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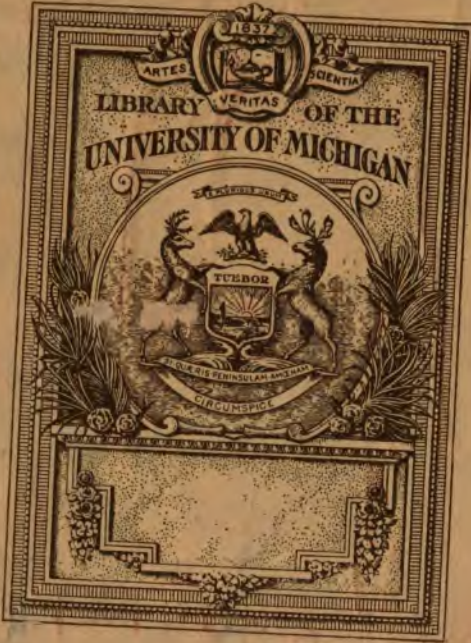
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Philo - Milton

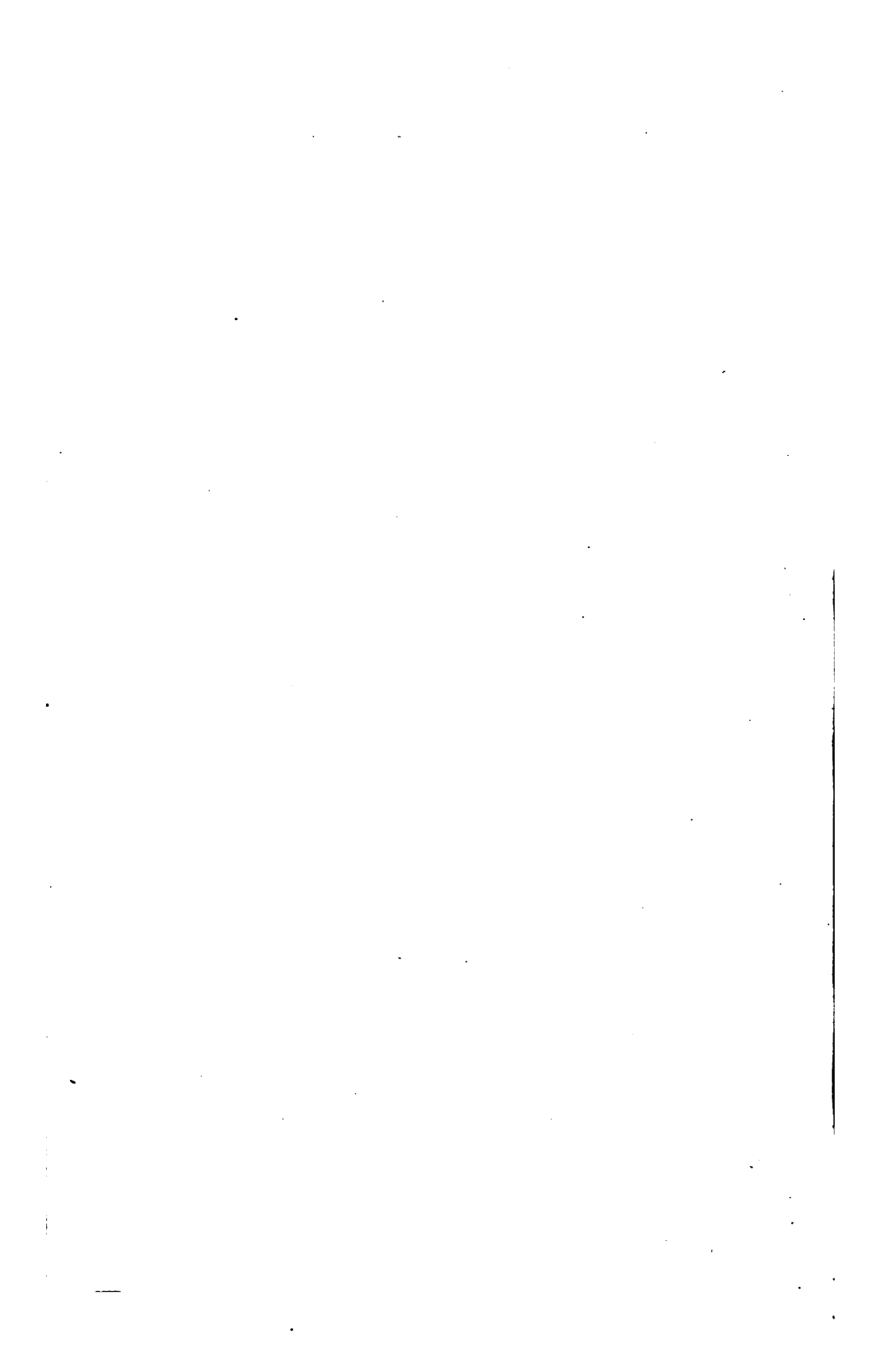
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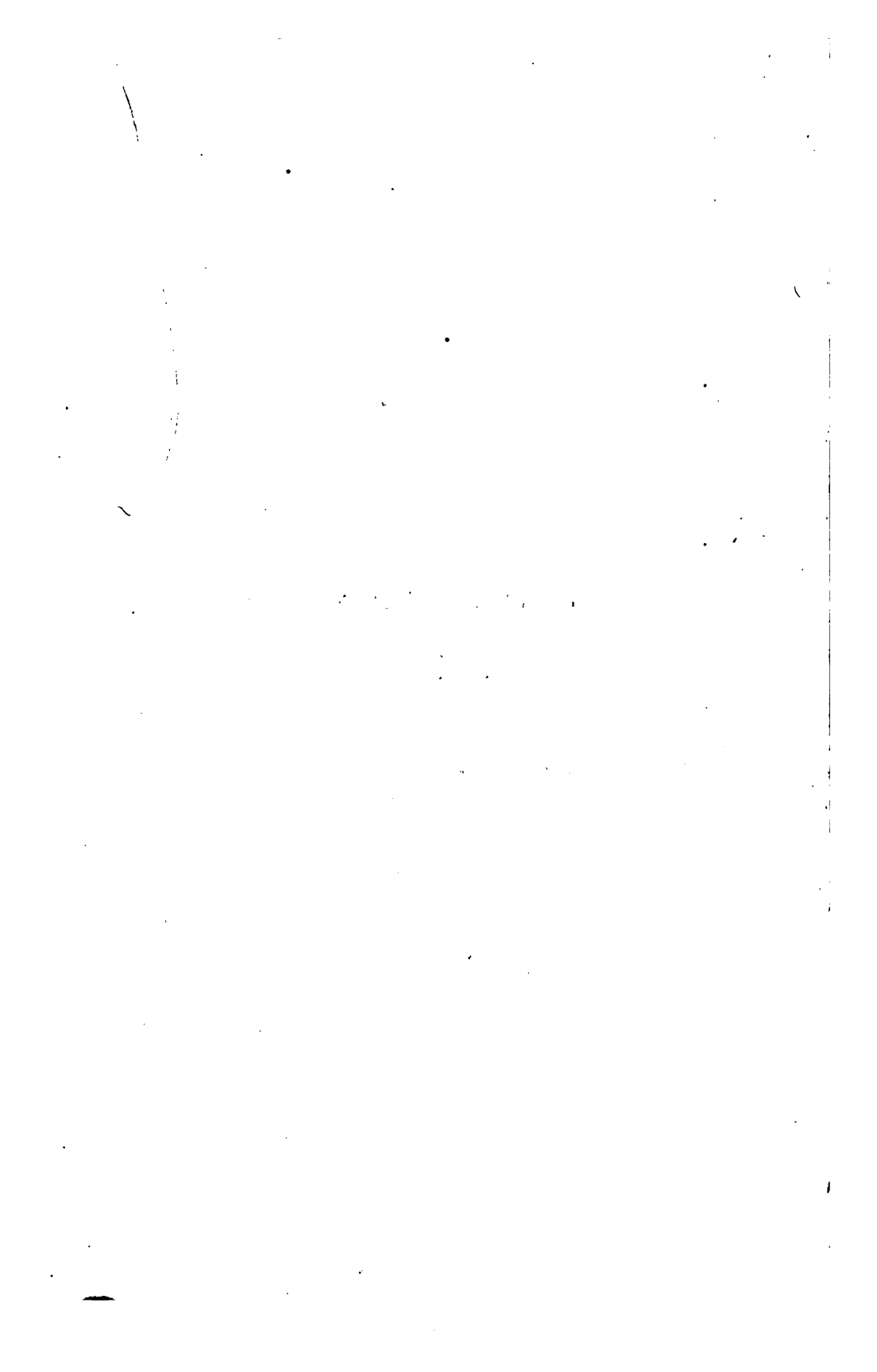


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VINDICATION,

&c. &c.



A
VINDICATION
OF
THE PARADISE LOST

FROM THE
CHARGE OF EXCULPATING

“Cain,”
A MYSTERY.

BY PHILO-MILTON, *et passim*

“If Cain be blasphemous, Paradise Lost is blasphemous.”

