritan, in Essex, who cut his hair short".¹
This brief note exercises Masson's ingenuity at some length.²
Since Thomas Young had, so far as is known, no connections
in Essex, Masson deduces that Aubrey must be referring to an
earlier tutor. He suggests, too, that it was not, as had been
supposed, the tutor who had his hair cut short, but Milton.
Milton did wear his hair short as a boy, as is evidenced by
the painting of him at ten; (Masson suggests that Aubrey may,
in fact, be explaining how in this picture Milton appears as
"such a sweet little Roundhead"). The situation is complicated
by the fact that at twenty-one Milton appears in another pic-
ture with unmistakably Cavalier tresses. This absence of
"one outward sign of Puritanism", Masson tells us, has given
Todd some concern. The problem is certainly a profound and
difficult one; but it is hardly likely to establish any theory
as to Milton's Puritan tendencies. The important point is
that Milton had perhaps two Puritan tutors, (there is, of
course, no question about Thomas Young in any case); and this
fact may be set down as the only specific and concrete evidence
of Puritan leanings to be found in the materials so far covered.

There is nothing further to our purpose in the gossipy
but obviously freshly gathered notes of Aubrey, although his
explanation of the "Lady" epithet which was applied to Milton

1. Ibid., p. xxii.

2. David Masson, The Life of John Milton, vol. 1,
pp. 67f, and p. 67, note.

at Cambridge is interesting. "He was," Aubrey says, "so fair that they called him the lady of Christ's College".¹

This seems reasonable enough in itself, but it is hardly adequate, as we shall see that Milton himself did not attribute the epithet to any so innocent cause in the prologues.

However, aside from the confirmation of inconclusive evidence also in the other biographies, the reference to the tutor is the one concrete fact bearing on our problem in Aubrey's notes or Wood's sketch; and as the import of that fact can be weighed more easily in the broader context of Masson's biography, it will be considered later.

Masson's biography is, for all its voluminousness, largely dependent on the sources already considered; and one of these, the anonymous biography, was discovered too late to be available to him. There were original sources later than those dealt with above which Masson used; but those, insofar as they contributed any fresh material, were concerned with later periods of Milton's life. Masson adds to the materials in his sources a great quantity of peripheral data accumulated by careful research in records and patched out with general knowledge of the times and informed surmise; but he offers more in the way of a general understanding of the environment than

1. The Student's Milton, p. xxiv.

of specific knowledge of the circumstances of Milton's early years. In the matter of early Puritan influences on Milton he cannot go far beyond the contemporary sources.

Accordingly his assumption that Milton was a Puritan child in a Puritan background cannot stand as evidence in itself, particularly since he does not give the matter any direct consideration. When we find him referring to the above-mentioned painting of the boy of ten as "that of a very intelligent little Puritan boy with auburn hair",¹ we may be justified in complaining that the painting gives more conclusive evidence of the color of Milton's hair than of the shade of his religion.

Masson's detailed investigation of the environment of the young Milton did uncover one significant fact which corroborates his assumption of Milton's Puritan background. With customary thoroughness, Masson examined all the evidence as to the life and character of the minister of the parish in which Milton's London home was situated.² The minister, the Reverend Richard Stocke, is clearly established to be "a very zealous Puritan". While there is no evidence of the nature or extent of the contacts between the Milton family and their parish minister, it is reasonably certain that the Miltons, an undoubtedly religious family, attended regularly a Puritan minister's services.

1. David Masson, The Life of John Milton, vol. 1, p. 67.

2. Ibid., p. 54.

Masson suggests that the Puritan minister and the Puritan tutor, the two Puritan influences so far established, may have been connected.¹ He finds that Young was earlier associated with a friend of Stocke, and concludes that it is reasonable to suppose that Young was introduced to the Milton family by Stocke. This is possible, but throws no new light on the situation.

Out of the quantities of supplementary material elaborating the information supplied by the early biographies, the Puritan minister is the only new item contributed by Masson to the clarification of Milton's early religious position.

Thus the evidence in biographical sources as to early Puritan influences on Milton comes to very little. The contemporary biographies may, as has been suggested, have tended to slight Puritan tendencies; they were certainly brief, superficial and inspecific. Masson, though incomparably more thorough and exact, is limited by their inadequacies. The material in them and in Masson relevant to Milton's religious position in his childhood can be summed up in three points:

1. His father was a convert from Roman Catholicism, against the bitter opposition of his grandfather.

1. Ibid., p. 7f.

2. He lived as a child in a parish presided over by a Puritan minister, and so almost certainly heard weekly sermons tending to Puritanism.

3. He studied under one (or possibly two) Puritan tutors.

This is by no means as impressive a list as Wolfe's, which, to repeat, enumerated:

A city home of Puritan inclinations, a neighborhood of wealthy merchants, a boyhood outlook of deep seriousness, enhanced by Bible study, a Puritan minister in the parish pulpit, a strict Puritan master in his earliest school, two or three susceptible years at St. Paul's under the Calvinist Thomas Young, Cambridge study under Joseph Meade...¹

This list includes only two of the above three points; Wolfe does not include the first as it does not imply a necessarily Puritan influence. The third point (the Puritan tutor) appears in Wolfe's statement in an unaccountably confused form; the statement that Milton was "at St. Paul's under the Calvinist Thomas Young" is either careless or positively inaccurate. But it seems safe to assume that we are in essential agreement with Wolfe on the Puritan minister and tutor.

The rest of Wolfe's decisive influences are either tenuous, doubtful or mistaken. Thus the phrase, "Cambridge study under Joseph Meade", is doubly misleading. Milton did

1. See above, p. 20.

not study under Meade, and in any case Meade was scarcely a Puritan influence. The life of Meade in the Dictionary of National Biography admits some grounds for doubt on the point; he failed to win a fellowship "more than once", because of "'very causeless' suspicion on the part of the master, Valentine Cary..., that he 'looked too much towards Geneva'". But his position was essentially Anglican, though with a tendency to broad sympathies which was beyond either Anglicanism or Puritanism. The Dictionary of National Biography gives explicit evidence of this:

Mead was no party man. 'I never', he says, 'found myself prone to change my hearty affections to any one for mere difference in opinion'. His openness of mind is expressed in the maxim, 'I cannot believe that truth can be prejudiced by the discovery of truth'. But his loyal attachment to anglican doctrine and usage, as representing 'the catholick consent of the church in her first ages,' was disturbed by no scruples. On 6 Feb. 1636 he writes strongly to Hartlib against a puritan book, which is evidently one of the Latin treatises of John Bastwick, M.D.... Against the presbyterian discipline, the institution of 'lay-elders', and the use of the term 'minister' in the place of presbyter or priest, he argues learnedly in his 'Discourses'. In the same strain are his historical arguments for the reverence due to sacred places, and for the view of the Eucharist as a sacrifice. With the puritans he held the pope to be anti-christ; with the high churchmen he admitted that the Roman church teaches the fundamentals of the faith. The points at issue between Calvinists and Lutherans he did not take to be fundamental; but professed himself not 'well versed in the subtilties of those controversies'.¹

Mullinger in his history of Cambridge refers to Meade simply

1. From the article, "Mead, Joseph" in the Dictionary of National Biography.

as a "tolerant Anglican",¹ and while this is not perfectly precise, it is more nearly accurate than the suggestion that Meade was a Puritan influence.

The allusion by Wolfe to a "strict Puritan master in his earliest school" and the following reference to Young are inexplicably garbled; there is surely some confusion in Wolfe's mind between Gill and Young. Certainly in one phrase or the other Wolfe must be implying that Gill was a Puritan; but this too is quite inaccurate. D. L. Clark in John Milton at St. Paul's School says:

Gil's theological position was not unlike those of Harker and Andrews... If the Gils...had been strong Puritans..."not conformable wholly to the ceremonies of the Church of England", they...might well have been "enforced from keeping school"...²

Even more specifically he says later:

That Gil was all his mature life consistently an orthodox and rational Anglican theologian appears by his Preface (to "The Sacred Philosophy of Scripture").³

Wolfe's three remaining points (the first three in his list) are by no means decisive in themselves. There is no evidence as to the inclinations of Milton's home; they can only be deduced from the other information at hand. The neighborhood is hardly a determining factor; and deep seriousness and Bible study was conceivably possible even in an

1. J. Bass Mullinger, The University of Cambridge, vol. 1, p. 18.

2. D. L. Clark, John Milton at St. Paul's School, p. 67n.

3. Ibid., p. 78.

Anglican child.

The case must rest, then, so far as biographical sources are concerned, with the three points which are established from the fairly limited data relevant to Milton's early religious development. These might seem to be fairly conclusive, even though not very specific in their implications; but they must be evaluated in terms of the times, for just as it is too easy to read back into Milton's youth the viewpoints which he espoused in his maturity, so there is a danger of interpreting the situation in 1608 in terms of that in 1640.

The first point, the elder Milton's change of faith, is, of course, inconclusive as far as Puritan tendency is concerned. We are not concerned with the fact that Milton's father was converted, but with the specific form of the faith to which he was converted. It is as likely as not that a new convert will be little conscious of the varying shades of his new faith; taking refuge in a strange Church, he is at least as likely to look for security in the Establishment proper as to identify himself with any dissident groups within it.

The other two points must be considered more carefully. They obviously imply some degree of association with Puritanism. The Milton family could hardly have been prelati- cal in their sympathies while attending Puritan sermons and employing a Puritan tutor. But to precisely what extent they must have been devoted to the Puritan cause is not immediately clear.

In 1640 it was impossible for any intelligent person to avoid committing himself to one side or the other in the controversy. But this violent split had developed rapidly in the years immediately preceding 1640; for a long time the tendency had been rather towards a compromise which might eventually have made possible a patching up of differences. The early Puritans, before they lost the hopes which the accession of the Tudors had aroused, espoused a thorough program of reform based on Calvinistic presbyterianism. This was wholly unacceptable to Elizabeth, who saw clearly that the episcopacy was a mainstay of her throne. But she was much too shrewd to attempt to eradicate Puritanism; she had much better use for it. By calculated policy, playing the Puritans off against the bishops, she achieved a political balance which was much more useful than the establishing of prelatical supremacy.

The result for the Puritans was frustration. Neither martyred nor permitted to carry out their reforms, they developed theory at the cost of action, began to break up into factions and waste their energies in controversy. Extremist manifestations of Puritan sects were, however, as distasteful to conservative Puritans as to the prelates; and the majority of Puritans found it both possible and preferable to maintain an uneasy alliance with the Establishment, working for their reforms from within the Church. As their hopes for the establishment of a presbyterian organization faded, their emphasis on the issue at stake between them and the

Anglicans shifted to secondary liturgical matters. Horton Davies defines the terms of the opposition as follows:

The Puritan insisted that the primary principle of the Reformation was adherence to the Word of God. It had been thoroughly applied in doctrinal matters by the Fathers of the Church of England. Naturally and inevitably the second stage of the Reformation in England was the application of the same criterion to the unreformed worship of the church. Puritanism in England was, therefore, of necessity a liturgical movement.¹

Thus the Puritans with whom Milton was familiar were striving to achieve this further step in the reformation of the Church wholly from within the Establishment. There was no thought in their minds of a second reformation; their aim was rather to work out the final settlement of the details which followed from the one true Reformation. Had Elizabeth's policy of compromise been continued, the prelates and the Puritans might have been able to work out their differences within the Church, held together by their common basis in the Reformation, their common hatred of Rome, and their agreement on the desirability of preserving a single state church.

At the time of Milton's birth there were already ominous foreshadowings of the shattering of any prospect of a peaceful settlement. On Elizabeth's death the Puritan forces, long put off by the canny Queen, took new hope from the accession of a King who had ruled in Presbyterian Scotland. Their hopes were embodied in the Millenary Petition presented to

1. Horton Davies, The Worship of the English Puritans, p. 8.

James by a group of the Puritans (that is, ministers of the Established Church with Puritanical tendencies). They requested first of all reform in the management of the Church, which concern for abuses in the Church was associated with the Puritan cause, although it was not in itself distinctly Puritan. The characteristically Puritan aims of the ministers appeared in requests for reforms of Church rites to bring the worship into harmony with the principles of the Reformation.

James' rebuff of the Puritans at the Convocation of 1603-04, and the strongly anti-Puritan policy pursued under Bancroft, his first Archbishop of Canterbury, were prophetic of developments which were to lead to an open break. But they produced only talk of separation; independency as an active and effectual policy was still purely theoretical. The Puritans objected to the excessiveness of the program for conformity, but still felt no impelling need to set themselves up in opposition to King or Establishment.

