

**Puritanism in  
History and Literature**

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## FOREWORD.

The following pages have been taken from notes prepared to correct the false impression of English history and literature given in Long's *History of English Literature* (*Ginn & Co.*). Dr. Long is a fair example of a school that either through ignorance or prejudice still persists in misrepresenting the Church and its influence while extolling the "advancement" of which present-day Modernism is the logical result. The reason for selecting this particular epoch at this time, will be evident to anyone who has observed the rather premature laudations of Puritanism that have already appeared to prepare us for the celebration that is to commemorate the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth. True, some writers have grown very eloquent in showing the utter dissimilarity between Pilgrims and Puritans, but when their contentions have been examined it appears that the difference between them is mainly this,—the Pilgrims were itinerant Puritans and the Puritans were stationary Pilgrims. The material given in so brief a space as these few pages is not, of course, intended to do more than suggest to students of history and literature a line of thought and reading that will put them on their guard against the falsely eulogistic appreciations of Puritanism and similar movements while indicating the true source of much that is glibly attributed to the influence of Puritanism and other Protestant forces.



## The Puritan Age.

Before proceeding to a consideration of the Puritan Age, we shall first attempt to show what Puritanism was. That is not a simple task even when one is not constrained to be brief, for it was a political as well as a religious movement. However, few will deny that which the Puritans themselves insisted upon so often, namely, that they were attracted to the reforms advocated by Calvin and Fox rather than to those urged by Henry VIII. and his successors. "They were, first of all, Protestants in their religion and Calvinists in their theology." (*Byington.*) However, instances are not wanting in which representative Puritans, especially in the days of their inception, insisted that they differed from their dissenting Anglican brethren only in respect to the *form* of worship. "The contest was not, at that time, in respect to the doctrines of the Church, nor in respect to the episcopal form of government. It related to forms and ceremonies and vestments." (*Byington, The Puritan in England and New England, p. 14.*)

It is impossible to discuss at length the doctrine of predestination with which the Puritans identified themselves. However, we may say in passing that if they really believed that some of their number were going to hell and others to heaven independently of the sort of lives they led, it is difficult to understand why they did not conform to the exactions demanded of them. Cer-

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tainly being true to their conscience did them no good in this life and in the light of predestination, it could do them no good in the life to come.

The chief of the dictates of a Puritan conscience was that only "Scripture and conscience" were necessary for salvation. This tenet of their belief was rather embarrassing in its application, for, "nearly every foolish and terrible thing which Puritans did was the result of their erroneous conception of the Bible. . . . It was only about forty years ago that Puritan preachers all over the South and some of them in the North defended slavery as a divine institution, proving it from the Scriptures by citing the fact that God had pronounced a curse on Ham." (*Jefferson, p. 137.*) This example taken from a sermon delivered by a staunch admirer of Puritanism, is a fair instance of the absurdities to which private interpretation led.

IN giving predestination, private interpretation of the Bible and an attempt to "purify" the ceremonies and ritual of the Church, as the characteristics of Puritanism and Puritans, I am not unaware of the many virtues attributed to them by their eulogists. However, it is as true of Puritanism as it is of every other movement that has attempted to reform the Church from without, that whatever is good and noble in them is but the relic of their former Catholicism. Charles E. Jefferson, in his "Forefathers' Day Sermons" (*p. 160*) tells us that "the dominating ideas of Puritan theology are these: the sovereignty of God, . . . the unworthiness of man, . . . the greatness of the soul." One has but to recall the lessons of his penny catechism to know that these are

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among the dominating ideas of Catholic theology and that they, like all else that was of any moral worth in Puritanism, came from the Catholic Church,—the guardian of faith and morality during the centuries that preceded the Puritan movement as well as during the years that succeeded it. Again, Mr. Jefferson informs us that Puritans “believed in morality in public life and private life, they believed that only the pure in heart shall see God. They believed in education. . . . They believed in the home. . . . They believed in liberty.” It is indeed true that some Puritans held these beliefs, but were they and the world after them indebted to Puritanism for these tenets that had been part of the Church’s doctrine from the beginning? Is it not rather true that every one of these so-called Puritan beliefs came directly from the Church? Even the most enthusiastic admirer of Puritanism will hardly claim that the masterly spirit of the encyclicals of Leo XIII. was the result of that movement. Yet, a single paragraph from his letter “*Inscrutabili*” will show how keen was his appreciation of the necessity of educating youth and preserving the integrity of the Christian family.