Lord Byron's Letter from Pisa.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR F. C. & J. RIVINGTON,
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD,
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1822.

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22 Dec. 23. FHW

A

VINDICATION,

&c.

THE position which I exhibit on the title-page of this Tract has been fearlessly asserted, and speciously maintained. To beat down the defences, and render the position untenable, will be the principal aim of the following discussion.

It is not proposed, at this time of day, to argue the question, how far the Poem of "Cain" is qualified to prejudice the best interests of society; however frequently its merits, or I am rather bound to say, its demerits, will come under review, in the progress of my argument. Judgment has already been passed upon its *tendency*;—virtually, by the highest, and, I believe, by general admission, the most competent legal authority in the land, in the case of *Murray versus Benbow and others*;—professionally, by the critics of the day, of all denominations; by the ominous silence of some, on

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its subject, and the temperate reprobation of others;—by the roused feelings of society itself, manifested in various ways, since the publication of that poem:—and, lastly, but not least forcibly pronounced, by its presumed subserviency to the purposes of Hone, Carlile, and the rest of that fraternity, in the piracy of its copy-right.

And let it not be argued, in reply to the last charge, “that it is the *persecuted* poem, through the cheap sale of which, the venders of mental poison expect to thrive.” It was the piracy which gave rise to the legal question; and the plunderers of the property seemed to understand better than the presumed rightful possessor, how far society might be affected by the publication.

Still less is it the *poetical* merit of the piece, that is attempted here to be questioned. Upon this point, too, an opinion has been unequivocally pronounced, by all parties; and those who comment with most rigour upon the perversity, are not the least liberal in their admission of the powers, of the mind which produced it.

The object of the following pages is two-fold. To obviate a charge of self-reproach, in hearing the name of Milton aspersed without a murmur, the writer has thrown his thoughts into form; and if, by giving publicity to those thoughts, he shall obviate one particle of the mischiefs incident

to society from the production of "Cain," his second object will be fully attained.

The vindication of Milton from a charge of blasphemy, in the construction of the *Paradise Lost*, will form no part of his design. Milton has ranked, for upwards of a century and a half, among the great lights and benefactors of mankind; and shall any one deny, that the *Paradise Lost* forms his chief claim to our homage? The civilized universe has accepted it as the glory of rational nature; and are we, of to-day, to set about enquiring, whether it be a boon, or a curse, to mankind? whether its tendency be, to unsettle, or to confirm, our belief in the doctrines of Revelation? I would use, with due reverence, the expression of one of his fallen angels, as applied to the manner in which this charge is likely to affect the fame of Milton:

" the ethereal mould,
Incapable of stain, will soon expel
Her mischief, and purge off the baser fire,
Victorious."

Par. Lost, b. 2. v. 139.

No!—" *Paradise Lost*" and " *Cain*" will not stand or fall together, morally viewed, in the judgment of posterity; and it is for the interest of those of the present day, who will not be at the pains of examining the preposterous argument

here advanced, in its various bearings, that it should be pointed out to them, no matter how imperfectly: *why* the author of the *Paradise Lost* is still entitled to their reverence; although the author of "*Cain*" should be deemed worthy of condemnation; and *why* the impieties contained in the latter Poem are wholly indefensible, upon the ground which justifies those contained in the former. It is for the interest of those, who have hitherto read over the most outrageous ravings of the rebel spirits in Milton, if not with unconcern; with feelings, at least, that awaken no conflict in their own breast which it becomes the business of the judgment to allay;—it is for the interest of those, to be reminded, that reason and reflection give their full sanction to such feelings. They, too, who have hitherto shuddered over every page of the "*Mystery*," must not be beguiled, whether by sophistry, or by pure but erring intention, into the belief, that these have been false alarms, which an appeal to stronger heads and sounder judgments will enable them to overcome. The heart is the safest counsellor in these matters; and if a person of upright mind and modest pretensions tells me, that the impieties of Satan and his compeers, in the one poem, are little to his taste, but, that under all their circumstances, they are infinitely less revolting to

his feelings, than those of Lucifer and Cain in the other poem; yet that he cannot account to himself for this disproportion in their effects: since, assuredly, those of the former poem are as direct, and couched in as strong terms, and as offensive to his eyes and ears, as those of the latter can possibly be;—when such results follow upon the perusal of these two poems, (and that they do universally, I will fearlessly assume, and the daily expression of public opinion will bear me out;)—then, I say, that these poems must be subjected to another test than that proposed by the champions of “Cain,” for deciding their merits, as they affect the good or ill-being of society. I would, indeed, have the *Paradise Lost* borne ever in mind, where this “Mystery” is admitted; but not upon the terms here proposed. Not, as yoked, like those two in the stupendous allegory of its own 10th book, “jointly spreading their bane.”

And here, I must protest, once for all, against the imputation of venturing to discuss, what may have been the *motives* of the noble author, in giving “Cain” to the world; or what may be the principles by which his private life is governed. I only know Lord Byron by his works, with the fame whereof “all Europe rings from side to side;” and I remark upon this particular work, as regarding its *tendency*, not its *object*. At

a moment when it's tendency is declared, virtually or explicitly, by all parties; as well those who would suppress, as those who would encourage, the dissemination of moral mischief, to be most pernicious, I would willingly lend a hand, however feeble in the wielding of it's weapon, to deprive it of that support which, since it's own resources have failed, it is attempting to derive from almost canonized authority:—not indeed to vindicate the integrity and wholesome doctrine of Milton's poem; but to justify the repugnance of those, who are invited in this controversy, to choose their alternative;—to mistrust both the one and the other, in direct hostility to their common judgment and common feeling:—or to admit the poem of "Cain" to be a sharer in their confidence, and the joint friend of their bosom; with equal violence to all those judgments and feelings.

Such an examination, too, may not seem uncalled for, at a moment when the position is advanced; not only by such as find their account in the confounding of right with wrong; not only by counsel in a court of justice, while advocating the cause of a client; not only by the noble bard himself, who must, at least, be suspected of partiality in his own cause; but by writings which bear the stamp of sincerity, dispassionate enquiry, and good faith. Such a writing I have now

before me* ; and did I not feel convinced, that the cause I am about to advocate will bear me out, I should not venture to set up my own opinions in opposition to those of one, who is evidently a scholar, a calm enquirer, and an advocate for social order. I too would willingly lay title, in what follows, to both the latter denominations ; and if I differ from this writer in my views of the same subjects ; as I most assuredly shall in almost every case, for I write with no other intent ; I trust I shall suffer nothing offensive, or wantonly obnoxious, to escape me in the mode of my dissent, either towards the conscientious advocate, or the noble author, of the poem in question.

The avowed object of the writer of the letter to Sir Walter Scott, on the subject of " Cain," is " to interest the ordinary reader in favor of that poem, and to vindicate it from a charge of impious tendency or design ;"—and the plan pursued for the accomplishment of this object, has been, to confront the most offensive passages in " Cain," with such as he considers parallel passages from the Paradise Lost : and to move for an acquittal of the former, from a charge of impious tendency, on the same grounds upon which it has been universally granted to the latter. Lord

* A letter to Sir Walter Scott, Bart. on the subject of " Cain."

Byron has certainly no reason to be dissatisfied with the manner in which his own argument has been conducted by this advocate for his poem. The most striking parallels are adduced ; and, of course, the strongest passages in both authors, of objectionable tendency separately considered, are placed in counter-view. My object will be, to advert to these assumed parallel passages, in the order in which they are presented, and if possible to obtain a verdict of condemnation from the ordinary reader, where he has solicited one of acquittal ; fully persuaded as I feel, that the tendency of the doctrine conveyed in " Cain " is wholesome to no mind ; balefully pernicious to many ;—and those not the least cultivated, or least comprehensive of the community ; and that its service in the cause of ill, is proved, beyond the power of argument to refute, by the fact of its adoption, under the banners of anarchy and licentiousness of every denomination.

But, in a question of this kind, previous to entering upon an examination of insulated passages, it may be of service to enquire, from data which are before us, what has been the *general design*, and what, the *professed object* of the poet at the out-set.

Milton proclaims in the first lines of his poem, and with far greater solemnity than could have

attended any prefatory address, that his object is

“ to assert eternal providence

“ And justify the ways of God to men.”

Has it ever been questioned, that this was really his design, throughout the whole performance?

Now, with regard to “ Cain.” The nature of the work precluded the possibility of the poet declaring his intention, in the manner of Milton; but he has thought fit to furnish us with a prefatory notice from whence we may legitimately infer, in what temper of mind the work was undertaken.

I have already disclaimed all design of attributing secret motives, but we have a right to reason upon what is exposed before us;—and I have no hesitation in saying, that the general impression conveyed by this preface, is any thing else than a desire to up-hold the authority of Scripture, either generally, or in the particular portion of it which is intended to be dramatized. On the contrary, I think ground is therein taken, manifestly to the disadvantage of revelation, and, to many a mind, by no means tenable.