Furthermore, it is clear from events following 1610 that the Puritan element could still identify itself with the Established Church, that an open split was by no means inevitable. For the successor to Bancroft three years after Milton's birth was Abbot, an ardent worker for further reform in the Church. Abbot's Puritan leanings were known to the King when he made him archbishop, and to the Puritans, who worked hopefully in the Church under him. Throughout his office he fought the tendency towards Arminianism which was

to form the core of the opposition to the Puritans in the Church. On Abbott's withdrawal from participation in the activities of his office, his virtual successor, Williams, though not "Low Church" was "Broad", and pursued a firm policy of toleration until the growing tide of conflict forced his retirement from politics.

Thus during the period when Milton was subject to the Reverend Stocke's influence, Puritan ministers could still identify themselves with their Church. Haller writes: "The Puritan preachers were churchmen, indistinguishable in respect to social origins and intellectual attainments from others".¹ They were, as well, indistinguishable in respect to doctrine and in respect to their allegiance to state and Church. They were marked only by their more rigid interpretation of the meaning of the Reformation, by a desire to put into practice in matters of liturgy principles already embodied in the Church doctrine. In so far as they formed a separate group, both they and their opponents could feel that their differences were secondary matters which did not threaten their common roots in the Reformed State Church. The Puritan minister in Milton's parish was in a very different position than the Puritan revolutionary of 1640, and was under no impulsion to preach revolt against the prelates. The recent convert from Catholicism and his precocious son

1. William Haller, The Rise of Puritanism, p. 128.

need not have felt, under his ministrations, any necessity for involving themselves in the issues on which he was at odds with other ministers of the Church. As converts they would probably prefer resting in the unquestioned common faith which bound the Church together, to entering into new and perhaps trivial religious controversy.

The influence of Young as Milton's tutor was subject to the same reservations as Stocke's. Young need not have made it his business to exercise a distinctively Puritan influence on his young student; living at a time when reform within the Church still seemed possible, he may not have thought it his duty to turn every pupil into a "sweet little Roundhead".

Thus the fact that the Miltons attended a Puritan's church and employed a Puritan tutor may prove no more than would their patronizing a Puritan merchant because his store happened to be on a handy corner, or employing a Puritan charlady because she had been recommended to them by a Puritan acquaintance. That is an exaggeration of course; John would unquestionably be more influenced by the minister and tutor than by the presumptive merchant and charlady. He could not have avoided some Puritan ideas and ideals; but he need not even have been clearly conscious of the distinction between a "Puritan" and an "Anglican" ideal. Indeed, during the years when he was listening to Stocke and studying under Young, it would have been impossible to work out two independent systems of thought which could have been identified as "Puritan" and "Anglican". Differences had not yet been sufficiently

clearly formulated that a line could be drawn between two such theologies. Milton would learn from both Stocke and Young more that was later to be characteristic of Anglicanism than of Puritanism.

Thus the two "Puritan influences" on Wolfe's list which are supported by evidence in the biographical sources are far from decisive. Since there is no other indication of Puritan tendencies in the autobiographical passages and the biographies, it is not possible to prove on the basis of those sources that Milton must have been a Puritan in any thorough sense as a result of his early environment. The extent of Puritan influence can only be determined in the one other source of evidence, Milton's youthful writings; and we shall, accordingly, look to the prologues for a consideration of their evidence as to the net result of Milton's childhood background and early training.

CHAPTER IV

THE CAMBRIDGE BACKGROUND

The prolusions were the product of the very special Cambridge environment, which in itself exercised a very strong influence on Milton. It cannot be argued that that influence was openly Puritan; if it had been it would be impossible to credit Milton with Puritan tendencies before the end of his college years, for he was, we shall see, almost completely silent about Puritanism before 1632. The only way to get around this difficulty is to attribute the silence to repressive forces in the environment; and at least one critic does so explain it.¹ But an examination of the University environment, along with a reasonable evaluation of the content of the prolusions, will, I believe, make such an explanation untenable.

The situation at Cambridge reflected that of the nation; Cambridge was deeply involved in the theological and political developments of the times, and was continually influencing or being influenced by the trend of events. In the years before Milton's appearance there, the University had tended to take the initiative in this interaction; the activity

1. See below, p. 67.

of the University Puritans had been an important factor in the spread of agitation for reform throughout the Church. Thus Thomas Cartwright, the Lady Margaret Professor in 1569, led a vigorous attack against the Episcopal hierarchy and against abuses in the Church, (that blend of distinctively Puritan aims with criticism of the shortcomings of the Establishment which was characteristic of the Puritan cause). Cartwright preached against "the institution of archbishops and bishops, of archdeacons and deacons; the appointment of preachers without any settled charge; and the practice of appointing those who were selected to minister to certain congregations without admitting the congregation themselves to a voice in the election", and against "the keeping of saints' days and the enforced use of homilies".¹

But Cambridge was not always taking the initiative. Even Cartwright was successful in giving expression to his views for only a short time; he was forced to leave in 1560 by Whitgift, the Archbishop of Canterbury and himself once Lady Margaret Professor (and Puritan sympathizer). Such expressions of dissent as Cartwright's were intermittent, and at no time did the Puritan forces become preponderant in the University, even though they did in individual colleges. The University was too dependent upon the support of the Court to permit Puritans to direct its policies, and it could not

1. J. Bass Mullinger, The University of Cambridge, vol. 2, p. 257.

for long allow even free expression of opinion to its Puritan members, so that although the conservative officers of the University never succeeded in eradicating Puritanism, with the support, and at the insistence, of the King, they kept the Puritans at bay, and for long periods forced them to remain inactive and silent. They were so successful in their struggles against the 'radicals' that when Puritanism began to be a powerful force in the Parliament and nation it was steadily losing ground at Cambridge. Haller states that "the main strength of the spiritual brotherhood had already begun to ebb at Cambridge when Milton arrived there".¹

Milton's own college, Christ's, had a mixed record.² At one time Puritan forces had some strength there; this was under the mastership of Edmund Barwell, from 1582 to 1609, when, the administration being very lax and little attempt being made to oppose Puritan activities, it was possible for Puritans to work openly in the college. No extremists appeared to take advantage of the opportunity; the most active Puritan in the college during the period was William Perkins, who had been an extremist but who was during his stay at Christ's an exponent of the Calvinistic principles which were to be the distinguishing mark of the moderate Puritans as opposed to the Arminianism of the Anglicans.

1. William Haller, The Rise of Puritanism, p. 294.

2. This and the following paragraph are based on the second volume of J. Bass Mullinger, The University of Cambridge.

Before Milton's time, however, a fairly rigidly enforced conformity was established at Christ's by Valentine Cary, an anti-Calvinist who was master from 1609 to 1620.¹ Puritanism was never eradicated; during the years immediately preceding Milton's birth instances of Puritan activity appeared and were quelled. Thus in 1608 a fellow of the college attacked Bancroft's anti-Puritan policy, and in 1609 Nicholas Rush expressed Puritan views publicly and later attacked the lax administration of Barwell. The first was threatened with 'degradation' and silenced, while Rush was expelled (though less for his Puritan views than for his attack on Barwell, and then only because he had the amazing bad taste to make his attack during the course of a funeral oration which he was delivering over its deceased subject). In 1609 a third fellow, William Ames, who had refused to comply with Cary's urgings to wear the surplice, was forced to resign for delivering a sermon against the traditional laxity of the holiday season.

These were isolated instances, however, and were by no means expressive of a general feeling in the college. Mullinger points out that both Universities disavowed any support for the Millenary Petition, and he records no instance of the expression of Puritan sympathies at Christ's during the period of Milton's stay there. Cartwright's days were,

1. Ibid., pp. 508ff.

by the time Milton arrived, far in the past; Cartwright had died in 1603, back in England after exile, still urging the need for reform, but so far prepared to conform (or to appear to conform) in other respects as to reach a reconciliation with Whitgift before his death. Nor was his memory uncritically honored by the new generation; Joseph Meade consistently condemned him as intolerant.

During Milton's stay at Cambridge the tendency towards reaction was accelerated by the determined efforts of Laud, who realized that control of the Universities was vital to his program. By 1630 he had established himself as Chancellor of Oxford, and his influence in both Universities was rapidly growing. Thus Milton's studies at Cambridge were carried on under an increasingly rigidly enforced conformity, with masters and tutors who must of necessity have been conservatives in politics and religion. Unfortunately, little is known about Tovey, Milton's tutor. Masson records the bare outlines of his life, but gives no information on his religious views;¹ though perhaps it indicates prelatival sympathies that, on leaving Cambridge to take a living, Tovey was ejected in 1647 by the Parliamentary sequestrations. Chappell, the tutor who engaged in the unexplained disagreement with Milton when Milton first arrived at Cambridge, was suspected even at the time of Arminian sympathies, and later

1. David Masson, The Life of John Milton, vol. 1, p. 130.

gave evidence that he was orthodox by rising in the hierarchy through Laud's influence, and by suffering imprisonment during the Civil War.¹ The broadly tolerant views of Meade, the most respected tutor at Christ's in Milton's time, have already been mentioned.²

Thus the Cambridge environment was far from favorable to the expression of Puritan sympathies, and the argument that Milton was forced to conceal Puritan tendencies there is plausible from the viewpoint of the environment at least. Whether or not it is necessary to assume that there was anything to conceal is another question.

But the answer to that question can be found only in a comprehensive evaluation of Milton's reaction to the Cambridge environment, in which reaction much the most obvious factor was his expression of humanist sympathies. I believe that an examination of the reasons for Milton's attack on the curriculum will suggest that his predominant interests during his college years were quite unrelated to, if not actually incompatible with, Puritan tendencies.

Milton's studies, the central issue in the prologues, were founded on the traditional curriculum of the Universities. Tradition was predominant in this curriculum even

1. Ibid., p. 129.

2. Above, p. 44f.

over the influence of humanism, the rise of which had had a much more telling influence on the studies of St. Paul's than at either of the Universities.¹ Attempts at reform of the curriculum along humanist lines had produced some changes in detail, but even these had not taken firm hold, and they never offered any threat to the supremacy of the mediaeval viewpoint. The ideal of humanistic enthusiasm, as evidenced in the full flood of the Renaissance in Italy, was an identification with the spirit of classical paganism which was consciously in opposition to the mediaeval attempts to force the letter of pagan writings into apparent conformity with the established dogmas. This humanist spirit scarcely reached England at all; the English humanists observed its triumphs in Italy with an interest which was strongly restrained by their alarm at the profane and heretical tendencies which accompanied them.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century the only humanist innovations in the University curriculum were the study of Hebrew and Greek, which had been instituted in the early sixteenth century, the latter by Erasmus during his stay at Cambridge. Hebrew, though considered the root of all modern languages, was neglected as a study;² and Greek won the attention of very few, at one time (in 1580) becoming almost extinct.³

1. See below, p. 65.

2. Masson, op. cit., p. 418.

3. Ibid., p. 419.

Thus the curriculum remained essentially the mediaeval curriculum. Knappen writes:

On the university level...there was a surprising lack of innovation. Though the loose requirements for degrees left some time for belles lettres and history, Aristotle continued to dominate the curriculum. ...it was at best modified mediaevalism...¹

This was so in spite of attempts made during the troubled years of the Tudors' reigns to bring about some improvements. The Statutes of Edward VI, drawn up in 1549, had been designed by the learned continental Protestant scholars, Peter Martyr and Martin Bucer, to bring University studies into line with reformed theological views. Some reform of the mediaeval curriculum was achieved;² in the study of philosophy Aristotle was supplemented by Pliny and Plato, and other courses were revised and brought up-to-date by redefinition of their subject matter and by better selection of classical texts. More revolutionary was the attempt to revise the traditional order of studies in which the trivium had provided the studies of the four years leading to the B. A. degree, and the quadrivium the courses for the M. A. degree in the three post-graduate years. The Edwardian Statutes ruled that grammar, formerly part of the B. A. course was the proper study of the grammar school, and was to be replaced in the B. A. course with an introduction to mathematics, previously a post-graduate study.

1. M. M. Knappen, Tudor Puritanism, p. 475.

2. J. Bass Mullinger, The University of Cambridge, vol. 2, pp. 110f.

The quadrivium was to be expanded by "further study in philosophy, perspective, astronomy and Greek". At the same time a general revision was made of the administration, discipline and examinations.