Now the training of youth most conducive to the defence of true faith and religion and to the preservation of morality must find its beginning from an early stage within the circle of home life; and this family training, sadly undermined in these our times, cannot possibly be restored to its due dignity, save by those laws under which it was established in the Church by her Divine Founder Himself. Our Lord Jesus Christ, by raising to the dignity of a Sacrament the contract of matrimony, in which He would have His own union with the Church typified, not only made the marriage-tie more holy, but in addition provided efficacious

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sources of aid for parents and children alike, so that, by the discharge of their duties one to another, they might with greater ease attain to happiness both in time and eternity. But when impious laws, setting at naught the sanctity of this Sacrament, put it on the same footing with mere civil contracts, the lamentable result followed. that, outraging the dignity of Christian matrimony, citizens made use of legalized concubinage in place of marriage; husband and wife neglected their bounden duty to each other; children refused obedience and reverence to their parents; the bonds of domestic love were loosened; and, alas! the worst scandal of all and the most ruinous to public morality, very frequently an unholy passion opened the door to disastrous and fatal separations. These most unhappy and painful consequences, Venerable Brothers, cannot fail to arouse your zeal and move you constantly and earnestly to warn the faithful committed to your charge, to listen with docility to your teaching regarding the holiness of Christian marriage, and to obey the laws by which the Church controls the duties of married people and of their offspring. (*The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII., Benzinger Bros., p. 17.*)

Nor did Pope Leo's great heart and mind fail to grasp the true meaning of that other "Puritan belief," liberty. In his encyclical "*Rerum Novarum*" he shows clearly how alone real liberty can be assured in our day to the two great classes now so bitterly opposed to each other.

The great mistake made in regard to the matter now under consideration is to take up with the notion that class is naturally hostile to class, and that the wealthy and the workmen are intended by nature to live in mutual conflict. So irrational and so false is this view, that the direct contrary is the truth. Just as the symmetry of the human frame is the resultant of the disposition of the bodily members, so in a State it is ordained by nature that these two



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classes should dwell in harmony and agreement, and should, as it were, groove into one another, so as to maintain the balance of the body politic. Each needs the other: Capital cannot do without labor, nor labor without capital. Mutual agreement results in pleasantness of life and the beauty of good order; while perpetual conflict necessarily produces confusion and savage barbarity. Now, in preventing such strife as this, and in uprooting it, the efficiency of Christian institutions is marvelous and manifold. First of all there is no intermediary more powerful than religion (whereof the Church is the interpreter and guardian) in drawing the rich, and the poor bread-winners together, by reminding each class of its duties to the other, and especially of the obligations of justice. Thus religion teaches the laboring man and the artisan to carry out honestly and fairly all equitable agreements freely entered into; never to injure the property, nor to outrage the person, of an employer; never to resort to violence in defending their own cause, nor to engage in riot or disorder; and to have nothing to do with men of evil principles, who work upon the people with artful promises, and excite foolish hopes which usually end in useless regrets, followed by insolvency. Religion teaches the wealthy owner and employer that their work-people are not to be accounted their bondsmen; that in every man they must respect his dignity and worth as a man and as a Christian; that labor is not a thing to be ashamed of, if we lend ear to right reason and Christian philosophy, but is an honorable calling, enabling a man to sustain his life in a way upright and creditable; and it is shameful and inhuman to treat men like chattels to make money by, or to look upon them merely as so much muscle or physical power. Again, therefore, the Church teaches that, as religion and things spiritual and mental are among the workingman's main concerns, the employer is bound to see that the worker has time for his religious duties; that he be not exposed to corrupting influences and dangerous occasions; and that he be not led away to neglect his home and family, or to squander his earnings. Furthermore, the employer must never tax his work-people be-

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yond their strength, or employ them in work unsuited to their sex or age. His great and principle duty is to give everyone a fair wage. Doubtless, before deciding whether wages are adequate, many things have to be considered; but wealthy owners and all masters of labor should be mindful of this, that to exercise pressure upon the indigent and the destitute for the sake of gain, and to gather one's profit out of the need of another is condemned by all laws, human and Divine. To defraud any one of wages that are his due is a crime that cries to the avenging anger of Heaven. *Behold, the hire of the laborers . . . which by fraud hath been kept back by you, crieth aloud; and the cry of them hath entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.* (St. James v. 4.) Lastly the rich must religiously refrain from cutting down the workmen's earnings, whether by force, by fraud, or by usurious dealing; and with all the greater reason because the laboring man is, as a rule, weak and unprotected, and because his slender means should in proportion to their scantiness be accounted sacred. (*Encyclical Letters*, pp. 218-220.)

The quotations just given and similar ones from Catholic sources will serve well during the Pilgrim celebration to help us keep clearly in mind just how much of the good in the Puritan movement was due to Puritanism and how much was the result of its fragmentary Catholicism.

Many writers tell us that Puritans stood for religious toleration and Dr. Long speaks of "the supreme Puritan principle, the liberty of the individual soul before God." (p. 205.) Yet we know that a strictly Puritan government in Massachusetts banished Quakers for following their consciences and relying only on "God and the inner light." If these Quakers returned to the sacred precincts of Massachusetts they were whipped for their first

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offence; had their ears cut off for the second offence; and if they persisted and returned a third time, they were hanged.