I come now to the consideration of particular passages: always bearing in view, that it is the object of the advocate with whose argument I am at variance, not to inculcate *Paradise Lost*; but to exculpate the “ *Mystery*.”

He sets out, with the following assumption.

“ If” (he says) “ we find in Milton, many striking parallels, for the Demoniacal sentiments of Lord Byron’s characters, then must candour pronounce, that ‘ Cain’ is neither an impious nor an immoral poem ; unless Paradise Lost fall under the same imputation.”

There is an end of the question, if I admit this inference ; for how shall I deny, that many passages of daring impiety are to be found in the Poem of Milton ? How could “ Eternal Providence” be “ asserted” unless it be by first shewing how it is *impugned* ? How could “ the ways of God to men” be so triumphantly “ justified” as by exposing the sophisms in which their wisdom is *impeached* ? If the mere *statement* of evil can draw down reproach, on the head of the writer or arguer, then our ablest champions of religion have much to answer for. All who have laboured most strenuously in the cause of truth, and for the instruction of mankind, lie under the imputation. The objectionable argument must be *stated*, in order to draw out the *refutation*.

I must therefore enter my unqualified protest against the fallacy of this inference ; and I hope to establish the grounds of my dissent more firmly,

with each succeeding parallel that shall come under review.

The first that is adduced, is one between a passage contained in an early part of the dialogue between Lucifer and Cain, on the one hand; and Satan's taunt to the Seraph (not the Arch-Angel as stated in the vindictory letter) beginning at v. 165 of the 6th book, on the other. The sentiments from Milton, considered abstractedly, are certainly those of a rebellious spirit; and Milton would have found it as difficult as Lord Byron, to make his fallen spirits "speak the language of angels or true worshippers of the Deity." But, how does the passage come before us, standing as it does, with its context, and without any reference to the general design of the poem? the antidote is at hand; both in *word* and in *deed*. The soliloquy of Abdiel, which immediately precedes, and his reply to the apostate, nullify the mischief, as it regards *us*; and the Arch-Angel, "of the first" before his fall, "if not the first," foiled in combat by the faithful Seraph, and the weight of reproof made valid upon his crest, is a glorious refutation of the vaunts just advanced.

The same observations apply with equal force to the next passage, adduced from the 5th book; and not from the 6th, as implied in the letter. It

is a speech addressed by Satan to the revolted spirits whom he had drawn after him. But, read the passage immediately following; the remonstrance of Abdiel; then Satan's indignant reply; then the retort of "the flaming Seraph;" and the passage which closes the book; surpassed nowhere in the *Paradise Lost*, for loftiness of thought, and strength of sentiment; and if any one will assure me, after a careful perusal of this whole passage, that any feeling at variance with devotion has been excited and not laid, I shall then be ready to pronounce Milton a blasphemmer and his poem a nuisance.

The council of Pandemonium comes next under review. Here again, there is plenty of impiety, but here, at least, fearful witness is borne to the prowess of the Almighty, in the confessions of some, and in the plight of all. The tendency cannot be injurious to *us*: nothing comes near home to *us*, in their arguments. Gentle natures may revolt at their hardihood, but there is no temptation to make common cause with them. Now, how do these remarks, as far as they have gone, apply to "Cain?" Where is the antidote, to admitted obnoxious passages? Is it in the context, or in the general tendency, or in the event, of the poem? Is it in the purity of mind of the women; beautiful pictures as they are? Is

it in the "tamed-down" resignation of Adam, or in the patient humility of Abel? I find it no where: I feel myself every where tempted

"With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls,"

in points which concern humanity nearly; and I must *fly inward*, in search of the antidote to their mischievous tendency. Is this, then, a work calculated to benefit society? "Yes:" (it will be replied,) "it throws us back upon our own resources." So does every thing, in its own nature, bad. It is not what *ought* to be the effect, but what it may reasonably be expected *will* be the effect of a work, constituted as man is, upon the frame of society, that is to decide the question of its tendency; and, tried by this test, thus far at least, I cannot help thinking, that while vindicating the Paradise Lost, I have deeply implicated "Cain;" for I cannot think I am singular in the feelings which I have thus far expressed, on both their subjects.

But to proceed. The next parallel sets before us the Evil Spirit, as represented by both poets, disputing the power of the Almighty to *unmake* them; and even questioning the fact of their creation by his hands. The passage in Milton is part of Satan's reply to Abdiel, b. 5. v. 853.

already commented upon. Considered abstractedly, the parallel is perfect; and, if circumstances did not materially alter the value of these passages, as they are calculated to affect *us*, certainly no blame could attach to the one Poet, without being shared by the other, on this score.

And here we may take occasion to enquire, (not unprofitably I presume; since the question of moral tendency of the two Poems will be found mainly to depend upon the result of such enquiry;) what are the draughts severally set before us, of this mysterious agent, by the two poets; wherein they agree, and wherein they differ; for differ they do, I maintain, most essentially.

There is an unhealthy splendor cast round the ruined Arch-Angel by Milton, at his first appearance upon the scene, that fascinates; and there is something wonderfully commanding, and even paralyzing to our best propensities, in the display of giant-intellect and prowess set before us. The poet appears to have had it in design to overpower us at the outset, with the concentrated array of all that is perniciously captivating to our apprehension; that his triumph might be the greater, and more signal, while he wins us over from the unworthy cause in the sequel. Neither does he detain us long in jeopardy. Satan's

baser qualities peep out in succession; and not after long delay. He has already undergone the heavy reprobation of the poet, in the narrative. His consciousness of utter incompetency to achieve what he threatens, is made apparent after his first speech :

“ So spake the Apostate Angel, tho’ in pain ;
 Vannting aloud, but rack’d with deep despair.”

In his interview at hell-gate, odium does not linger in attaching to him ; but it is on his address to the sun, at the opening of the 4th book, that I would mainly rest, for exculpating Milton’s Poem from the charge of a pernicious tendency. Here is the impostor, *self-convicted* of imposing upon *self* ; the conscious, yet irreclaimable fiend. The poet had here a difficult purpose to accomplish ; and it tasked the highest powers of Milton’s mind, to pursue it successfully. He had to obtain a confession of demerit from the lips of Satan, without impeaching the mercy of Heaven ; —to restrain us from sympathizing with the offender, while heaping reproaches upon his own head. To filch from us our sympathies, at the expence of our judgment, in favour of Heaven’s antagonist, though but for an instant, formed no part of Milton’s design. To engage man on the

side of the tempter in the perdition of his race, was an exercise of ingenuity that had no attraction for a mind of Milton's sweep, however consonant with the taste of the present day; and Milton was too great a master, to suffer such to be the effect, though but for an instant, when it was not of his purpose. Yet this, to a certain degree, was inevitable, had the former part of the speech stood unqualified by the latter. Lost Arch-Angel purely repentant; or if not repentant, prostrate in soul, and self-condemning, yet utterly rejected by the Almighty; was too dangerous a picture to have presented to our contemplation. What then does Milton?—Satan's conviction of his own unworthiness is made to act as it ought to act, in the spirit of evil, viz. *in aggravation of his offence*. We see, that it is not Heaven that is inexorable, but the fiend that is incorrigible; and that he is lost, of his own free and deliberate will; not by any law of necessity, or implacable judgment of Heaven. If his concessions at the beginning were most important to us, his decision at the close is not less so. It sunders us from him for ever—"Evil, be thou my good!" the passage upon which Lord Byron has thought fit to rest his own exculpation; and the hollow sentiments and evasive reasonings which lead to this frantic invocation, are,

I contend, standing where they do, our best safeguard against mischief. The poet has here, as it were, armed us "in complete steel" to encounter the splendid sophistries of the 5th and 6th books. The fiend shews like himself, in his retirement, and we need nothing further. The scheme of the poem imperatively required, that an interest should be excited for this too successful agent, but it was to be an interest that should not set us in array against omnipotence. This was what Milton would studiously avoid, and he has succeeded wonderfully. Admiration, of a certain cast, had been already excited. Commiseration was too much. Abhorrence is the result.

If we pursue the career of Satan throughout the action of the poem, he uniformly continues to fall. His exposed subterfuges in the garden; his interview with Ithuriel and Zephon;—that passage of rare beauty, which is at the same time one of the most instructive in the whole work; and one of the finest commentaries in existence, upon the doctrine Lord Byron lays down in his letter upon the Pope and Bowles controversy;—all set him in the light of a remorseless fiend and desperate rebel. But the last appearance he makes upon the scene, brings the consummation to his disgrace; when, on his return to the assembly of peers in Pandemonium, he relates the happy result of his enterprize, and instead of

the shoutings of applauding angels, haughty though fallen; and the harpings of idolatrous seraphs, sweet though "partial;"

"dreadful was the din

"Of hissing thro' the Hall."