By Milton's time some of this ground had been lost. In the Elizabethan revision of the Statutes in 1570, mathematics disappeared from the B. A. course. In practice it continued to be available to undergraduates, but it was poorly organized and badly provided with texts, and since it was not compulsory, was little attended. Rhetoric, taught from the traditional ancient texts, was re-emphasized in the place of mathematics. It was to be the chief study of the first year. In the second and third years studies were to centre about Logic, taught from Ramus' text, the one Protestant innovation in the curriculum. The fourth year was devoted to Philosophy.¹

The post-graduate course was in a state of decay only partly accounted for by the lingering grip of mediaeval scholasticism. It had suffered also from a gradual relaxation of the requirements; residence was no longer demanded, and the compulsory requirements were "limited to the keeping of one or two acts and the composition of a single declamation".² Mullinger says that the better students, did, during their post-graduate studies, supplement the meagre fare of the

1. David Masson, The Life of John Milton, vol. 1, pp. 260ff.

2. Mullinger, op. cit., p. 414.

established curriculum with some attention to ethics, physics or metaphysics (and Milton would be pre-eminent among these better students); but even these supplementary studies were generally pursued on a narrowly scholastic basis. Throughout the curriculum and extra-curricular studies the scholastic standards were, Mullinger points out, far behind the times.¹ Astronomy was studied from Ptolemy, and cosmology from the Timaeus. The Renaissance, in spite of minor improvements in certain phases of the curriculum, had failed completely to inspire any pervasive spirit of enthusiasm for the extension of the studies beyond their mediaeval limit.

Such a curriculum was, of course, wholly inadequate for a student with any initiative, and the common recourse was to study and controversy in the much more immediate and vital theological developments of the day. The post-graduate occupied himself with the "all-absorbing controversial theology of the day and.. the composition of 'commonplaces', to be delivered in the college chapel".² Thus Milton complains of students who

...fly off unfeathered to Theology, while all but rude and uneducated in Philology as well as Philosophy, content too lightly to pick up as much Theology as may suffice for anyhow sticking together a little sermon and stitching it over

1. Ibid., p. 402.

2. Ibid., p. 414.

with worn rags from other quarters, insomuch that it is to be dreaded that by degrees there may spread among our clergy that priestly ignorance of a former age.¹

But this concern over premature involvement in the theological controversies was only a very minor aspect of Milton's dissatisfaction with what went on at Cambridge. His most urgent attack was against the very basis of theology and philosophy as they were studied at Cambridge. This attack is the central issue of the prologues; they are a persistent, and it would almost seem co-ordinated, assault on the Cambridge curriculum.

The obvious explanation of a pro-humanist attack on an anti-humanist curriculum would be that its author was defending his humanist principles. That this was true in Milton's case is suggested by all the evidence from his earlier years. He might have been amenable to the scholastic curriculum (and, conceivably, have proceeded without any alteration in his plans for the ministry), had he not been thoroughly conditioned against it not only by his remarkable precocity, exercised under Thomas Young in an enthusiastic pursuit of classical studies, but as well by his studies at St. Paul's.² Established by Colet, one of England's few great humanists, St. Paul's in Milton's day still preserved the essential outlines of a truly humanistic educational system. The curriculum was drawn up, as was the University curriculum, on the basis of the

1. From a letter to Thomas Young in 1628, The Student's Milton, p. 1078.

2. The data on St. Paul's is drawn largely from D. L. Clark, John Milton at St. Paul's School.

ancient trivium; but Colet freed the studies from the mediaeval conditioning which permitted classical learning to survive only insofar as it was made subservient to mediaeval theology. At St. Paul's Milton learned Latin, some Greek and a little Hebrew, in their classical texts, with a freedom of approach to the classical authors which was to clash violently with the circumscribed scholastic interpretations at Cambridge. Milton's most glowingly enthusiastic statements of his delight in the ancient authors pertain to experiences which began in his boyhood, in his studies with Thomas Young and at St. Paul's. It was with Young that Milton "first traversed the Aonian glens and the sacred boskage of the twice-cloven peak, drank of the Pierian spring, and by Clio's grace thrice wet my happy lips with Castalia's wine".¹ It was at St. Paul's that "there were revealed to (him) the eloquence of the language of Romulus and the graces of Latin, and also the sonorous vocabulary developed by the oratorical Greeks, a vocabulary that befitted the mouth of Jove."²

Thus Milton's reaction at Cambridge was based upon a tradition which appeared to him to be deplorably frustrated in the narrow channels in which learning was confined there. D. L. Clark, in a valuable résumé of the St. Paul's course, brings out clearly the effect on Milton of the transition

1. From "Elegy IV", The Student's Milton, p. 88.

2. From "Ad Patrem", Ibid., p. 102.

from St. Paul's to Cambridge.

That Milton should aspire to such literary and oratorical ideals as moved the orators and poets of antiquity is natural enough, for he had an early education very like their own. Indeed in Milton's boyhood formal education in the English grammar schools was as exclusively literary as formal education had been in the Roman schools of the first century. In Imperial Rome and in Renaissance England all seven of the Liberal Arts were honored as the basis of a liberal education, but in both periods the mathematical arts of the quadrivium (Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy) were honored more than taught. The core, flesh and skin of the educational apple were comprised in the linguistic arts of the trivium (Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic). Hence in Milton's boyhood his father might have boasted, quite correctly, that he was giving his son a sound "trivial" education. For St. Paul's School, which prepared Milton for Cambridge, was as completely given over to the study of the trivium, in Latin and Greek, as was the grammar school Ovid attended in Rome. Milton read the same school authors, practiced the same imitative exercises of translation and paraphrase, and wrote and spoke themes on the same sort of assignments. That Milton received such a grammar school education was the all but inevitable result of the Renaissance in England, for the Renaissance humanists, Erasmus, Colet, and Lily, who organized the course of study for St. Paul's in process of bringing about a rebirth of classical culture through a renewed study of classical languages and literatures simultaneously brought about a rebirth of the classical educational system.

This humanistic education which he received at St. Paul's School had a profound influence on the mature Milton and contributed to making him what he became - a great man of the Renaissance. It was at St. Paul's School that he gained that command of Latin which he put to such noble use in the service of his country in his great defenses of English liberty. Here it was that he first learned to practice the rhetoric which, when he became a man, enabled him to control his thoughts for effective communication to the world. At this school, happy in the literary studies afforded by academic leisure, he was encouraged to write verses in English as well as in the learned tongues. Indeed

he was so happy in the congenial surroundings of his humanistic grammar school that he was well prepared to hate, as hate he thoroughly did, the mediaeval scholasticism of his university when he proceeded to Cambridge in 1625.¹

Such an exclusively humanist account of Milton's reaction to Cambridge is somewhat inconsistent with the assumption that Milton was already significantly Puritan in his views when he was at Cambridge. Haller attempts to overcome this difficulty by combining with the humanistic explanation, Puritan reasons for Milton's unfavorable reaction to his University:

He came there versed in the Bible, in humane letters, and in Puritan ideas of reform. He found there the course of study and system of education dictated by mediaeval tradition. ...The decline of Puritan influence at Cambridge in Milton's time could only have thrown into sharper relief the arid traditionalism of the formal curriculum. ...though Bacon's attack on scholasticism fell in with Milton's mood, his mood continued to be that of the Puritan reformer rather than of the Baconian philosopher. ...Milton assailed the prevailing system, both while he was a university student, and even more violently, as an active revolutionary after 1640, because he was convinced that it turned out nothing but ignoramus unfit for the duties of the pulpit.²

Haller is clearly working from the assumption that a well developed Puritan tendency was already established in Milton, and that Puritanism played an important part in the writing of the prologues. In his brief account of the early outlines of Milton's life, he satisfies himself on the question of the

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1. D. L. Clark, John Milton at St. Paul's School, p. 3.
 2. William Haller, The Rise of Puritanism, pp. 298ff.

Puritan tendency of the family with the dogmatic statement, "The family was, as we should expect, Puritan in its faith, its sympathies and its way of life".¹ Haller's account of Milton's University years is founded upon this 'expectation'.

The crux of the issue is Milton's complete silence about Puritanism during the college years, but apparently Haller satisfies himself on this point, too.

It seems (he says) at first thought surprising that Milton has nothing to say concerning the preachers he may have heard at Cambridge and little concerning preachers at any time. The omission can, however, be explained. As we have seen, the heyday of Puritan preaching at Cambridge was over when he arrived, and the preachers were beginning to feel more sharply the hostility of the authorities. He could not have referred to preaching while a member of the university without complaining of the repression to which the pulpit was being subjected. He did privately express his admiration for Thomas Young as a teacher and as a spiritual adviser, and complained to him of what was being done in the church. A kind of pride as well as common prudence made him at other times maintain silence; he was waiting for an opportunity when he could speak to some effect. What he did as a student was to protest against the program and method of study which official authority as well as tradition still maintained at Cambridge.²

Milton's complaint to Thomas Young about "what was being done in the church" we shall have occasion to look at later.³ But the prologues themselves are the best answer as to whether a "kind of pride" and "common prudence" are sufficient explanations of Milton's failure to speak up for his assumed Puritanism.

1. Ibid., p. 290.

2. Ibid., p. 296f.

3. See below, p. 109.

CHAPTER V

THE PROLUSIONS

The prolusions offer a final check on the forces at work, or assumed to be at work, in Milton's childhood and in the Cambridge environment. If their obvious import is recognized, arguments such as Haller's become secondary, if not perverse. Accordingly in this chapter I will treat only their actual content and the uncontrovertible evidence which it offers, and in the next I will resume consideration of the devious defences of the exponents of Milton's early Puritanism.

In view of the purpose for which they were intended, it is unlikely that prolusions should be vehicles for the most revealing expression of the interests and tendencies of their writer. They were formal college exercises, prepared and delivered as orations on assigned topics, each student being required to give a set number during his course, and to attend many more. The topics, as illustrated by Milton's seven college prolusions,¹ are at once revealing of the scho-

1. The early "Prolusion on Early Rising" is not dealt with here, as it is too immature to be of much value, and may have been written at St. Paul's. For the prolusion and commentary, see David Masson, Life of Milton, vol. 1, p. 303f.

lastic emphasis in college studies, and as well futile, if not foolish. Milton did not, apparently, consider his pro-lusions important examples of his prose writing; they were printed, in 1674, only when the printer who was preparing an edition of Milton's letters was denied the use of the public letters. In his "Printer's Preface" he tells us that he asked for something to serve "as a makeweight", and that Milton, "having turned over his papers, at last fell upon the accompanying juvenile compositions, scattered about, some here and others there".¹ Milton had, then, valued them sufficiently to save them through the years; but apparently felt no urge to publish them for their own sake. It might easily turn out that such papers should illustrate no more than specific aspects of the curriculum and Milton's ability to meet its demands. This they do illustrate; and when Milton is attending to business, there is little in the pro-lusions of more general value to the Milton student. It is only when, in defiance of limitations, special concerns force themselves to expression that the pro-lusions become of significance; and these special concerns, (in the case of Milton's pro-lusions, one persistent concern), are likely to be, therefore, especially revealing of the most vital interests of their author.

1. The Student's Milton, p. 1076.

Those of Milton's prolusions which best illustrate the limitations imposed by the materials and circumstances of their writing are the fourth and fifth. They will serve also as illustrations of the basic pattern which all the prolusions follow, though not all so closely; for since they deal with the most technical subjects of any of the prolusions, they lend themselves most readily to the formal outline, based upon classical rhetorical principles, by which the seventeenth century student organized his material. This outline was determined by the fact that the prolusion was commonly part of a debate-like exercise in which two or more students and a moderator took part. Milton's fourth and fifth prolusions clearly reveal debating techniques. They begin with an introduction the purpose of which is, Milton tells us in the introduction to the first prolusion, to secure "the goodwill of the listeners"; it is the freest section of the exercise, and most easily provides an opportunity for self-expression. It is followed by a very brief statement of the subject. Then a series of arguments is presented in support of the speaker's side of the debate; this is followed by rebuttals of possible arguments of the opponents; and finally the prolusion is concluded, perfunctorily in these cases, though not always.

The limited opportunities for self-expression in the prolusions are further reduced when the student is dealing with dry technical aspects of a scholastic philosophy as

Milton is here. When he is developing the assigned subjects, that "In the destruction of any substance a resolution to primary matter does not occur" in the fourth, and that "Partial forms do not occur in an animal in addition to the whole" in the fifth, Milton includes nothing beyond a treatment of Aristotelian metaphysics along mediaeval scholastic lines; and there is nothing in his treatment of interest to anyone but a student of the development of scholastic methods.

If Milton had been an average student, there might have been nothing more in the prolusions; but in none of them (except the "Prolusion on early rising") does he fail to achieve some degree of self-expression in defiance of the limitations of his material. And no matter what the subject of the prolusion may be, this self-expression is centred in one theme, his opposition to the established curriculum. This opposition appears first as hints and comments, but it takes up an increasing proportion of the later prolusions, and is the theme of one of them. Milton's revolt against the curriculum is the significant content of the prolusions; it is the first sign of that intransigence in the face of unfavorable circumstances which eventually drove him to his final radicalism. In the material with which Milton has to work in the fourth and fifth prolusions, the note of rebellion is of necessity reduced to no more than a commentary; but Milton does not fail to make his stand clear. He treats his themes with reasonable care; but reveals unmistakably his

feelings at having to work with such themes.

The introductions allowed, it has been pointed out, some freedom in choice of material, and Milton took advantage of this freedom to offer first, perhaps, an implied, and then an open criticism of the educational system which perpetrated these exercises. While they use different materials, the two introductions have the same theme; both deal with truth, and draw emphatic pictures of its defeat at the hands of error. This is appropriate to the debate, as the opponent can be identified with the cause of error, as he is in the fifth proclusion. There Milton outlines at some length and vividly the rise of the Roman Empire and its struggles against its enemies, which, by a forced analogy, is made to represent the rise of truth and its struggle against error. Then, by a skillful turn of the argument, he identifies his opponents as the supporters of error, "champions of no mean ability,... men who might win fair fame, if they would but abandon their present allegiance and serve under the banner of Truth," and, he continues, "it is now my task to lay Error bare and to strip it of its borrowed plumes."¹

This introduction might pass as a clever and graceful oratorical gesture, well suited to its purpose and without any further significance, though Milton perhaps goes beyond the demands of rhetoric, and gives unnecessary emphasis to

1. Phyllis B. Tillyard, Milton, Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, p. 82. All quotations from the pro-
lusions are taken from this translation, which is a more
attractive and clearer statement of Milton's meaning than
Bromley Smith's more literal translation in The Student's
Milton.

his picture of the success of error. Truth is being overwhelmed, he says, and "we are powerless to check the inroads which the vile hoard of errors daily makes upon every branch of learning".¹ However, he is careful to fit the introduction to its rhetorical purpose in the framework of the debate, and it offers at the most a veiled hint of the theme which is to appear so much more unmistakably in the other prolusions.

In the introduction to the fourth prolusion the veil begins to lift. Here he does not trouble to preserve a logical transition from his introduction to the body of the argument. At the end of the introduction he simply confesses, in an overworked pun, that he has been wandering. The "wandering" is a mythological development of the same theme as that of the introduction to the fourth prolusion, the triumph of error over truth. His use of history and mythology certainly indicates that they were fields of special interest for him; and perhaps his use of them is, as well, an implied criticism of the curriculum which did so little to encourage their study. In any case, criticism of the curriculum comes into the open when Milton draws the moral of his mythological "wanderings":

The thing has come to such a pass that the richest dainties of philosophy, sumptuous as the feasts which the gods enjoy, now only disgust those who partake of them. For it often happens that a student who turns the pages of the philosophers' books and is busied about them day and night departs more puzzled than he came. For whatever one writer has

1. Ibid., p. 81.

affirmed and believes that he has established by a sufficient argument, another confutes, or at least seems to confute, with the greatest ease, and both are able almost indefinitely the one to find objections, the other replies. The wretched reader meanwhile, continually rent and torn in pieces as if between two wild beasts, and half dead with boredom, is at last left as at a cross-roads, without any idea which way to turn. But, to be quite candid, it may not be worth while to spend the trouble which is demanded in finding out on which side the truth really lies; for in fact it is very often about questions of the most trifling importance that the most heated disputes of the forces of philosophy occur.¹

If there is any doubt that Milton is here speaking in deadly seriousness about specific conditions at Cambridge, the passage needs only to be compared with the third proclusion; its consistency in tone and content with that open attack on the curriculum makes it impossible to question that Milton is here taking advantage of the opportunity provided by his introduction to a completely unrelated subject to express an opinion which was much more vital to him.

The two introductions contain almost all that is of value to the study of Milton in the fourth and fifth proclusions. The argument proper in each case seems a reasonably careful execution of a task which, as he insists twice in the course of the fourth proclusion, he finds utterly boring. He makes some attempt to enliven the debate by dramatizing the entry of the conflicting arguments, but closes perfunctorily in each case.

1. Ibid., p. 74.

Thus these two prolusions are models of the "barren and useless controversies" which Milton attacks at length in the third prolusion. Their only content is dry scholastic dialectics and incidental but pointed comments on them. Their only value to the study of Milton is this revelation of Milton's attitude to his studies; and in the circumscribed framework of these prolusions he can only suggest negative criticisms - that the debates are futile, frustrating to the students and contributing nothing to the advance of philosophy.

The fourth and fifth prolusions are the only instances of the more arid type of scholastic debate. The first and second illustrate a different, but apparently also standard, type of prolusion. They are debates, not perfectly regular in form, on more general themes, demanding less specifically technical background and less formal treatment. The themes are possibly even more foolish than those of the fourth and fifth prolusions. The first, "Whether day is more excellent than night", Milton refers to ironically as "no common question", and he complains that it deserves poetic rather than dialectical treatment. The second is on "The Music of the Spheres", and Milton asks not to be taken seriously in his discussion of it.

Nevertheless it is significant that he nowhere implies such distaste for these themes as for those of the fourth

and fifth prolusions, nor does he complain of boredom. The reason is that the themes, though providing no opportunity for display of dialectical brilliance, give ample scope for rhetorical and poetic display in which Milton obviously takes a genuine delight.

He does not attempt a rigid adherence to the debate form; in the first he omits the rebuttal which would hardly be possible on such an irrational subject, and the second is not required to follow the usual pattern at all as it is not a presentation of one side of the argument, but an introduction to the debate proper. The first prolusion boils down to a panegyric on day. He suggests an outline to begin with; he will deal first with the births of day and night, then consider which was more honored by the ancients, and finally determine which serves human needs better. But he does not follow the outline with any consistency. The second prolusion preserves a more disputative tone; in spite of the fact that as the introducer of the debate he would not seem to have to take sides, he speaks out strongly, though not perfectly seriously, in support of the belief in the music of the spheres. However the prolusion remains essentially highly adorned artificial rhetoric, with some notable though exaggerated nature description.

Thus in themselves the arguments have even less value than those of the fourth and fifth prolusions. But their more congenial material gives fuller scope to self-expression,

and results in a more varied revelation of Milton's nature and interests. They reveal, first of all, further hints of the revolt against the curriculum. In the second, Milton refers somewhat ambiguously to "the usual trite and hackneyed topics", without making it clear whether he considers the music of the spheres one of them. In the introduction to the first prolusion, there appears the first open reference to a controversy in the student body over the curriculum. While the passage is too brief to reveal much about the nature of the controversy, it indicates clearly Milton's own estimate of the effect of the controversy on his relations with the students. In his own view at least, he represents a progressive minority which is bitterly opposed by the majority of the students, and presumably by the tutors as well. He displays a characteristic uncompromisingness, though he does soften the tone of his remarks at the close of the introduction.

References to Milton's attack on the curriculum remain in the first and second prolusions, as they were in the fourth and fifth, no more than passing allusions; but the first and second prolusions are much more revealing of the positive tendencies of Milton's mind at the time. There are more opportunities for literary comments which reveal aspects of Milton's classicism. Thus in the defence of Pythagoras in the second prolusion, he belittles Aristotle at the expense of Plato and Homer, which is in harmony with his views on

the curriculum in which Aristotle's influence was so large. Again, in the first prolusion, after quoting Hesiod as authority for a genealogy of day, Milton digresses to consider seriously the question of the dependability of the ancient poets in such matters. He admits that it is dangerous to place too much trust in them; "the more cultured Muses and Philosophy herself, the neighbour of the gods, forbid us to place entire confidence in the poets who have given the gods their forms, especially the Greek poets".¹ He broadens his argument into a general defence of the ancient poets. Their error lay, he claims, in "the perverse and blind ignorance of the age"; and he proceeds to list the achievements which they made in spite of that ignorance. Their achievements are remarkably comprehensive:

They have attained an ample meed of honour and of glory by gathering together in one place and forming into organized communities men who previously roamed like beasts at random through the forests and mountains, and by being the first to teach, by their divine inspiration, all the sciences which are known to-day, arraying them in the charming cloak of fable; and their best title to everlasting fame (and that no mean one) is that they have left to their successors the full development of that knowledge of the Arts which they so happily began.²

That this discussion is more than merely incidental to his argument is suggested by a repetition of his naive account of the formation of states in the seventh prolusion, where he

1. Ibid., p. 56.

2. Ibid., p. 57.

parallels this account, though in much greater detail.¹ It is apparent that the question of the dependability of the classical writers, which he was to be driven to judge so very differently in Paradise Regained, was already an issue with him. The opinion expressed in this passage is so much in harmony with the pervasive classical attitude in the prolusions that it seems safe to judge that he is expressing in it the settled conviction of his youth, that it reveals the Renaissance-intoxicated poet defending his faith in classical writers.

He is not satisfied to drop the matter with the above-quoted statement of the achievements of the ancient poets. He has admitted that, because of their environment, the ancients cannot be taken at their face value; and he now proceeds to explain by what means we are to test their validity and uncover the hidden truths beneath the "charming cloak of fable". Their writings are to be submitted to the "test of reason"; and he illustrates how that reason will extract the essence of truth from mythology. He explains that Earth is called the mother of Night because she produces night by cutting off the sun; and similarly Phanes' pursuit of Night symbolizes the alternation of day and night, since Phanes represents the sun. The same exercise of reason (assisted by science) is illustrated more significantly because less self-

1. See below, p. 101f.

consciously in the second prologue, in Milton's defence of Pythagoras. It is ridiculous to suppose, Milton argues, that anyone so wise as Pythagoras could make such an unreasonable assumption as that of the existence of the music of the spheres; it was Aristotle who "foisted on Pythagoras the literal doctrine". What Pythagoras really wanted to suggest by the music of the spheres was "the laws of destiny" in accordance with which the spheres move. The argument does not speak well for Milton's objectivity, but it certainly reveals a strong faith in the ancients (or at least in those of them with whom he was in sympathy).

Another, deeper level of self-revelation appears incidentally in the climax of the argument of the second prologue. Milton there explains that we cannot hear the music of the spheres because of the sin in us as a result of the work of "that thief Prometheus" (surely a bizarre disguise for the Fall); but, he continues, we may hope to hear it again if our souls become "pure, chaste and white as snow" (as was Pythagoras' soul). Thus by a peculiar blend of ideas, the classical Golden Age is to be achieved by a Christian moral revolution. Whether the new Golden Age has in it anything of the Puritan holy community is not clear from the description he gives of it; it will be an age "free from every grief" when we would "pass our lives in a blessed peace which even the gods might envy". But the state of soul which will ensure it is unquestionably a product of the same moral idealism

which appears in its richest form in Comus.

Thus in the first and second prolusions, in addition to further clues to the development of the attack on the curriculum, there are indications of a concern for (and a positive decision on) the reliability of classical authors, an appeal to reason as a criterion for the establishing of the truth in classical writings, and a hint of the rigid moral nature which was to play so vital a part in Milton's development. All of these appear incidentally in a context made up of a wealth of classical allusions, some vivid nature description which leans heavily on the pathetic fallacy, and arguments on the assigned themes, which take up much less space than in the fourth and fifth prolusions.

The four prolusions so far dealt with are all typical college exercises in form at least. They all suffer, though more particularly the fourth and fifth, from restrictions imposed by their subject matter; and to the extent in which they are characteristic exercises they are unrevealing of Milton's nature. But it is an indication which will be significant in Milton's later development that already in these early college writings the individual is clearly apparent, and indeed is consciously insistent on drawing the line between what he is and is not in sympathy with in the material he is handling. In none of these prolusions does Milton lose himself completely in his material. Often he cannot forego comment on it; and we can know with considerable precision

to what extent we can hold him responsible for anything that he says.

The three remaining prolusions are all distinctive in one respect or another. The sixth and seventh were both written for special occasions; as they were probably the last written, they can most profitably be considered last. The third was probably delivered during the same general period as the four already discussed, and it conveniently sums up the one theme which, though never treated openly and in detail in them, is common to all four. This prolusion, pointedly titled "An attack on the scholastic philosophy", is nothing but a comprehensive statement of Milton's position in the controversy over the curriculum; it gathers together all the hints and asides in the other four early prolusions and builds them up skillfully into an exhaustive treatment of the problem. It is thus unique among the prolusions in its subject matter, and it is not easy to explain how it came to be assigned or accepted as the theme for a public oration. Tillyard gives an instance of the opposition to a similar expression of opinion which suggests that little toleration was allowed to such freedom of speech. Ganning, a fellow of Corpus College, was, he tells us,

objected to as a disputant at the Commencement of 1631 on the ground that he railed against school

divinity, whereas King James and King Charles commanded young students in divinity to begin with Lombard and Aquinas.¹

Milton himself reveals, in the introduction to the first proclusion that in the controversy he was one, presumably the leader, of a small and strongly opposed minority. However, the fact that Milton was an accepted and even admired student later should limit our estimation of the revolutionary nature of Milton's statements. He probably overestimated it himself at first, for in the sixth proclusion, some time not very long after the heat of the controversy had died down (even though the issue was not dead), he expressed surprise that he had not been judged as unfavorably as he had expected.