P. Lost, B. 10. V. 538.

The imagined annual recurrence of this ignominious visitation, is evidently contrived by the poet, with a view to the same lofty purpose that has been manifested throughout his work; namely, the preserving his reader from contamination, by the influence of those two powerful repellants, upon his nature, abhorrence and contempt. Satan's glory, moreover, is always pronounced, in its most illusive display, a *permissive* glory. Whereas, the direct contrary is the case, with regard to the Lucifer of "the Mystery." He rises in terrific hostility before us, in proportion as we are made better acquainted with him. My complaint against the Mystery is, that throughout the poem, the temptation is for *us*, as well as for *Cain*. No doubt, we may, and most assuredly ought, to regard the tempter as an impostor, but in Milton's poem, we inevitably *must*. The sceptic, searching for plausible arguments to support his speculations, will be foiled at every turn of the page in the *Paradise Lost*; either from the mouth of the poet, or of some beneficent agent, or, most efficaciously of all, from the mouth of the fiend himself. Now, I will assert, that there are many

ardent and enterprising wits, who will be disposed to find "much reason" in a great deal that is advanced by Lucifer; and if such an one is to be rescued from jeopardy through the good offices of Adah, or the milder personifications of the drama, these latter must carry about them a charm more potent than I have yet been able to discover; well awake as I am to the beauties of the scenes in which they are permitted to appear. For the poet to interpose, as in an Epic Poem, was impossible; and it will hardly be asserted, that Lucifer himself does much to undeceive the reader. He indeed shews him palpably enough, that the way he leads, is to perdition; but then, he tempts him "to be in love and pleased with rain." Humility does not grow upon such a stalk; he may become a more intemperate railer against the divine decrees, from such communion; not a jot more submissive to them. Here are no "compunctious visitings" of fallen angelic nature set before us; no disclaiming, from the secret soul, of titles arrogated abroad. Here is an assumption of powers and attributes, which, if possessed, are utterly incompatible with omnipotence; if falsely arrogated, it must be by gratuitous admission on our part, that we deem them so. We are no where urged, or tempted, so to receive them, by the poet. The Being stands before us, full of pre-

tensions, which, as far as we are allowed to see, he is equally qualified to make good. According to *his* revelation, there is scarcely a Most High in existence. His impieties come before us, with far different credentials from those of Milton's Satan. Where we are made to know, that the assertions of the latter are vain boasts; deceptions practised upon himself, not less than upon others; those of the former may be, for aught we are given to understand to the contrary, a fair assumption of rights and prerogatives. We are not let behind the scenes here, as we are by Milton; and, as I have already stated, if we are determined to treat with Lucifer, as with an arrogant impostor, we may; there is no bar to it, perhaps; but we are not constrained to this course, by the poet; and the temptation exists for *us* as well as for *Cain*.

Lucifer, I have said, is invested by his poet, with qualities which are never attempted to be arrogated by the Satan of Milton. His boast is: "that he knows *all* things^b;" and a passage upon which much stress has been laid, in vindication of the tendency of the work, brings his prowess in this respect to the test^c. The rebel Angels in

^b "And I, who know all things, fear nothing." Lucifer to Cain.
Act. 1. Sc. 1.

^c "Ay, woman! he alone

"Of mortals from that place (the first and last

"Who shall return, save ONE)—shall come back to thee."

Lucifer to Adah. Act. 1. Sc. 1.

Milton affect not an acquaintance with the scheme of futurity. Milton had otherwise adjusted the economy of his poem; and it needed not the eagle-glance of such a mind, to pierce at once, through the maze of absurdity, in which so unauthorized an ascription would inevitably entangle him. They indeed

“reasoned high

“Of Providence, Fore-knowledge, Will and Fate,

“And found no end, in wandering mazes lost.” B. 2. V. 565.

Bright intelligences as they are represented, the distance is immeasurable between these and omniscience. The earth was proposed to be invaded, on the supposition that “if ancient and prophetic fame in Heaven erred not^d,” such a creation was then in existence; and it had been moreover, “the will pronounced in Heaven of the Almighty,” that such was to be.

But it may be replied: that this insight into futurity, on the part of Lucifer, in the instance adduced above, is also *derived*; that it was intimated in the original denunciation against man and the tempter. Granted: but does an implicit confidence in the annunciations of the Most High accord with the character of Lucifer, as it is here drawn out, or with the tone of authority wherewith his predictions are pronounced to Cain? does not that tone rather accord with a power of

^d Beëlzebub's speech, B. 2.

fore-seeing, self-derived, and inalienable from his own nature, as a spirit? such a power as he has, in fact, declared to Cain that he enjoys? At all events, if the point is still disputed in this case, it will hardly be contested, with respect to what follows; where he is made to speak prophetically of a miraculous incident in the ministry of the Messiah*; a circumstance of detail, which cannot be supposed to have formed any part of the revelation, when the joint sentence was pronounced. In the "Paradise Regained," to which poem allusion has been made in the tract I am considering, Satan, consistently with the limit set to his powers in the greater poem, is furnished with very obscure insight into his own, or the Messiah's future destinies. There has been no tree of knowledge planted for *him*, whereof the gathered fruit has disclosed to his importunities, the most intimate designs of the Most High. Lord Byron is certainly not bound to adopt Milton's notions, considered purely as the emanation of Milton's mind, in portraying his evil spirit; but, when it is admitted, as I believe it universally is, that Milton's sincere desire was, rigidly to conform to the authorities of Sacred Writ, in depict-

* "There will come

"An hour, when toss'd upon some water-drops,

"A man shall say to a man, 'Believe in me

"And walk the waters;' and the man shall walk

"The billows and be safe." Lucifer to Cain. Act. 2. Sc. 1.

ing the functions and properties of the malign being: there may be some responsibility attached to a departure, in essential points, from the draught he has transmitted to us, by any writer who represents the same agent as interfering in the acted concerns of this world. At all events, in the "Mystery of Cain," the knowledge of all things is allowed to be participated by Lucifer: and if this is an attribute that cannot be supposed to fall to the lot of a lost Arch-Angel, the inference is obvious; and the "double principle," no empty vaunt, in the system of theology adapted by the poet to this portion of the Sacred History.

But there is yet another point of view, in which I would consider this "redeeming passage" as it has been called, and in the influence of which, in spite of its individual prominence on the page, I do not see so much cause for the congratulation which I have heard expressed. I would submit it to the test, by which Milton's objectionable passages, so far as they have come under our review, have been scrutinized. I would consider its bearing upon the context, as it is likely to affect *us*. In pursuing the dialogue, in the progress of which, Lucifer has been made to

¹ "Thou would'st go on aspiring,

"To the great double mysteries! the *two principles!*"

Lucifer to Cain. Act. 2. Sc. 2.

prophecy (obscurely to Cain) of the Redeemer, we have the following passage :

CAIN. (*speaking of the world.*)

“What ! is it not then new ?

LUCIFER.

“No more than life is; and that was ere thou

“Or I were, or the things which seem to us

“Greater than either: many things will have

“No end; and some, which would pretend to have

“Had no beginning, have had one as mean

“As thou: and mightier things have been extinct

“To make way for much meaner than we can

“Surmise; for *moments* only and the *space*

“Have been and must be all *unchangeable.*” *Act. 2. Sc. 1.*

This passage, if it mean any thing, approximates, at least, to an intimation that the being to whom Cain and the world which he has left for a while, are at all events admitted to have owed their existence, is himself only an *accident*, arising out of the multifarious workings of *some other undefined cause*. For who, or what is, this “*greater than either?*” Not the Arch-Angels; he has proclaimed himself “loftier than these,” at the out-set, for they serve. What is the inference also, which must be drawn from the two last lines?

We are aware that this whole passage is part of the fraud practised by the tempter, upon Cain; but how is it likely to work with the *ordinary reader* of to-day? Will the promulgation of what he knows to be most importantly true,

touching futurity, and which he has heard from the lips of Lucifer a few moments back, add to or detract from the authority of the fiend in matters more removed from our apprehension? or are the intimations thus delivered, so palpably incompatible to ordinary apprehensions, as that the approved truth of the one should necessarily destroy the credibility of the other?—Here, at least, is a confounding of truth with falsehood, very perplexing;—if the future triumph (future to Cain) of the Messiah is conceded, the eternity and immutability of the Godhead is denied; and I would gladly have dispensed with the *prophetic* intimation, for the truth of which all who read may dare vouch, from the mouth of one immediately after so strangely oracular of the *past*.

It is possible that there may be some benevolent minds, to whom these strictures may seem over-strained; who will hail with pleasure every gleam of light which appears to penetrate, though but transiently into this wilderness; but I own, this is the point of view in which I feel myself bound to consider the passages last referred to, as an enquirer into their tendency.

Nor let it be argued, that such remarks as are here ventured upon, are superfluous; or that if there really be mischief in a work, they only tend to increase the evil, by calling attention to objectionable points, which would otherwise

pass innoxious of un-dwelt upon, with the generality of readers. Passages of insidious tendency, wherever they exist, will assuredly not work less efficaciously, because the mind which is exposed to their influence is not bent upon ascertaining, or wants habit to detect, wherein its danger lies: and the censor who faithfully performs his task, has at least the merit of setting the watch who slumbered, upon the alert;—how its duties are afterwards discharged, is not for his regulating.

I now proceed in my examination of the parallels adduced to exculpate “the Mystery.” The next in succession, noted in the letter, is between the speeches of Moloch and Beëlzebub in the 2nd book of the Paradise Lost, and one of the strongest passages in “Cain.” But here, surely, the vaunts are most impotent, in the instances adduced from Milton. They are declared so, by others of their own party. What reader will endure to be enlisted under such banners? But, in the instance of Lucifer, menaces are exchanged for reproaches, and a view offered of the divine nature, shocking to the apprehension of humanity. Unhappily too, the poet has given himself no opportunity in this drama, of summoning up in our mind the reflections which ought to prevail, when the cloud that he has thrown across it has over-past; no mighty pre-

sence, as in the case of Gabriel, B. 4. and elsewhere in Milton's poem, to put the tempter to shame, and bare his falsehoods to our view, with an energy equal to that which has evoked them.

The subject of the temptation of Eve, in the *Paradise Lost*, is next alluded to; and the reverence with which it has been treated by Milton, need hardly be insisted on. To the beautiful scenes in "the Mystery," in which Adah is made to bear a part, I have already conceded all I feel justified in conceding. In the encomiums of the commentator upon the lofty poetry of the passages which precede these scenes, I heartily concur.

In pursuing the 2nd Act of "the Mystery," Adam's frantic imprecations in the 10th Book v. 720, of the *Paradise Lost* are noticed, in defence of a similar passage in "Cain;" and considering the state of mind in which both complainants must be supposed to have been, when they gave utterance to their feelings, perhaps neither poet could have consistently made them speak otherwise. Adam, however, makes ample atonement to the feelings of the reader; in the sequel of the poem. I am persuaded that Milton would never have gone so near to sack our nature as he has done, with the disobedience of Adam, had he not been conscious of his intention to make ample

amends for it, in the subsequent picture of his steady and exalted contrition. What can be finer, of this cast, than his address to Michael in the 11th Book, on the Arch-Angel's declaring the object of his mission; and his previous discourses with Eve of a similar tendency? But here again, with regard to "Cain," the fulfilment of such a design, on the part of the poet, has been rendered impracticable by the plan of his drama.

Numerous quotations are now brought, in palliation of the parting disclosure and admonition of Lucifer, which the commentator himself admits is dreadfully energetic; namely, 1. A portion of Satan's Address to the Sun, which, if I have argued with any success, a few pages back, can hardly be brought to defend a passage of triumphant blasphemy; 2. Moloch's Speech, B. 2. v. 94, which has also been before adverted to; 3. that of Satan to Beëlzebub, B. 1. v. 94, and 4. a portion of Satan's Address to the seditious spirits he had drawn after him, preparatory to the reproof of Abdiel which immediately follows. The temptation of Eve is also again adverted to, as analogous to that of Cain. As this was the catastrophe, upon which the whole interest of Milton's Poem was to turn, I do not see how he was to bring it about better, or more consistently with the record he was bound to respect,

than in presenting the unequal contest between subtlety and credulity, adulation and fatal self-confidence. The most important task of the poet, was to provide while he interested us, that reproach should fall in the right place; that its due proportions should be allotted. His genius was not to be made subservient, even by implication, to any cause unworthy of his subject. Undoubtedly, cast as the poem of "the Mystery" is, Cain was also to be submitted to temptation; but the difference in the conduct of it, as it respects us, is great. In Milton, we are preserved against infection, by the skill and design of the poet. In "Cain," we are exposed to it. Milton, whenever his guardian angels are, of necessity, removed from around us, is himself present with "the better reason." It was a ground of defence, which all who from the first protested against "Cain" must have anticipated, as the most plausible that could be taken; "that this "Mystery" is "nothing more than a drama; that due punishment is eventually inflicted on the criminal; and that the characters must be allowed to play their parts consistently." Further, we saw it might be alleged "that the sentiments of the spirit of evil, and the example of the first-born in sin, and first disinherited of Paradise should have no attraction for us, so differently circumstanced, and strong in better assurances." This latter argument, if it is of any

effect, applies to the writer's *intention*, with which I have no concern; the *tendency* of his work may still be pernicious, though he himself should be exonerated from the charge of willing that it should be so.

With regard to the first portion of the defence, (which has in fact been set up, as anticipated,) I am not undertaking to decide how far the imperfections with which I consider this "Mystery" to be chargeable, are or are not separable from such a subject, with due regard to dramatic effect; or how far other interests may be legitimately sacrificed to this latter. Neither shall I enquire, how far censure *must* attach to an author who voluntarily engages in an enterprize of this nature, where the difficulties are avowedly insuperable. But, had Milton undertaken the subject of Cain, the whole recorded tenor of his poetical career will bear me out in affirming, that he would have left an impression upon ordinary minds, which would have required no effort of the reason to efface. He would otherwise not have engaged in it at all; not because his great powers would have failed him, under any circumstances, in stirring men's minds; but because he disdained to stir them, to their own prejudice.

If the paramount cause of Truth be the plea of modern days, it was more than a plea with Milton; but Milton had another name for that which

has been wont, of late years, to usurp the sacred title; and his was no twilight view of forms intellectual, while he wrote, however dim and undiscerning of the forms of things external. It has been too prevailing an opinion in all ages, and is deplorably so with the present, that an ostentatious hardihood in speculation is the infallible test of stoutness of heart and vigour of intellect; and the name which Newton could never pronounce without a sign of reverence, has been "weighed in the balance, and found wanting!"—by the arch-empirics of modern days. Yet he who bowed is admitted to rank among the greatest of mankind; and it would be futile indeed, to set about demonstrating, that it was neither from constitutional pusillanimity, nor from occasional failing of heart, that Newton's awe was derived. It was, that he approached nearer than other mortals to the throne of the Infinite, and could most worthily estimate the degree of homage that was due.

In Milton, also, every where we see the genius of the poet shedding a glory round the suggestions of the responsible agent;—every where a co-herency of one with the other;—and the conditions of providence, to which Bacon before him, and Locke and Newton beside him, were content to subscribe, were not rejected as terms

inadmissible in the breast of Milton. A consciousness of being seated far above the myriad tribes of fellow-mortals in the regions of intellect, did not, in *his* estimation, confer a title to frown defiance upon the race; nor did the experience of a capacity to influence, beyond the ordinary powers of men, tempt him to stoop from his throne of command, to find a passage to their hearts, through the channel of their sorriest weaknesses. He, too, aspired: "*to strengthen Man with his own mind*;" but his was not the discipline which arms him with the powers of a maniac for a season, to leave him nerveless and disconsolate, when the delirium has over-past. Milton could contrast other characters with his desperado and impostor, than the merely "meek" and sententiously pious; and the interest of his high theme does not appear to have suffered from such a preference. Excepting so far as it challenges comparison, his example furnishes no pretext for future adventurers over the same region to despair, while they follow the same track. What a mischievous poem he might have made of the *Paradise Lost*! Was it because he found, that the dramatic form would inevitably lead him to such a conclusion, that therefore he departed

* Lord Byron's "*Prometheus*." St. 3, L. 4.

from his original plan, and adopted the epic?—for he, too, at one time, had projected a “Mystery.”— This granted, would at least be conclusive as to the *purity* of his *intentions*, in writing the poem, if that were a question; which it is not. A motive worthier of his transcendant powers may be assigned, and I believe ever has been assigned, for this departure from his original plan. But, what would have been the tendency of *his* drama, may be safely and most satisfactorily inferred from authentic records which have been handed down to us^a.

Indeed, it is very observable, that minds of the first order have never been prone to cavil at the obligations of Religion, whether considered in the abstract, or with reference to positive Revelation. It has been among a class immediately beneath them, that the difficulties have originated and been fostered;—and while the former have soared into the “pure serene” of truth, without offering a violence to their own natures or to that of others; these latter have been left to flounder about in the chaos of their own Speculations; bewildering all who pin their faith upon them. Not to go back to the Ancients for examples: among whom, a dependance upon an over-ruling and ever-watchful Providence was eminently dis-

^a See Johnson's Life of Milton.

played, in the greatest and brightest minds ; we need only look around us, and we shall there find, perhaps, the most illustrious instances, in confirmation of what I advance. Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire and many others, of both nations, whether cotemporaries or writers of an earlier period, who have indulged in similar speculations with themselves, are deservedly celebrated, in Literature and in Science ; but who will think of ranging them, in his Pantheon of modern worthies, by the side of Bacon, Locke, Newton, Boyle, Shakespeare, Milton ;—whether considered as regarding the benefits they have actually conferred upon mankind, or as regarding their Title to election as Guides and Monitors of the human Race ?—and this will be denied them, not assuredly upon the sole ground, that those have been Sceptics and these have been firm believers in Revelation ;—but because those who believed are universally esteemed of higher authority than those who doubted or denied.