There is no question, however, that Milton was opposed by the general opinion and feeling of the University; and there is no question that the third proclusion is a direct expression of the views which set him in such opposition. The proclusion is unique in every respect. For the first and only time Milton identifies himself without qualification with his material. This appears clearly in the earnest tone of the proclusion; but is more subtly and forcibly apparent in the much reduced adornment and conscious rhetoric, in the complete absence of asides or incidental comments, and in the reduction of the introduction to a polite, formal opening.

1. P. B. Tillyard, Milton, Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, p. xxxii, quoting an unspecified source.

There is nothing in the form of the prolusion to indicate that it was intended as part of a debate; no reference is made to any opponents as was usually done in the conclusions, and no rebuttal of possible contrary arguments is attempted. There is nothing in the prolusion except Milton's carefully developed and often violent attack on the scholastic curriculum.

After a brief, conventional opening Milton states his theme without delay:

I shall attain the height of my ambition for the present if I can induce you who hear me to turn less assiduously the pages of those vast and ponderous tomes of our professors of so-called exactitudes, and to be less zealous in your study of the crabbed arguments of wiseacres.¹

He will show, he says, "that these studies promote neither delight nor instruction, nor indeed do they serve any useful purpose whatsoever". This is his outline, and he abides by it carefully.

He opens his argument with a skillful attribution of these studies to "the monkish cells"; from such a source no delight is to be expected. When he comes to consider the instruction to be derived from the studies, he reiterates this ascription of the scholastic writings to Roman Catholic scholars; he refers to the "hordes of old men in monkish garb, the chief authors of these quibbles", and repeats his

1. Ibid., p. 68.

charge of the fourth prolusion that philosophy is only confused by their studies. In a sharp-sighted judgment on the results of scholastic training, he points out that it results in naivety in its students when they are "faced with a new situation outside their usual idiotic occupation". He sums up his attack in the statement:

...the supreme result of all this earnest labour is to make you a more finished fool and clever contriver of conceits, and to endow you with a more expert ignorance; and no wonder since all these problems at which you have been working in such torment and anxiety have no existence in reality at all, but like unreal ghosts and phantoms without substance obsess minds already disordered and empty of all true wisdom.¹

In a closing illustration he reveals the spirit of Renaissance nationalism; for the crowning instance of the futility of scholastic studies is, he says, that they tend neither to "eloquent speech" nor to "noble action", the "two things which most enrich and adorn our country". He concludes that they should be done away with.

Such a bare outline of the prolusion presents only the negative side of the argument. In several passages in the elaboration of his points, Milton reveals more personal and positive aspects of his stand. Thus at the beginning of the argument proper he makes it clear that he is speaking from personal experience, giving a brief but vivid view of his work in the college:

1. Ibid., p. 71.

Many a time, when the duty of tracing out these petty subtleties for a while has been laid upon me, when my mind has been dulled and my sight blurred by continued reading - many a time, I say, I have paused to take breath, and have sought some slight relief from my boredom in looking to see how much yet remained of my task. ...as always happened, I found that more remained to be done than I had as yet got through...¹

There is an intriguing personal note, too, in his description of those who can find interest in such things as "boorish and quite hairy of chest". This appears at the climax of the argument where it would be most likely to receive the unfavorable notice of his auditors; and it is so much in harmony with the reasons that he suggests in the sixth pro-
lusion for the 'Lady' epithet that it is tempting to consider it a possible cause of (or perhaps a retort to) that epithet.

More profoundly revealing of personal predispositions is his statement that "morality or purity of life" is "the most important consideration" in evaluating the scholastic studies.² This may be interpreted as an indication of Puritan influence, or more simply as another instance of the workings of that "certain reservedness of natural disposition" which he makes the chief guarantee of his chastity in An Apology for Smectymnuus.

But these points are only incidental to the main argument. The prevailing positive note appears in two passages

1. Ibid., p. 69.

2. Ibid., p. 71.

in which he is suggesting what he would have substituted for the scholastic studies. In the first of these, he contrasts the dullness of scholastic studies with the delight to be found in poetry, rhetoric and history, which, in their aesthetic effects, he almost seems to set side by side:

Now surely divine poetry, by that power with which it is by heavenly grace indued, raises aloft the soul smothered by the dust of earth and sets it among the mansions of heaven, and breathing over it the scent of nectar and bedewing it with ambrosia instils into it heavenly felicity and whispers to it everlasting joy. Rhetoric, again, so captivates the minds of men and draws them after it so gently enchained that it has the power now of moving them to hatred, now of arousing them to warlike valour, now of inspiring them beyond the fear of death. History, skilfully narrated, now calms and soothes the restless and troubled mind, now fills it with delight, and now brings tears to the eyes; soft and gentle tears, tears which bring with them a kind of mournful joy.¹

This is the youthful Renaissance poet speaking in unmistakable accent; the suggestion that the Bible is the one true source of the delight which the scholastics cannot offer is wholly out of harmony with such a passage.

A more comprehensive and even less mistakable statement of the nature of the studies which Milton intends to be substituted for the futile scholastic curriculum occurs in the pro-
lusion's glowing peroration. Our country will not be served, he says, by these "ingenious praters, with all their forms and phrases", so let us banish their unavailing studies.

1. Ibid., p. 70.

...how much better were it gentlemen, and how much more consonant with your dignity, now to let your eyes wander as it were over all the lands depicted on the map, and to behold the places trodden by the heroes of old, to range over the regions made famous by wars, by triumphs, and even by the tales of poets of renown, now to traverse the stormy Adriatic, now to climb unharmed the slopes of fiery Etna, then to spy out the customs of mankind and those states which are well-ordered; next to seek out and explore the nature of all living creatures, and after that to turn your attention to the secret virtues of stones and herbs. And do not shrink from taking your flight into the skies and gazing upon the manifold shapes of the clouds, the mighty piles of snow, and the source of the dews of morning, then inspect the coffers wherein the hail is stored and examine the arsenals of the thunderbolts. And do not let the intent of Jupiter or of Nature elude you, when a huge and fearful comet threatens to set the heavens aflame, nor let the smallest star escape you of all the myriads which are scattered and strewn between the poles; yes, even follow close upon the sun in all his journeys, and ask account of time itself and demand the reckoning of its eternal passage.

But let not your mind rest content to be bounded and cabined by the limits which encompass the earth, but let it wander beyond the confines of the world, and at the last attain the summit of all human wisdom and learn to know itself, and therewith those holy minds and intelligences whose company it must hereafter join.¹

Thus geography, history, poetry, nature study, and a philosophy which encompasses the truth of religion, all pursued without presupposition, form the curriculum which the young Milton sets up as his ideal in opposition to decadent scholasticism. All knowledge is his sphere, and he recognizes no authority which may claim to circumscribe what should be studied.

1. Ibid., p. 72.

It must be kept in mind that the five prolusions so far dealt with have not been (or at least may not have been) treated in chronological order. It is unfortunate that accurate dating is not possible, for together the five prolusions obviously provide fairly full data on a highly dramatic controversy which was waged at Cambridge during the early years of Milton's stay there. It might seem reasonable to assume that such a controversy would first appear in the prolusions in veiled hints, gradually develop into a full statement, and perhaps gradually subside (as we shall see it does in the sixth and seventh prolusions). But aside from such assumptions there is little support for any arrangement of the five earlier prolusions.

Tillyard claims that similarity in material and style between the second prolusion and the Nativity Ode dates the former in 1629.¹ The evidence seems dubious. The similarity is obvious but superficial; the second prolusion is far less subtle and complex than the Ode, and such similarity as exists could easily have persisted in Milton's mind throughout the three or four years during which he might have been required to write the prolusion. Moreover, the tone of the prolusion is immature, especially in the unassuming modesty of the introduction; and the prolusion would seem to fall into the early

1. E. M. W. Tillyard, in the introduction to P. B. Tillyard, Milton, Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, p. xxv.

stages of the development of the controversy, for it has the vaguest references to that issue of any of the prolusions.

Tillyard argues that the first prolusion must precede the sixth, since the rivalry is still strong in the first and is clearly declining in the sixth.¹ This is reasonable, and would apply equally well to the third, if we assume that it incited the controversy. Tillyard attempts nothing more in the way of dating the early prolusions.

Woodhouse suggests that there is no difficulty in assuming that the prolusions are arranged in chronological order.² It is true that a plausible case might be worked out for almost any arrangement of the five early prolusions; but if the printed order is the chronological order, it is necessary to assume that Milton had already delivered some unprinted prolusions, for it is clear from the introduction to the first prolusion that the controversy had already begun. In any case there is no strong argument in favor of assuming that the printed and chronological orders are the same. Milton did not arrange his poems chronologically, but was careful to start the 1645 collection with the poem most likely to win immediate approval, the Nativity Ode, (and he concluded with the most ambitious poem, Comus). Similarly the first prolusion is by far the most attractive

1. Ibid., p. xxv.

2. A. S. P. Woodhouse, Notes on Milton's Early Development, University of Toronto Quarterly, vol. xiii, 1943-4.

and impressive of the first five, and would be the obvious choice to begin the collection, while the seventh is most suitable for closing, quite aside from the fact that it was probably written last.

There is, as well, more specific evidence that the first prolusion was probably not the first written. In the introduction to the sixth prolusion, Milton speaks of an oration delivered a few months before which he felt sure would "have but a cold reception" from his audience, but to his surprise was very well received.¹ This previous oration would most reasonably be the first, for Milton began it, as he states in its introduction, anticipating the disapproval of the students. The first prolusion was delivered, too, in the college, which is consistent with his reference in the same passage in the sixth prolusion to the previous prolusion being an "oration before you" (the sixth prolusion also being delivered before the students of his own college). Since the sixth prolusion can be dated in Milton's fourth year at Cambridge, the first would thus probably be the last of the first five prolusions to be written.

The most reasonable arrangement, then, would seem to be first, the second prolusion, with its immature tone and very slight relevance to the curriculum controversy, then the fourth and fifth, revealing growing opposition to the studies

1. See below, p. 93.

and growing freedom in expressing that opposition, then the third, precipitating the controversy, followed by the first, which seems to have appeared at the height of Milton's ill feelings over the issue. The sixth, in 1628, expresses, as we have seen, his surprise that the students' feelings were not as strong as his own, and marks the decline of the controversy; while the seventh, though not dated, is by general agreement the latest.¹

Any such arrangement can only be suggestive. The one established date is for the sixth, which can be placed in 1628 by the poem, At a Vacation Exercise, which first appeared in it and was dated by Milton in the 1645 edition of the poems; and the only safe assumption is that the seventh prolusion is the latest. The rest probably were written before 1628, fitting into the controversy whatever its course may have been.

The last two prolusions represent, in any case, the last stages in Milton's relations with Cambridge. The sixth was delivered in the year before Milton completed his B. A., and marks the beginning of an improved relationship with the students, the credit for which must be granted to the appeal and integrity of his character, for he certainly never com-

1. See E. M. W. Tillyard, op. cit., p. xxv, and David Masson, The Life of John Milton, p. 297 of vol. 1.

promised. The reference to the cessation of hostilities mentioned above appears as a pleased and perhaps rather naive expression of surprise that his previous oration had been much better received than he had expected. After explaining why he finds it burdensome to have to take time from more important matters to prepare and deliver the exercise, a characteristic note in his later prolusions, Milton concedes:

I was...strongly induced and persuaded to undertake this office by the new-found friendliness towards me of you who are fellow-students of my own college. For when, some months ago, I was to make an academic oration before you, I felt sure that any effort of mine would have but a cold reception from you, and would find in Aeacus or Minos a more lenient judge than in any one of you. But quite contrary to my expectation, contrary indeed to any spark of hope I may have entertained, I heard, or rather I myself felt, that my speech was received with quite unusual applause on every hand, even on the part of those who had previously shown me only hostility and dislike, because of disagreements concerning our studies. A generous way indeed of displaying rivalry, and one worthy of a royal nature!¹

That Milton's feelings of a "new-found friendliness" were genuine is apparent both in the indication of his popularity in the fact that he was chosen "Father" for the "sportive exercises" of the vacation, and in the tone of the prolusion. For the first time, his rhetorical flattery of his listeners in the introduction sounds warm and expressive of an essential accord, for all its extravagance.