In support of the 8rd Act of “the Mystery,” the only passages adduced from Milton, to justify similar ones in “Cain,” are the reflections already alluded to ; of Adam, immediately after his fall ; B. 10, v. 817 ; those of Eve also, in the same book ; and that touching, and I will add, natural apostrophe of Adam, on the first presen-

tation of death before his eyes; so beautifully corrected, in the subsequent replies of the Arch-Angel. The passages quoted from the 11th Book, v. 607, and from the 2nd Book of the "Paradise Regained," v. 153, are adduced with a view to rescue certain passages in "Cain" from censure, but not under a charge of impiety. Yet, I cannot but think the tendency of the passages adduced from Milton, very different from that of the passages they are brought to defend; inasmuch as one, the first quoted, is simply historical of times that are to come, and illustrative of the sacred record; the other, is the characteristic counsel of one fiend to another, stigmatized before-hand, by the poet. Whereas, in "the Mystery," if the first passage is calculated "to start a spirit" in the mind of the reader, it is not of any healthy order, or such as had not need to be laid, through some effort of our own; but the extract must be carried one step further than it is presented in the quotation; and the levity of tone, in the second instance, if reprehensible, will find no countenance in the parallel passage from Milton.

I have thus endeavoured, to meet every instance in which it is attempted to derive support for "Cain," from the authority of Milton; to rescue the "Paradise Lost" from an imputed

consanguinity with "the Mystery." The principle upon which I have argued throughout is this: that the tendency of a work cannot be truly decided by the complexion of detached passages taken separately, of a particular cast, however they may abound; but by the influence which such passages are allowed to possess, when the context and general nature of the work are taken into the account. No one, I think, will contend, that viewed with this combination, the obnoxious passages collected from Milton, do not by a *designed* contrast, present those of wholesome instruction, standing off

"Like bright metal on a stilled ground,"

their value enhanced by situation.

On the other hand, I believe few will deny, that in "the Mystery," the good characters are rather employed as foils, to give effect to the bad;—that the wholesome doctrines rather serve to afford relief to the powerful opposition offered to them throughout the great body of the poem;—that the bad cause is too well calculated to acquire influence over *us* (I speak of ordinary readers) as well as over *Cain*, from the manner in which it is advocated and opposed;—the energies of the powerful mind at work is too decidedly exercised in the service of the evil cause; and

that only ordinary powers (I mean of reasoning) are exerted in vindicating the good. It will perhaps be asserted, that this defect is inherent in the subject of Cain, as a drama. I then ask again, why adopt this subject, or why treat it in a dramatic form? To pourtray the Evil Genius of Man, if such portraiture is agreeable to the temper and talents of an author, cannot surely in itself be considered matter of reproach; but in the name of Heaven, let us not have him Deified, for our recreation.

Having thus, as I conceive, laid waste, one by one, the defences of the position which stands on the title-page of this tract, I feel myself fully entitled to call for a surrender; but I would first offer some comments on collateral points, touched upon as well in his Lordship's letter from which my extract is made, as in the vindicatory letter I have been reviewing.

And first, with regard to his Lordship's letter from Pisa.

The passage from Milton, to which Lord Byron appeals from the charge brought against his poem: "Evil, be thou my good!" has already been commented upon, in considering the whole of the speech from which this passage is an extract. In Milton, Satan's reasonings include every argument with which the libeller and in-

fidel of all ages has been wont to arraign the decrees of Omnipotence; but they are *purposely* introduced by the poet, in order to produce their refutation; and thereby, eminently to serve mankind; and who shall say, that he has not triumphantly succeeded? Lord Byron's Lucifer, too, is prompted with all the characteristic energy of the poet; but who shall say, that his blasphemies are answered, or attempted to be answered? The demon is *exorcised*, but he is not *laid*, by the poet. It is in this, especially, that the difference between the *tendency* of the two works lies; and of the objectionable arguments we meet with in both.

But Lord Byron (addressing his publisher,) asks: "How, or in what manner can *you* be considered responsible for what *I* publish?"—Really, the question, coming from any other than Lord Byron, would be deemed unworthy of a serious answer; but it comes from him with an appearance of authority which it may be worth while to invalidate. Must we, then, gravely state, for Lord Byron's information, that "all this is so" because it is the law of the land; and that it *is* the law of the land, because the welfare of the State finds its account in it; and the welfare of the State, and of all it comprizes, is the object of *all* law?

But his Lordship proceeds: "What!" (he says) "when Gibbon's, Hume's, Priestley's, and Drummond's publishers, have been allowed to rest in peace for seventy years, are *you* to be singled out for a work of *fiction*, not of *history* or *argument*?" the letter was written, evidently under an impression, that proceedings were about to be instituted in a court of law, on account of the publication. Such a course has, however, not been pursued, nor does it seem to be in contemplation. But it is upon the *principle*, that I would meet his Lordship, and not as applied to any particular case; and my reply to his enquiry would be: "Yes!"—and precisely because it is a work of *fiction*, and not of *history* or *argument*. Few will read Gibbon, and writers of that class, but such persons as possess some resources of their own, upon which they can fall back, if they will, when they find the citadel of their reason and of their human instincts and feelings assailed. Few, at least, will comprehend such writings, who have not those resources. The bulk, too, of such works will render them comparatively inaccessible to any other class of readers: and the gravity of their matter will render them, at all times, little attractive to minds superficially enquiring; even where it is most fulsomely illumined by the glare of their sophistries. What I here advance is incontestably supported by fact. The works of

the last-mentioned writers are, indeed, to be met with in every well-appointed library in the kingdom; but what publisher has ever thought of doling them out in eighteen-penny numbers, for the gratification of the million? and why?—precisely because they profess to be works of *argument* and *history*, and not of alluring and spirit-stirring *fiction*.

But, the case is far otherwise with a work like Lord Byron's. As society is constituted at this day, it will be extensively relished. Why else should the copy-right have been pilfered from the presumed rightful owner; and that given to the world for 1s. 6d. for which we are ready to pay 15s. rather than be debarred the perusal of a work of Genius? Nor let it be asserted, that it is upon the renown of the writer, and not upon the attractions of the work itself, that these venders speculate; and that if they were equally befriended by the law in their piracy, they would expect to profit equally by the less exceptionable productions of the noble bard. It cannot be admitted for a moment, that an idolatrous admiration of Genius will drive customers to Benbow's shop, or that it is through the operation of such an incentive that these traffickers expect to thrive. All will read such a work, because all will be captivated by the embellishments of its poetry; many, indeed, will fail to comprehend

it, in its highest reaches; but many who have scanty or no resources of their own, will, at least find a commanding interest, and "a fastening attraction," generally pervading it;—and all this will be effected, solely because it is professedly a work of *fiction*, and not of *argument* or *history*. And, if the general tendency of such a work be admitted to be bad, then I think it cannot be denied, that it is for the benefit of the community, that the most efficacious measures should be adopted, for restraining its circulation. Instruction, both good and bad, is conveyed through the medium of fiction; and the intention of an author may often be plausibly defended, while at the same time, his work shall remain a positive nuisance to society.

High-soaring genius will not unfrequently venture upon speculations, which common prudence pronounces, and daily experience proves to be visionary; and some may hold it to be not impossible, that a man of Lord Byron's order of intellect, from the athletic constitution of his own mind, and the tried energies of his own soul, may be prevailed upon by no unworthy motives, to submit ours to a mode of discipline, that they may not have been tempered by nature to endure. There are nervous systems, which can bear to look deliberately out over the precipice, from whence another would reel, and topple down

head-long; and so it may be contended, it is with mind. It may be thought possible, (although hardly, I think, without an effort;) that the framer of such spells may be able to pass heart-whole through an ordeal, that it might be difficult for inferior natures to escape from the trammels of, without incurring some taint. The time is not long past, when the influence of such a work as is here presented to us, would scarcely have extended beyond a sphere, within which its moral operation, never salutary, may be assumed; however, to be nugatory. It is the leading characteristic of this age, that knowledge is accessible to, and coveted by all. Freedom of discussion, so precious in its principle, so mischievous in its abuse, is the ruling passion. It is the pride of the age, assuredly, but it is also its distemper, if that which is professedly administered as invigorating aliment should, from a total inaptitude of means to ends, uniformly act as an insidious poison.

Yet, it is not therefore contended, that society arrived at its riper years, should be put off with that alone, which gave delight to its day of simplicity. The "livelier play-thing" may have become its due. But there are eternal principles of practical right and wrong, which no advance in refinement can impart a title to confound. There are institutions, at which the axe of philo-

sophical reform can never be levelled with impunity.

Here too, I must beg to enter my protest against a species of defence which has been set up, both by Lord Byron himself, and by the partizans of the "Mystery," that "the characters depicted therein, are creatures of the imagination; an ideal race of beings, not to be measured by the common standard of man, &c."