1. P. B. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 86.

In purpose and substance this prolusion is quite different from any other. It is the opening speech in a holiday celebration which Milton delivered as "Father" or master of ceremonies for the occasion. The celebration would seem to be rather in the nature of a modern stag than of a literary festivity, after the formal opening had been got through at least. It seems, in fact, dangerously like an opportunity for those "dishonest gestures of Trinculoes, buffoons, and bawds, prostituting the shame of (the) ministry" which Milton held up to scorn in An Apology for Smectymnuus.¹

What was required of the "Father" was an introduction devoted, in this case at least, to defending such festive celebrations, followed by a witty and perhaps preferably crude 'jeu d'esprit' to get the celebration started in the right spirit. Anything serious would have been out of place, and Milton, in his determination to do the right thing by the occasion, avoided any significant issues, so that the exercise (apart from its concluding verses) is not revealing in any important respects. At the most it reveals his lack of easy wit.

The introduction, which is a full length exercise in itself, has most to offer. After a long and extravagantly flattering appeal to his audience, embodying the already quoted reference to the subsiding academic rivalry, he pro-

1. The Student's Milton, p. 548.

ceeds to his defence of jest and mirth. He belittles those who are opposed to folly because they are incapable of it, instances its powers to "strengthen the sinews of the mind", calls upon Homer, Socrates, Cicero, and Erasmus, along with numerous ancient generals and writers as supporters of its cause, and finally meets the charge of stern masters that such exercises indicate a relaxation of the standards of learning. They do, he admits, but since learning is now well established, such a relaxation is permissible. To the charge that education is becoming capable of producing nothing but "fellows fit only to be buffoons and play-actors", a charge which he was to take more seriously later (and perhaps took more seriously at the time than he was prepared to admit openly), he answers, in his peroration, that jest is necessary, although one cannot jest well who has not "first learnt how to behave seriously". Then with an extenuation of any departure which the celebration may occasion from his "usual habit and strict rule of modesty", he launches into the pro-
lusion proper.

The pro-
lusion is intended to be a sheerly frivolous witty exercise. It displays some mild and fairly elaborately veiled crudity, but depends for its effect mainly on labored and not very witty allusions to persons and groups present. The only characteristic touches are his digression in his own defence against the 'Lady' epithet, and his resort, at the end, to verse. His account of the probable reasons for the

epithet seems specific enough:

It is, I suppose, because I have never brought myself to toss off great bumpers like a prize-fighter, or because my hand has never grown horny with driving the plough, or because I was never a farm hand at seven or laid myself down full length in the midday sun; or last perhaps because I never showed my virility in the way these brothellers do.¹

The closing verse, which he published separately in the 1645 edition of poems as At a Vacation Exercise in the Colledge, tells more about Milton's development than all the rest of the proclusion. Along with its suggestion of Milton's growing interest in English verse instead of Latin, it provides a fairly clear indication of the nature of Milton's poetic ambitions in 1628. After explaining with a self-consciousness inappropriate to the occasion, that his literary ambitions are very high and serious, and are only waiting on his mastery of the poetic art, he gives a list of possible themes which compares interestingly with the lists in The Reason of Church Government and the Cambridge Manuscript. He is considering here heavenly themes involving a heaven occupied by Apollo, Hebe, and "her Kingly Sire"; then what seem to be descriptive poems dealing with a nature reminiscent of that described as a desirable substitute for scholastic studies in the third proclusion; and finally, "Kings and Queens and Hero's old". There is surely a startling emphasis on pagan classical themes in this choice of a pagan heaven,

1. P. B. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 99.

pagan nature and pagan mythology for a poet already supposed to be under Puritan influences.

The poem concludes with a heavy burlesque of Aristotelian philosophy, and an enigmatic passage dealing with rivers, which were intended to accompany a ceremony that started off the festivities proper.

Thus the most valuable revelations of Milton's development in the sixth prolusion are the reference to the cooling off of the academic rivalry, the defence against the 'Lady' epithet, and the account of his poetic ambitions in the verse. These are buried in the usual wealth of mythological adornment (along with which there appears, in his mention of the abortive expedition made by Buckingham to the island of Ré, one of the rare references in the prolusions to contemporary events). The prolusion could not have been a triumph of wit, but it would certainly not detract from Milton's reputation for learning, and in view of his admission of his own inadequacy and his obvious goodwill, it surely contributed to his popularity.

With the sixth prolusion marking the close of heated controversy, the last three years of Milton's stay at Cambridge must have been quiet, for the seventh prolusion reveals an essentially unchanged situation. It suggests that Milton finally won a fuller freedom for the undisturbed study

which he had sought, for though he complains of being torn from studies by "the distressing task of speaking unseasonably imposed" upon him, he does not suggest that such interruptions were numerous. The complaint is seasoned with graceful expressions of appreciation of the honor being done him, which, if not as extravagant as those in the sixth prologue, are even more suggestive of a genuine sense of the well-meaning of his audience.

In theme and outline the exercise is a routine example of the non-technical prologues like the first and second. It falls into the conventional introduction, defence and rebuttal on its subject, that "Learning brings more blessing to men than ignorance". Although this theme is essentially as foolish as those of the first two prologues, it offers more obvious opportunities, and Milton does not complain about it as a theme, though he makes some cryptic remarks about having decided, in desperation at the interruption of his studies, to defend ignorance, whose pursuit is not subject to such obstacles. But he confesses that Fortune set him right, directing him to the defence of learning, and he concludes on a note of positive enthusiasm:

This can now hardly be called an interruption, for who would regard it as an interruption when he is called upon to praise or defend the object of his affection, his admiration, and his greatest desire?¹

1. Ibid., p. 106.

After this introduction Milton is unfailingly positive in his attitude to his subject. There are no asides or comments to throw any doubt on his interest in it, and while the lengthy and carefully worked out argument remains necessarily, because of the frivolity of the theme, unimportant in itself, nevertheless almost every point is a significant statement of Milton's sincere opinions on the most profound philosophical, religious, political and personal issues which are discussed in any of his writings to this time. And every argument is added evidence that Milton was before all else a thorough humanist.

After disposing of the necessary introductory gestures, he starts off his argument on an elevated level by claiming that knowledge is necessary for an understanding of the eternal in us. The argument is founded on an account of creation which is surely drawn from the Timaeus; "the great framer of the Universe", who is the final object of knowledge, is in both title and function a deity who combines Christian and humanist ideals in a spontaneous (and perhaps naive) fusion.

To forestall an attack on knowledge as secondary and perhaps even subversive of virtue, Milton next discusses the relation between knowledge and virtue. He acknowledges the primary necessity of virtue, but defends knowledge by arguing that while wisdom can be corrupted and virtue can of itself save, yet virtue is illuminated by knowledge, and when they are in their proper, mutually sustaining relation, wisdom is

supreme. Thus Socrates is given a certain formal priority over Christ.

As an illustration of the truth of this argument, Milton gives the most striking account of his interpretation of the middle ages:

Throughout this continent a few hundred years ago all the noble Arts had perished and the Muses had deserted all the Universities of the day, over which they had long presided; blind illiteracy had penetrated and entrenched itself everywhere, nothing was heard in the schools but the absurd doctrines of drivelling monks and that profane and hideous monster, Ignorance, assumed the gown and lorded it on our empty platforms and pulpits and in our deserted professorial chairs. Then Piety went in mourning, and Religion sickened and flagged so that only after prolonged suffering, and hardly even to this very day, has she recovered from her grievous wound.¹

If this is incredibly exaggerated, it is yet sufficiently in harmony with Milton's more briefly expressed account in Of Reformation in England² that it is safe to assume that it represents at the most a youthful overstatement of a view which he held consistently.

Turning from these more abstract arguments to a consideration of the part knowledge plays in "ordinary life", Milton displays one of his touches of deepening insight into human nature; knowledge, he admits, may incapacitate man for human contacts and affairs. Nevertheless he insists it is essential to the highest manifestations of human nature; and

1. Ibid., p. 109.

2. See above, p. 10.

in a long and glowing passage he outlines revealingly what can be achieved through knowledge. First in the natural world, knowledge extended by Baconian methods will bring it about that no natural event need be unexpected or devastating; nature will become subject to man. Similarly in the study of history, knowledge will give an understanding of "the changes in the conditions of kingdoms, races, cities, and peoples"; and to its student, knowledge will make it possible that he may become "the oracle of many nations", sought out and respected by the great men of the world. Thus the basis of Milton's political ambitions is suggested.

In an illuminating consideration of the function of knowledge in practical politics, he admits that learning is no guarantee of advancement in political spheres. The admission seems to trouble him, however; he hedges with the qualification that the two greatest rulers, Alexander and Augustus, were students of philosophy, and he stretches out his discussion with fine-drawn proofs that in spite of appearances, all states have prospered in proportion to their learning. He considers Sparta and Rome, and then, in another of the rare references to contemporary matters, Turkey (which, he argues, hardly deserves the name of state, and which, anyway, acquired some culture from the Saracens). He finds more congenial evidence for the necessity of knowledge to the state in his rather shaky anthropology; a rudimentary picture

of evolution (briefly foreshadowed in the second prolusion),¹ proves to his satisfaction that even if the effect of learning is not apparent in the modern states, it was nevertheless the "Arts and Sciences", inspiring men with "knowledge of themselves", which "drew them to dwell together within the walls of cities."²

The prolusion's rebuttal, an attack on ignorance, is necessarily directed against ineffectual issues, but once again every argument is turned into a defence of an unmistakably humanist position. He first deals with the charge that life is short, art long, the fruits of knowledge too hard won, or not to be won at all, so that devotion to learning is inevitably unavailing. He retorts with an emphatic defence of the untried powers of reason, which defence develops into an unqualified expression of a humanist faith. The past failure of reason is due to first "our bad methods of teaching the Arts, and secondly our lack of enthusiasm". He deals with the latter first, belittling human weakness which permits learning to be pursued with less energy and determination than the making of a living, or a life of dissipation. In a passage that obviously outlines the program which he set for himself in his youth, he states his faith in the powers of man's reason:

... if we were to set ourselves to live modestly and temperately, and to tame the first impulses

1. See above, p. 78.

2. P. B. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 114f.

of headstrong youth by reason and steady devotion to study, keeping the divine vigour of our minds unstained and uncontaminated by any impurity or pollution, we should be astonished to find, gentlemen, looking back over a period of years, how great a distance we had covered and across how wide a sea of learning we had sailed, without a check on our voyage.¹

The question of bad methods of teaching, the other cause of the failure of reason to achieve its full potentialities, gives occasion for Milton's last expression in the prologues of his scorn for the scholastic curriculum. He is brief but specific, deriding the "despicable quibbles" in the study of grammar and rhetoric, the foolishness taught in the name of logic, and the fallacies of metaphysics. Scholasticism is termed, with characteristic scorn, a "monkish disease", which "has already infected natural philosophy", as well as mathematics and jurisprudence.

However learning can, apparently, be easily purged of these evils, and Milton concludes this section of his rebuttal with a vaunt of the unlimited scope of the human mind when properly directed, which is amazingly short-sighted even in his day and at his age:

Therefore, gentlemen, if from our childhood onward we never allow a day to pass by without its lesson and diligent study, if we are wise enough to rule out of every art what is irrelevant, superfluous, or unprofitable, we shall assuredly, before we have attained the age of Alexander the Great, have made ourselves masters of something greater and more glorious than that world of his. And so

1. Ibid., p. 116.

far from complaining of the shortness of life and the slowness of Art, I think we shall be more likely to weep and wail, as Alexander did, because there are no more worlds for us to conquer.¹

Surely the humanist's faith in his human powers could go no further.

To meet the argument that, since the end of the world is approaching, effort is of no avail, Milton counters that effort is its own reward, even if not rewarded with fame. Then in a lengthy series of illustrations which display more knowledge than reason (and less knowledge than fancy), he shows that ignorance is not even the mark of the beasts. Even the trees and stones showed, in their response to Orpheus, that they were not completely ignorant. Ignorance is more hateful even than "the famous 'non-existent' of the Epicureans".

The proclusion is concluded with a neat, brief plea to his audience; and an apology for the length of the speech which is a refreshing contrast to the perfunctory closings of the earlier proclusions with their expressions of boredom; for here Milton excuses the undue length on the grounds that it "was demanded by the importance of the subject".

Thus the seventh, almost certainly the last, and certainly the best of the proclusions, presents a richly detailed picture of the mature college student. It is consistent

1. Ibid., p. 117.

with the earlier prolusions; Milton is still the academic misfit. But he has been successful in winning the right, demanded by his genius, to a free pursuit of his own interests. He has won the right, as well, to give unrestrained expression to those interests in his public exercises. While he may complain that he is being torn from more important matters, he feels that the opportunity to speak is an important one, and unquestionably he considers what he has to say important. It is not possible to argue that the prolusion does not present a true picture of Milton.

It obviously may not present the whole picture. Its theme would certainly give freest scope to Milton's humanist tendencies, and other aspects of his nature, such as whatever Puritan influences had made themselves felt, might be neglected. Certainly in these years Milton took his religion, whatever its nature, much for granted. Allusions in the seventh prolusion to a vaguely religious attitude are fairly common;¹ specifically Christian references are less so.² The Protestant Reformation is mentioned once, though with considerable emphasis.³ No clearly distinguishable references

1. Ibid., p. 107f, (the Timaeus-like account of creation); p. 109, (the learned man "a gift of God"); p. 117, (the approaching conflagration of the world); and see notes 2 and 3.

2. Ibid., p. 109f, (the relation of virtue to knowledge).

3. Ibid., p. 109, (the account of the middle ages quoted above, p. 100.)

to Puritanism are apparent, outside of the mention of that moral emphasis which was a characteristic trait of Milton as an individual, whether or not it was supported at this time by Puritan views.¹ The problem of discriminating the various shades of Christianity, as they were confused with classicism in Milton's spontaneous Christian humanism, are complicated by his enthusiastic but unconsidered use of classical symbols for Christian events, and by his casual fusion of Christian and classical principles. But whether or not it is because Puritan indications are being omitted, consciously or unconsciously, there are no such indications, either blended with humanism or in pure form, in the seventh prolusion.

Whatever the prolusions leave out, it is impossible to believe that they do not represent a large and vitally significant part of Milton's nature. That part was a seemingly unlimited faith in the powers of a universally acquisitive human mind. Before all else the youthful Milton demands the right to the free exercise of his intellect. He feels sure that all things are possible to the mind which is given scope to search out all truth without restriction. Virtue, too, is necessary, yet there is apparently no reason to doubt its compatibility with wisdom; and when virtue and wisdom are

1. Ibid., p. 116, ("keeping the divine vigour of our minds unstained and uncontaminated by any impurity or pollution").

"wedded in happy union as they surely ought to be", then "Wisdom raises her head aloft and shows herself far superior".¹ This wisdom is an undifferentiated blend of all knowledge, and indeed knowledge, science and art are essentially one; and the subject matter of this all-inclusive learning extends without a break from a knowledge of nature to a philosophical insight into the soul.²

Thus the ardent young student of the early prolusions with his poetic fondness for mythology and his already wide familiarity with the sources of classical humanism has developed in the seventh prolusion into the mature and full-fledged humanist, drawing on all sources of human knowledge and speaking spontaneously in humanist tones "to praise and defend the object of his affection, his admiration and his deepest desire" - not faith, nor salvation (whether freely available or foreordained), but learning, a learning which comes equally from pagan poets, from contemporary writers, from observation of nature, and, it seems safe to assume, from the Bible, though it was not until later that Milton began to terminate his lists of classical authorities with pious references to scriptures.

1. Ibid., p. 110.

2. Ibid., p. 72.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROOTS OF MILTON'S RADICALISM

If the prolusions may, as a result of restrictions imposed at Cambridge, consciously omit any reference to Milton's interests in Puritan preachers¹ (or in any other phase of Puritanism), the same argument does not apply to the writings from the same period which were not directed to the Cambridge audience and suffered from none of the restrictions which Cambridge may have imposed. In these there was ample opportunity for some expression of faith in Puritanism. The early poems directed primarily to the family circle and to friends, the Elegies, the prose letters, the Ad Patrem, all display the same vagueness on religious issues as the prolusions. The Ad Patrem, probably the latest of these works, indicates that Milton's ambitions were still firmly rooted in the faith which inspired the prolusions. In all of these works Milton is, before all else, the Renaissance poet. In some of them he is making his first failing attempts to become a distinctively Christian poet, perhaps quite unconscious of the reasons which make the attempt necessary; but in none of them is he the conscious advocate of the Puritan

1. See the quotation from Haller, above p. 67.

cause or the expounder, conscious or unconscious, of any body of Puritan doctrines or ideals. There is nowhere in Milton's early writings a statement of a Puritan faith, or a comprehensive presentation of Puritan ideals, in any way comparable with the case for humanism in the seventh prolusion.

In these early writings I have been able to find only one clear reference to circumstances related to the rising Puritan cause.¹ In the fourth Elegy, written to Thomas Young in Hamburg in 1627, Milton speaks of Young's exile, necessitated by his inability as a Puritan to make a living in England. There was here an opportunity, without restraint of pride or prudence, and with particular personal incitement, for a statement of feelings on the Puritan cause. What Milton says is:

...you live alone and penniless in a strange land,
you in your poverty seek in an alien country the
sustenance which your own country did not provide.
Fatherland, stern parent, more cruel than the white
cliffs upon which break in foam the waves of your
coast, does it become you thus to expose your inno-
cent children, do you thus with heart of iron force
them to a foreign shore, and permit those to seek
their livelihood in distant regions whom God himself
in his foresight had sent to you, who bring you glad
tidings from Heaven and show the way that after
death leads to the stars? Thou dost indeed deserve
to live imprisoned in Stygian darkness and to perish
by the unending hunger of the soul! Just so did the
prophet of the land of the Tishbites once tread with
unaccustomed step the trackless wilds and the desert
wastes of Arabia, as he fled from the hands of King
Ahab and from thy hands, too, ruthless woman of
Sidon. In such wise, his limbs torn by the strident

1. The passage must be the one which Haller refers to as complaining "of what was being done in the church". See above, p. 67.

scourge, was Cilician Paul driven from the Emathian city, and Jesus Himself was ordered to depart from the borders of fishy Gergessa by its ungrateful citizens.¹

In spite of its rhetorical tone, this passage does express the anguish and anger which can be expected of a Puritan sympathizer. It reveals too a vague but probably genuine faith in the work of the Puritans; they were sent by God to bring "glad tidings from Heaven and show the way that after death leads to the stars". The passage warns against the danger of forgetting that Milton must have been aware of the Puritan cause, and must have had some degree of sympathy with it. But it does not reveal any detailed understanding of the issues involved, either as they actually were or as he was to interpret them in 1640. For instance he does not direct his complaints against the prelacy, but vaguely against the state. Moreover the passage is the only concrete evidence in the early writings that the Puritan influences in Milton's childhood had created in him any concern for the Puritan cause; and in its isolation it suggests that Milton was not obsessed with their fate.

If, then, the biographical material is inconclusive as to religious tendencies, and the early writings display exclusively and overwhelmingly humanist sympathies, the only indication of a conscious identification with the Puritan cause before

1. "Elegy IV", The Student's Milton, p. 89.

1635 is the explanation, which Milton offers in The Reason of Church Government, of his reasons for not proceeding to his destined career in the ministry. His statement is that he was driven to abandon his purpose by conditions which he became aware of in the Church:

...to (the Church's) service, by the intentions of my parents and friends, I was destined of a child and in mine own resolutions: till coming to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded the church, that he who would take orders must subscribe slave, and take an oath withal, which, unless he took with a conscience that would retch, he must either straight perjure, or spit his faith; I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing.¹

This concern over abuses in the ministry was not in principle distinctively Puritan, though it was a special issue with the Puritans and came to be associated with the Puritan cause. But even if the Puritan implications of the quoted passage be granted, as they would have been by Milton's contemporaries, the passage provides questionable evidence of Puritan grounds for Milton's failure to enter the ministry.

It is plausible in terms of the developments in Church and state during the period. The religious situation had been changing rapidly in Milton's early years at Cambridge. All hope of a gradual compromise of conflicting ideals had been shattered by the negligent or stupid policies of the Stuarts. Charles' Parliaments were beginning to extend their debates on taxation and Popery to include heated, if unavail-

1. Ibid., p. 527.

ing controversies on Arminianism; and in spite of their controversies, the enforcement of religious conformity was speedily growing more forceful. Laud's presentation to Buckingham in 1625 of a list of churchmen marked 'O' and 'P' for Orthodox and Puritanical was a symptom of the drawing of lines between the two parties. Laud's rise was rapid in the following years. In 1633 he was Archbishop of Canterbury; and before that time he had established himself as the most powerful prelate in England. With his rise the program for the enforcement of conformity to the Establishment, and for the return to a more 'papistical' liturgy and ceremony (in defiance of the Puritan demands for true reformation) were intensified, and the plight of the Puritan reformer attempting to work within the Established Church became increasingly difficult.

These developments are thoroughly in harmony with Milton's account of his reasons for not entering the ministry, and Haller accepts Milton's statement that he was "thus church-outed by the prelates"¹ at its face value. "If," Haller says, "the spiritual brethren had been permitted to continue unchecked after 1625, Milton in the normal course of events would have taken his place among them."² But Milton was quite capable of misrepresenting his motives; and there are two indications that he was not speaking in perfect good faith

1. Ibid., p. 527.

2. William Haller, The Rise of Puritanism, p. 294.

in the above-quoted passage.

In the first place Masson points out with some emphasis that Milton had already subscribed, apparently without complaint, in 1629 and in 1632, to essentially the same oath which he later said he could not take without perjury.¹ All candidates for degrees were required to give evidence of their conformity by swearing to three articles of the Thirty-Sixth Canon, and Milton took this oath for both his B. A. and M. A. Candidates for the ministry were required to repeat the oath, along with certain other commitments which were "simply certain oaths of allegiance, supremacy and canonical obedience, which might be considered as really involved in that same act of subscription."²

Much more unmistakably damning is the evidence of two directly relevant and highly revealing contemporary writings, the Ad Patrem and a letter to an unidentified friend. The former is to all appearances simply a defence of poetry and of a career devoted exclusively to literature. Milton does not state specifically why he was writing it but it seems safe to assume (as do Masson³ and Pattison⁴) that it was written after a discussion of his future with his

1. David Masson, The Life of John Milton, vol. 1, pp. 217, 258, and 326.

2. Ibid., p. 326.

3. Ibid., p. 333f.

4. F. Pattison, The Student's Milton, p. 68, of the notes

He defends his preference against two possible alternative courses, "the broad way that leads to the market of lucre, Down where the hope shines sure of gold to be got in abundance", and "the Laws and the lore of the rights of the nation Sorely ill-kept...the babble of asses".¹ Amazingly, the possibility of the ministry is not mentioned, as if Milton felt no need to defend the life of a writer against the claims of the Church.

More specific light is thrown on his attitude to the demands of the ministry in the letter to a friend, written in 1632 or 1633.² This letter is a most valuable supplement to the Ad Patrem, since whereas the latter is a positive plea for the life he really wants, this is an argument for postponing his entry into the ministry. Apparently the friend has charged Milton with undue delay over his studies, and even worse, with too great a love of learning. The letter is a careful defence of the way of life which Milton pictured so much more positively in the prologues. He points out that if a life devoted, as his has been, to learning were evil, he could not persevere in it when so many less demanding and more attractive evils are at hand. On the other hand if his love of learning were a "naturall proneness" (and therefore apparently not perfectly good, if not actually evil), it

1. Ibid., p. 335f.

2. The date can be based, again, only on internal evidence.

would be overcome by stronger natural urges such as the desire for home and family, and as well by the longing for fame, for which, he implies, he has no desire, instancing his abstention from "the readiest ways of publishing and divulging conceived merits". Therefore, since the love of learning can only be good, it can only lead to "the solid good flowing from due and timely obedience to that command in the gospel set out by the seasing of him that hid the talent".¹

Thus by a process of formal logic Milton attempts to prove that his pursuit of learning is a sufficient reason for delaying his entry into the Church. He nowhere says or implies that he is considering giving up the ministry. On the contrary, he says that he is being guided by "a sacred reverence and religious advisement...not taking thought of being late, so it give advantage to be more fit".¹ He makes no mention of "conscientious scruples" about "what tyranny had invaded the church" nor about the oath which he could not take. Masson attempts to harmonize what Milton says in the letter with the reasons he gives for not entering the Church in The Reason of Church Government;² but it is impossible to gloss over the inconsistency. In the pamphlet he gave Puritan reasons for not entering the Church; in the letter, written near the time when the decision had to be

1. The Student's Milton, p. 1128.

2. Masson, op. cit., p. 325f.

made, he does not suggest that there is any reason for not doing so.

While it might be argued that scruples may have played a contributory part, along with literary ambitions, it is hard to see what scruples there might be which could play such a part and yet not merit mention in either the poem to his father or the letter to the unknown friend. It is only possible to conclude that Milton was dishonest either with his friend or with his later public. The latter seems more probable; for the Ad Patrem and the letter give surely conclusive evidence that Milton left the Church not because he could not stomach it, but because he preferred another career, the career of a man of letters.