The misfortune is, that they are *not* purely creatures of the imaginations; if they were, the mischief would be in part, though I think only in part allayed. But it is a most important portion of the Sacred Record, that is undertaken to be dramatized; a portion of history, the most interesting to all mankind; respecting which, the least-informed will be the most eager to know more, through whatever channel it may be derived; and if the subject is to be touched with fiction, it is of consequence, that the impression conveyed through such channel should not be calculated to mislead, and to inculcate notions of the moral government of the universe, unsanctioned assuredly by any portion of that volume, from whence alone the record is derived. An author, who should set out with a profession (which indeed Lord Byron by no means does, but rather the direct contrary;) that he is going to treat of characters purely fictitious; and who

at the same time, should choose to call those fictitious characters by the names of Cain, Adam, Lucifer, and so forth; and should, moreover, make them instrumental in bringing about an event, and developing a plot, already familiar to our most serious contemplations, would hardly, I think, stand excused to society by favor of the mask which he might adopt, for any allusions or misrepresentations calculated to prejudice society wrongfully. I do not charge Lord Byron with such a mode of proceeding; I only say, that any defence, advanced on the ground of his personages being *fictitious*, will not bear him out.

Lord Byron, in the progress of his letter from Pisa, takes credit to himself, at the expence of Milton, for not introducing the Deity upon the scene of his poem; and his Lordship has elsewhere¹ charged with *absurdity*, and even with an approach to *blasphemy*, the personification and visible agency of the Godhead, as attempted to be described by Milton. This passage is also adduced by the author of the Vindictory Letter, in support of his cause.

I cannot admit the validity of the charge, even where blame is *least* implied; for I maintain that Milton is warranted by the whole tenor of Scripture, (and particularly the more ancient,) with which his subject was immediately con-

¹ In the letter on Mr. Bowles's Pope.

nected,) in his mode of proceeding. I am equally as ready to admit, as his Lordship is to require, that the Almighty and the Son should be regarded as *One*, in this altercation.

“Who is this King of Glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle: the Lord of hosts?—he is the King of glory.” I know not what *figurative* construction his Lordship and his coadjutors may find it convenient to attach to this, and passages of similar import, with which the Sacred Volume abounds; but, whatever may be their mode of dissent, he has himself pointed out to me the mode of reply.

“Whatever interpretation the Rabbins and the Fathers may have put upon this, *I must take the words as I find them*, and reply with Bishop Watson upon similar occasions, when the Fathers were quoted to him, as Moderator in the schools of Cambridge: ‘Behold the Book!’—holding up the Scripture.”—I echo his Lordship’s words; and employ them, I presume, to better purpose, and I trust with better effect, in reply to the Sophist and the Infidel. The truth is, Milton was of too sound, and too independent a mind, to suffer his Metaphysics to prevail against his religious faith; and there, where his human reason ceased to be a sane guide, he did not choose to be led captive by it, into *that Limbo*, of which he has presented us with

so lively an anticipation in the third Book of his Poem: he did not choose to walk hood-winked by it, from the light which he possessed independent of it.

Much may indeed be said, with respect to the course adopted by Milton, in the subject which he was treating; as also with regard to his battle of the Angels, so much commented upon. But I believe it is universally admitted, and by none more explicitly than by the noble bard himself, that what Milton undertook, he achieved as none other could achieve. This concession obtained, it becomes a question, whether Milton feeling the competency of his own mighty powers to achieve *so much*, did not knowingly and deliberately compound for the censure he might incur, on the score of discretion. After all, this is a question more of a *criticism* than of a *moral* nature; more affecting his work as a *composition*; than as a piece of *instruction*. For I cannot think, that in a divine poem, a delineation of the Deity, however rash the attempt may be, and however complete the failure, can be censured on the score of irreverence; entered upon, at least, as Milton has entered upon it, with the whole panoply of Scripture girded round him.

If these who have not scrupled to submit their delineations of the Supreme Being in action, equally to the gaze of the most heedless as of the

most subdued beholders, have escaped the censure of the pious, while they have incurred that of the critical; proving thereby, how inadequate the mightiest genius of man has been to satisfy the mind through the medium of sense, on this first of subjects:—surely, he who has but shadowed forth the Divine Presence for the *intellectual* gaze, in our moments of rapt and secluded meditation, need hardly plead for acquittal from a charge of impiety, with whatever measure of justice it may be denied him on the score of discretion.

It is *not* in inadequately representing the Divinity, but in speciously *mis*-representing his ordinances, that the profanation virtually consists;—and it is but a semblance of decorum, at best, that is made merit of; if indeed it be not rather a mockery altogether: where the *formal* offence is fastidiously avoided, and that which is *virtual*, is so ill refrained from.

I do not undertake to consider how far Lord Byron might be bound (since the demon was to be introduced) to produce, in his own poem, an equivalent, at least, of a fairer character. I confess that, for one, I should have hailed such a presence very heartily, on more than one occasion, introduced as his Lordship's genius might have devised. Even a Chorus, the never-failing interpreter of the ancient mysteries, however in-

effective as an *agent*, would have been readily hearkened to, as a *monitor*. Any infraction of the *Unities* would have been tolerated; had it's tendency been, to mitigate the all-pervading outrage upon right feeling and sound reason. But, perhaps, *dramatic effect* in its *modern* sense must have been impaired by such a modification.

I turn now from his Lordship's letter, to offer a few observations suggested by the concluding pages of the vindicatory letter which I began with considering.

The author has thought proper to draw our attention to the Appendix to the "Two Foscari," originally printed in the same volume with the "Mystery;" and he is liberal in his approbation of the sentiments that Appendix conveys. It is partly exculpatory; partly prophetic of what we must, nevertheless, all hope may yet be averted; namely, a revolution in this land;—it is partly encouraging (if the reasoning be thought valid) to those who would not wish to see the mass of the human mind darkened through irreligion and a debasing philosophy. But I confess, I think acrimonious retort and invective, (how justly provoked, I shall not pretend to determine), forms its leading characteristic. But there is a statement of Lord Byron's in this Appendix, upon which I shall venture a few remarks. Lord Byron

asserts, that Voltaire and Diderot, and their coadjutors and disciples of the Encyclopedic and Atheistical schools, had little or no influence in bringing about the French Revolution; "for" (says he) "they were in exile, or in the bastille, or otherwise persecuted by a bigoted and tyrannical government."—True; they *were* persecuted; (if I am bound to adopt an expression oftenest in the mouths of those with whom a belief in all unbelief seems to be the only creed exempt from a charge of bigotry; and a contempt for all authority, the only admitted test of independence of soul;)—they were, according to this vocabulary, *persecuted*; and it was because the baneful effects of their doctrines and example was extensively felt, that they were so. I pretend not here to enquire, whether a French Revolution was, or was not inevitable; whether France might have arrived at what she is to-day without such a one as we have witnessed; or what were the immediate causes which produced that convulsion. But, that France was *demoralized* before she was *revolutionized*; and that it was chiefly through the influence of the corrupt literati and soi-disant philosophers of the day, that she became so, is I believe a truth, that few besides his Lordship of the present day, will be ready to contest.

That religion and law have risen more pure,

out of the revolutionary chaos, makes nothing against my argument. If the ravage of Europe for twenty years, with a prospect of further, in his Lordship's speculation, be mainly attributable to the exertions of gifted but mischievous men, acting upon the frame of society, rendered from a complication of causes, highly susceptible of infection;—however gratifying it may be to the metaphysical seer, to triumph in prospect over the ill success of our exertions, it is worth the risk of failure, to endeavour to restrain, or in the language of the day, to *persecute*, in the quarter from whence the mischief is most threatening.

Lord Byron's letter to Mr. Bowles is appealed to by the author of the Vindictory Letter; and an argument is deduced from the maxims therein laid down, in support of the benevolence of purpose by which his Lordship's pen is guided. I have all along abstained from attributing *motives*; but, when arguments are thus thrust upon us, in vindication of what we have undertaken to censure; they must either be met, or subscribed to. It happens unfavourably for this argument, that in the brilliant catalogue of his Lordship's productions, the letter appealed to stands, in point of chronological order, between the first and second remittances of Don Juan; and if arguments must be deduced from data which are before us,

I appeal from his Lordship's professions in the letter to his practice in the poem. Lord Byron's works are acts, and most efficient ones. No writer of the present day (the distinguished individual to whom this "Mystery" is so unaccountably inscribed, alone excepted;) no writer of the day fills so large a field, in the public eye. No author of any day, (the French revolutionary ones, perhaps alone excepted,) has done more to influence taste, and direct opinions by his writings. When, therefore, I see a most libertine poem, succeeded by a most exemplary letter, in point of morality, if not of criticism; and this again followed by a second series of that libertine poem, with a promise of many more;—and all this in very rapid succession;—I cannot but think that the system of deducing arguments from what is before us, had better be abandoned, where a defence is to be set up. For this versatility must be imputed, either to vacillation of principle, or insincerity of profession. In either case, the value of the testimony is painfully depreciated.

Be it remembered too, that before the continuation of Don Juan transpired, the first portion of the work, disowned wherever reputation could suffer, was hawked about to raise the funds of every petty dealer, and bankrupt in character;

and his Lordship had full opportunity of witnessing to what insults his muse in her holiday attire was liable. Yet three cantos succeeded; and I believe no one doubts, that the work is at this moment in progress. The degradation, therefore, we must presume, is courted.