The implications of the letter are emphasized by its tone. It is unfortunate that the recipient cannot be identified, for he might account for the letter's style, which was to become familiar in the pamphlets, but stands out strikingly from all the early writings. It has been suggested that the friend may have been Thomas Young, which seems reasonable from one point of view, for the charges against which Milton is defending himself are appropriate to an ardent Puritan; though, on the other hand, if the friend was a Puritan, why was he urging a course which Puritan scruples were later to find so objectionable? In any case, in the letter we hear Milton speaking for the first time in tones that suggest the Puritan. The poet whose wealth has been "all a

nothing save what the golden Clio has given me", now in startling contrast speaks of "Christ" who "commands all to labour while there is light". The elaborate rhetoric of the earlier letters gives way to sober arguments; the abounding classical adornment is reduced to one brief allusion.

It is tempting to think that this tone gives us a hint that Milton is here reacting to the force of Puritan demands, which before he may largely have neglected, or at the most taken for granted, unconscious of their incompatibility with his less circumscribed ideals. Perhaps it is being revealed to him that his spontaneous interests will not meet with universal approval, will not be approved even by people whom he has unthinkingly respected. Perhaps now he is realizing that something quite different than an untrammelled pursuit of all knowledge was to be required of him by a society which is turning out very unlike his youthful idealization of it.

But surmise is dangerous on such a complicated mind in such a complicated age. We must be satisfied with the conclusions which can be founded more substantially on the cumulative weight of the evidence of autobiography and biography, of the obvious facts of Milton's college and post-college career, and of the prolusions. Haller's argument that Milton intentionally concealed his interest in Puritan preachers, or any suggestion that any phase of

of his Puritanism was consciously or unconsciously slighted in his writings, is inconsistent with an objective evaluation of this evidence. "Pride" and "common prudence" were far less characteristic of Milton than uncompromising outspokenness; it was not likely that a man so persistent in his attacks on the curriculum (itself a subject calculated to stir up violent opposition) should hesitate to give some sort of expression to any vital Puritan ideals which he may have been harboring, at a time when public expression of them was still possible in the pulpits. It is unrealistic to suppose that it was possible for him to be for so long deeply engrossed in the one issue and to develop his expressions on it into such an enthusiastic and comprehensive statement, if he were actually more interested in another quite different matter.

Milton was perhaps capable of confusing or correlating humanism and Puritanism to some extent. We have seen that he baldly attributed the rise of humanistic studies to the influence of the Reformation,¹ and he was obviously convinced that there was nothing in his humanistic faith incompatible with Christianity, for he blended and confused their symbols and ideals with spontaneous abandon. But if the Christianity whose compatibility with humanism Milton assumed was a distinctively Puritan Christianity, then that Puritanism occupied much less of his attention and commanded far less of his

1. Above, p. 10.

enthusiasm than did humanism; and if he thought that in his support of humanistic studies he was furthering the Puritan cause, he was simply deluding himself. But there is nowhere any suggestion that he did think so.

While the case for humanism can be based upon an overwhelming accumulation of material in the early writings, the belief that Puritanism was a significant factor in Milton's thought before 1640 must be supported by inconclusive deductions from the circumstances of his early life, and from scattered and ambiguous allusions which are nowhere developed into a coherent apology for a faith such as the seventh prolusion makes for humanism. The hatred of a member of the Reformed Church for Rome, which we might expect to find in the son of a convert from Catholicism, is substantially evidenced in scattered comments throughout the early writings and comprehensively in the In Quintum Novembris; but a hatred for the Established Church, or a significant association with Puritanism cannot be proved from the college writings. If Milton had written nothing after 1632, it would scarcely be possible to discover whether he had any opinion whatsoever on the rising Puritan cause, or whether he was to any extent under the influence of Puritanism.

On the other hand it has never been questioned that, through his early encouragement in varied and continuous studies of classical writers, the young Milton became thoroughly imbued with a humanistic attitude to life, a deep and

at times even extravagant faith in the ability of man's reason to direct his destiny without supernatural aid. Salvation was not for him to be found in a careful attention to the soul, but by the strenuous exercise of the mind. In the pro-lusions Milton at once displayed his enthusiastic delight in the exercise of his human powers to what he considered their proper end, and spoke out, with an encompassing optimism and an apparent unconcern for the relation of his program to the Puritan faith, on behalf of a comprehensive humanist faith.

It was then with a powerful humanist bias, and at the most a vague Puritan sympathy, that Milton set out on the road to radicalism. His progress along that road was a fundamental aspect of his development as a great poet. In its details that progress is far beyond the scope of this thesis; but a brief outline suggesting the turning points in the road is necessary to support the contention that Milton's radicalism was a function of his humanism.

Even before the end of Milton's college days, the cracks were beginning to appear in the Renaissance foundation which he had assumed adequate to the towering structure of his poetic ambitions. Incongruously in the midst of the artificial but spontaneous and enthusiastic effusions of the fledgling classicist, there appeared the abortive series of

distinctly Christian poems which Milton set himself as a consciously religious task, not realizing that such an undertaking was a symptom of developments which were to make comprehensive literary masterpieces increasingly difficult. Spenser had still been able to write a poem which was all things to all men; the Faerie Queene is a thoroughly Christian poem without being a distinctively religious one. But Milton, as he approached maturity and attempted the ambitious works which were to prepare the way for his great masterpieces, stumbled on hidden difficulties. Through sheer poetic vitality he was able to complete the first of his Christian series, the Nativity Ode, patching over the inadequate mediaeval framework with a wealth of classical allusions. The second poem, The Passion, he was not able to finish, and he gave up, charging his immaturity. He was not to discover until much later that what the times demanded was not the glorification of God, but His justification.

Meantime, however, Milton was developing his humanistic interests and studies to their peak in the seventh prolusion, in relative seclusion from the uncongenial spirit of the age; though his violent battle in its defence makes it clear that even at Cambridge humanism did not have a congenial environment. But by the force of his will and genius, he mastered the Cambridge environment, and delayed the inevitable clash between his ideals and those of the age.

At the end of the Cambridge years Milton's humanist

impulses once again won out, this time over the milder opposition of his father, when he took up a literary career instead of entering the Church. In the midst of his preparatory studies at Horton, some five years after that decision to withdraw from the Church must have been made, he gave expression for the first time to an active concern over contemporary religious developments. In his attack on the ministry of the Established Church, in Lycidas in 1637, Milton's entry into the Puritan cause was being prepared, an entry, it should be noted, through the side door of concern over abuses in the Church, and not through a spontaneous identification with Puritan principles.

Comus gives expression to a more potent because more inward factor in Milton's approach to Puritanism. In Comus that "certain reservedness of natural disposition" was given its crowning statement as a glorification of chastity. This trait, so much in harmony with rigid Puritan moral attitudes (and perhaps already encouraged by some Puritan influences in Milton's childhood), predisposed Milton to a sympathy with the Puritans, to whom he was opposed in so many other respects.

In spite of these indications of a trend towards Puritanism, it seems reasonable to suppose that, had the way been clear before him, Milton might have continued his pursuit of literary ambitions more or less without interruption. When he returned from the continental tour, he tells us, "I again

with rapture renewed my literary pursuits".¹ The transition from this resumption of a literary career to involvement in the pamphlet controversies is not explained anywhere, for all his protestations in the Second Defence of an inevitable logic guiding him.² Those protestations are completely inconsistent with the above-quoted statement, as well as with the circumstances accompanying the writing of the pamphlets which it was so convenient for him not to mention. And even if his concern was, as he claimed, to serve the Puritan cause, a great poet could have been at least as powerful a supporter as a pamphleteer, particularly a pamphleteer who found it necessary to occupy himself during the heat of the battle with a very personal concern over the rights and wrongs of divorce.

It is tempting to assume that what was occupying Milton during the two year gap³ which his protestations gloss over so speciously was the final clash between his idealistic (and humanistic) literary plans and the Puritan reality of the seventeenth century. With nothing to show for those two years, he must have begun to question the foundations upon which he had for so long been building. It is perhaps justifiable to guess that it was only when it became clear to him

1. The Student's Milton, p. 1146.

2. See above, p. 22.

3. Between his return from the continent, August, 1639, and the appearance of the first pamphlet in June, 1641.

that nothing was to come, for the time being at least, of all his efforts, that he was distracted by the dramatic developments of the times (which he had previously been willing to trust to "the wise conduct of providence and to the courage of the people"), and turned his gifts to temporary but practical use in the pamphlets.

But if Milton deserted his plans for a career based upon his humanistic literary ideals, he was far from abandoning those ideals, though in the pamphlets there appears perhaps the first faint hint of coming disillusionment, in the development of an increasingly conscious correlation of his classical and Christian foundations. In the verses, At A Vacation Exercise, he was satisfied to list a series of classical themes as possible subjects for his great masterpiece.¹ In The Reason of Church Government, in a much lengthier discussion of the types of literature he is considering as suitable mediums for his literary talents,² he mingles classical and Biblical themes indiscriminately, though giving final pre-eminence to "songs throughout the laws and prophets" (a type which, however, he never did employ as models). The relationship implied here between Christianity and humanism is presented more graphically in his statement of his ambitions in the same passage. He seeks, he says, to do for his country

1. See above, p. 96.

2. The Student's Milton, p. 525.

what the ancients did for theirs "with this over and above of being a christian". Thus, in 1641, he feels that Christianity culminates, without invalidating, the classical achievement. The same attitude is evident in the passage in An Apology for Smectymnuus where he presents the credentials for his character. After listing "the grave orators and historians", "the smooth elegiac poets" (in whose work, he admits, some discrimination must be exercised if the ends of virtue are to be served), Petrarch and Dante, "lofty fables and romances", and Plato and Xenophon, he says, "Last of all, not in time, but as perfection is last, that care was ever had of me, with my earliest capacity, not to be negligently trained in the precepts of Christian religion".¹ These statements are perhaps only conscious formulations of attitudes assumed in his college writings; but the very fact that he now gives them expression suggests that the problem involved in harmonizing Christian theology and classical philosophy is becoming increasingly apparent to him.

But if Milton's humanistic ideals were coming into question, his Puritanism was being subjected to a much more violent test. In the troubled years of the interregnum, the initial shallowness of his Puritan principles was illustrated by his rapid movement towards an extremist position. He came out of the period bitterly disillusioned in all the sects,

1. Ibid., p. 550.

and driven to a faith which rested in God alone, an ultimate form of Protestant sectarianism. Yet, throughout the trying times, he had preserved his ambition for a great literary career, and with truly superhuman determination, as the shaky support of the Puritan Reformation gave way beneath him, he turned again to his first ambition.

Now, however, though much of his humanistic faith persisted, conditioned by his experiences and interwoven with other strains of thought, he may have realized, even as he worked, that the material for a great Renaissance epic was no longer available, that the coherent social basis of the Elizabethan literary masterpieces had been irreparably shattered. Whether he was immediately conscious of this loss or not, in Paradise Lost he could only embody in a great classical framework what is, in essence, the most powerful of all Puritan tracts. He tried again in Paradise Regained, but the impossibility of what he was attempting was now surely forcing itself on him, for in Paradise Regained humanism and Puritanism came to their final inevitable conflict, and the faith of his youth was disavowed in his bitter renouncement of the richest sources of his humanism.

There was at the end no tranquil satisfaction sustained by a sense of great achievements in the face of overwhelming difficulties. Samson Agonistes, Milton's last and most perfect poem, was an expression of tragic despair in the face

of utter defeat.

That despair and its accompanying radicalism were only superficially conditioned by the defeat of the Puritans. Had Milton built his life on a solid Puritan foundation, he need never have been driven to his wholesale renunciation of every sect; he could more simply have concluded that human weakness had failed an essentially sound cause. But his radicalism was not rooted in his late and relatively shallow Puritanism. He was able to give up the Puritan sects completely and repair the loss by resort to a basic and encompassing Christian faith.

There was no such compensation for disavowed humanism. This was true even though its rejection was by no means as complete as the denial of the sects. No renouncement could tear up the roots of Milton's humanism; until the end he continued to look for guidance to an 'inner light' in which was blended Christian revelation and humanist reason. But the denial of the humanist authorities for this 'inner light' was a far more profound loss than the rejection of the sects. Milton was striving to uproot the supreme enthusiasm of his youth.

The age was changing, and humanism was not in harmony with its new forces. The youthful faith in a coherent humanist culture which could provide a foundation for the expression of his delight in life had been subjected to successive frus-

trations and defeats, until finally he was forced consciously to relinquish it. It was this loss which was irreparable to him. Milton turned to radicalism not because he was a Puritan whose Puritan hopes had been shattered, but because he was a humanist, and the changing age had denied him expression of his humanist aspirations.

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