I have now brought to a close these remarks, which have been induced by a comparison of the impieties of "Cain" with those found in the *Paradise Lost*. The controversy I have felt to be important; the more so, since the author of the *Vindictory Letter*, with whom I am at variance, expresses an earnest hope, "that he shall be enabled to enlist the *ordinary reader* in his train; and to secure this poem a place amongst the admitted sources of *instruction* and mental gratification." My observations have also been addressed, and indeed, *exclusively* to the ordinary reader: to the wary and discriminating, they profess to reveal nothing. But I have thought, that with the former class, an exposition of this nature might be of effect in diminishing the influence of a work, which, notwithstanding it's many and gross incongruities; (and happily, these never fail to abound, where similar speculations are pursued;)—notwithstanding it's manifest perversion of mysterious character, whose features had been already graven for our instruction, (so far as delineation

seemed lawful,) upon a monument which is at once the glory of England and the wonder of the Universe ; — notwithstanding the unauthorized measure of reproach which it throws upon human character in it's first fallings-off; and that revolting imprecation from the lips of Eve, which must incur, at least, the charge of bad taste : — is unquestionably an effort of powerful genius; and qualified, in it's operation, to prove a plague of the first order let loose upon society.

But, if it be the result of this enquiry, to restore candid, but too confiding minds, to an opinion from which they may have been diverted by a cursory perusal of the defence which I have been reviewing, or similar attempts at vindication, need I to apologize for engaging in it? — When silence too has been maintained, in quarters, from whence indignant reproof might have been expected to “ flash frequent and continuous?” Are “ the illustrious dead to be thus approached,” and none to lend a voice to the inscription on the marble, and exclaim : “ *Stator : — Heroëm calcas !*” — We are certainly not yet reduced to the necessity of defending Milton from a charge of blasphemy ; — I say *not yet*, be-

¹ “ Is this the frame of mind and of memory with which the illustrious dead are to be approached?” — Lord Byron, of Pope, in his letter on Bowles.

² The inscription over the Grave of Merci, on the field of Nordlingen, 1645. Desormeaux.

cause Locke has been appealed to oracularly, by the materialists and atomists of yesterday, for support:—and the proceeding which has given occasion to this tract, looks very like the fore-runner of an inauguration to the full as profane of Milton to-day. We know not what may be threatening us, of a similar complexion with “Cain,” from his Lordship’s pen; and is this first attempt at bringing the most exalted poem in theme, (and to many a mind in execution,) that the world holds, to the rescue of what is fully condemned as deplorably pernicious, to be tacitly endured? Is the Paradise Lost to be touched with an unhallowed, or an irreverent, or an indiscreet hand, and its glorified page be reduced to make common cause with that of dark-woven fallacy and audacious hypothesis, as often as their own artificial supports fail them; and must no one venture to protest against the profanation? I trust I am not proceeding discourteously, but really, the provocation is enough to start a spirit in a sheep-fold. It is like calling upon the thunder of Jove to acknowledge a common original with the mockeries of Salmoneus. In a question involving the moral merits of “Cain,” I should have expected, that the mention of Milton’s name would have been as studiously guarded against by the defendant party, as the introduction of a

torch, where the fire-damp is generated. But it has been invoked!—and this is one of the many anomalies, and not the least incomprehensible, of this Age of Reason.

One only ground, in extenuation at least, if not in defence, of this work of “Cain” remains to be taken. It may be thought by the abundantly indulgent, and unwearingly hopeful, that these remarks are premature; and that their harshness would be rendered fully apparent, should a direct antidote to the poison, admitted to be contained in the work, be ever offered to the world.

To this I would reply, in the first instance, with one of the most mischievous passages of the poem, (as it stands:)

“Strange good, that must arise from evil
 “It’s deadly opposite.” Act. 2. Sc. 2.

But the thing is impossible. Mighty magician as he is, Lord Byron has it not, nor ever will have it in his power, to furnish an antidote. No doubt, his genius might serve him to achieve great things (perhaps as great) in the cause of Heaven and man, as he has achieved, purposely or not, in the cause of another; and the materials are, happily, not wanting. But his success would supply no antidote to the mischief he has sown. Those who are taught to believe, that the fruit of the tree of knowledge has been offered to them with

one hand, will not care to pluck of the fruit of ignorance, as it will be represented to them, however temptingly out-held with the other. The poison is greedily imbibed by all: the antidote is left for those who need it not. There will be no cheap sale of such an antidote; no piracy. There would not be, if the spirit of the law encouraged it. Lord Byron has evinced too intimate an acquaintance with the infirmities of our nature, in almost every page of his works, to dispute this. His baneful production is spread over the face of the land, like the Upas: his antidote (if it ever come) will be precious indeed, but of tardy growth, and its shelter scanty, like the olive.

But what reason have we to conjecture, that such an attempt is ever likely to be made?—what should prompt us to expect it?—retrospect? impossible.—With retrospect for an indicator, who did not shudder when he heard, that Lord Byron was busied upon the subject of Cain? I thought I saw the germ from whence the work should spring, in his “Prometheus,” and poems of that complexion. I could not dream of the dark sublimities which his powerful imagination was to throw round it; but, did I err in anticipating its tenour?—What ground have we for conjecturing that this poem may only form part

of a mighty plan "altâ mente repostum," which is as yet but imperfectly divulged? What reason have we not rather, for presuming it to form part of a plan already too signally manifested, and thus fast approaching to maturity?

Yet, is it not strange, that so instinctively soaring a mind as this has proved itself to be, in almost every thing that it has undertaken, should tame itself down by precipitate decline, to become—(must I say it?) if not wilfully, most effectually, a pander to the most abject and worthless of mankind? If this be indeed a victory, it is surely the most inglorious victory that ever was achieved. There is not an estimable or high-minded individual in the kingdom, who does not recoil from the perusal of the work, while he is lost in admiration of the gifts which he sees abused. There is not a profligate clog on the community, who does not seek a stimulus to his venom, in the pages of scepticism and misanthropy; insensible, it may be, as the dead, to all that half redeems it in the eye of enthusiasm.—Strange predicament for a man of genius;—canonized in the minds of those whom he must in heart despise:—protested against, nay denounced, by those who can most worthily appreciate the perfections in which he glories. And he seems to be unconscious of it!

—or still more strange, if conscious, insensible to it!

“ ’tis so strange,

“ That tho’ the truth of it stands off as gross

“ As black from white, my eye will scarcely see it.”

What can be the inducement? The vitiated taste of the age?—We might justly stop to enquire, if this were admitted to be the fact, who has mainly contributed to render it so? But the irreproachable yet unrivalled career of him, to whom this “Mystery” has been addressed, affords the best refutation of such a charge, brought against the age. But supposing it valid, what then? A parallel with Milton has been provoked; let us pursue it. Milton, too, lived in an age of prurient taste and corrupt habits. “*Among* them, but not *of* them¹, he did not stoop to pamper the appetites of those in the midst of whom he lived. “*Of* them,” on the contrary, though not “*among* them,” Lord Byron seems studious of supplying the cravings of the most exigent of his libertine countrymen; and truly, he diversifies their entertainment with marvellous resource.

Will it be said, that political causes had a share

¹ “I stood among them, but not of them.”

in directing Milton's poetical pursuits?—in abstracting him, at least, from the beaten path of cotemporary genius?—Such apologists (by implication) of Lord Byron, I refer to numerous passages in his prose works, but particularly to that at p. 62, vol. i. The reference is extremely apposite.

Higher agencies, assuredly, were in force with Milton than mere political ones, whether stimulant or restrictive. If the love of fame should be found to have acted in Milton, as an incentive to his poetical powers, it was at least, of no ignominious order: But he struck his harp for mankind; and his only adequate reward, after the consciousness of having done so, was in anticipating the judgment of posterity, on what he should leave behind him. “He accepted the paltry pittance” (for his *Paradise Lost*), “although he well knew that immortality was its price; and posterity has paid it!”

But I am aware, that my purpose, in writing these pages, has long since been accomplished. It was not, I repeat it, to indulge in wanton diatribe against the character and pursuits of Lord Byron, that I entered upon this discussion; still

¹ Lord Camden's Speech in allusion to Milton, in the House of Lords, on the appeal concerning literary property.

less was it, to luxuriate in idle panegyric upon the perfections of Milton. But it was, to resent what I shall not cease to consider a most unjustifiable assault upon public feeling:—not less than an attempt to force a contract of unnatural alliance, upon ordinary minds, between a title so august as that of “Paradise Lost,” and one so deservedly stigmatized as that of “Cain, a Mystery.” Upon such an appeal, I hold it to be the privilege of every one who has a voice, however limited in its compass, to prefer his “yea” or “nay;” and I only aspire to the free exercise of this privilege, when, “in the name of Public Safety, I forbid the banns!” My declared, and only meditated design throughout, has been, to batter down the defences, and to enter the strong hold of this most injurious comparison. No stratagem have I called in aid, to effect this purpose:—the occasion did not seem to need it.—But I *have* succeeded, I feel well assured; and I now plant the standard of the PARADISE LOST upon the neck of CAIN, and give it to the wind:—To the rescue!—who shall cry?—

April, 1822.

THE END.

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