It is not easy to realize this intolerance and at the same time to appreciate "the heroic spirit of the American colonists who left home for a wilderness in order to give the new ideal of a free Church in a free state its practical demonstration." (*Long, p. 189.*) From the facts that Puritans held the doctrine of private interpretation of Scripture and at the same time punished those whose interpretation did not agree with their own, we see that they added the element of inconsistency that was lacking whenever Catholics persecuted those who disagreed with them. "If Catholic persecution of heretics is condemned as inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel, on the other hand, there was a certain logic in it. For heresy to the Catholic was objectively at least a revolt against the revelation of Christ as authoritatively and unquestionably made known through the Church and what was objectively a crime could consistently be treated as a crime and punished accordingly. But the Protestant could claim no such support of logic. If the Bible as interpreted by the individual was the sole rule of faith there could be no such thing as heresy, since each man's mind, being a law to itself, owed responsibility to God alone. Hence arose an additional element of faulty logic in Protestant persecutions from which Catholic persecutions are free." (*E. J. Hull, S.J., Truth, for May '19.*)

It is impossible to appreciate all that the Puritans destroyed, without saying a word about the "superstitious ritual and Romish idolatry" from which they "purified" the Church of their day. They abolished the Church

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calendar and refused to observe its feasts; they removed statues because they claimed that people worshiped them; they forbade music in church because it distracted them; they whitewashed cathedrals to make them simpler—and they succeeded. In other words, they thought that certain forms of worship were being abused in the Church, so they destroyed them altogether. It would be just as sensible to forbid a child to speak because he used excessive language, instead of instructing him to speak more temperately.

Negligence in some of the matters to which Puritans objected, has not escaped Church authorities even in our own day, but they have legislated against the abuse without prohibiting the use. For instance, when Pius X. so justly censured the operatic compositions that were stifling rather than helping devotion at Mass, he did not forbid the use of so natural a help to devotion as music, but he issued his "*Motu Proprio*" saying:

"Sacred music should possess in the highest degree the qualities proper to the liturgy. It must be holy, and must therefore exclude all worldliness. . . . Care must be taken that musical compositions . . . contain nothing worldly, be free from reminiscences of theatrical motifs, and be not fashioned after the manner of secular pieces."

Again, when this same saintly pontiff noticed that the feasts of God's sainted creatures were tending to obscure the devotion and honor due to God alone, he did not abolish all feasts in the Church, but arranged the Calendar so that none of the feasts of His creatures could supplant the commemoration of God's own works and deeds. Again, when Pius learned that many were

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ignorant of the meaning of much of the "form" of Catholic worship, he did not abolish all form, but urged Pastors to teach the beauty of its symbolism to their people. When this same successor of St. Peter saw the widespread growth of immorality, he did not subject our Faith to a process of merely human simplification so as to bring it down to the level of those who were living in sin, but he tried rather to uplift all by bringing them into closer contact with the living source of man's strength that was denied by Puritans and their followers,—Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. On a more recent occasion, our present Pope forbade certain of our modern dances because they were dangerous to morality, but he did not forbid such innocent recreation as the may-pole. When Leo XIII. noted the trend of thought in his day and the growing manifestation of atheism, agnosticism, Modernism and a hundred other schools of thought, he did not set himself to the impossible task of formulating a new system that would reconcile all of them, but he fearlessly urged a return to Scholasticism and especially to St. Thomas, the master-mind of the "Dark Ages." The growing unrest in domestic and political life did not induce this same pope to attempt a compromise at the sacrifice of principle. To combat the growing evil of divorce, he urged the sanctity and inviolability of Christian marriage in his encyclical "*Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*," and in his scholarly exposition of the relation between capital and labor he set forth in a profoundly erudite way, the Christian principles according to which alone, this very involved difficulty can be solved.

If we were to believe such men as Dr. Long, we should think that reforms in Church discipline have

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always resulted in separation from the Church. Even the few instances we have just cited are sufficient to prove that the same reforms as the Puritans vainly tried to bring about have frequently been accomplished with success by Catholic prelates without anything of the unreasonable severity that characterized Puritanism. In justice to Protestant writers, however, we must say that many of them have not failed to grasp the fact that there have been genuine reforms within the Church. Dr. Walsh in "The Century of Columbus" quotes Professor Briggs of the Union Theological Seminary as saying:

There were other and in some respects greater reformers in the sixteenth century than the more popular heroes Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. Sir Thomas More, the greatest jurist of his time, Lord Chancellor of England, a chief leader of reform before Cranmer, resigned his exalted position and went to the block rather than recognize the supremacy of the King in ecclesiastical affairs; a true knight, a martyr to the separation of civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Erasmus, the greatest scholar of his age, regarded by many as the real father of the Reformation, the teacher of the Swiss reformers, was unwilling to submerge learning and morals in an ocean of human blood. He urged reformation, not revolution. He has been crucified for centuries in popular Protestant opinion as a political time-server, but undoubtedly he was the most comprehensive reformer of them all.

John Von Staupitz, doctor of theology, and Vicar General of the German Augustinians, the teacher of Luther and his counselor in the early stages of his reform, a man without a stain and above reproach, a saint in the common estimation of Catholic and Protestant alike, the best exponent of the piety of his age, was an apostle of holy love and good works, which he would not sacrifice in the interests of the Protestant dogma of justification by faith alone.

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These three immortals who did not separate themselves from the Catholic Church, who remained in the Church to patiently carry on the work of reform therein—these three were the irenic spirits, the heroic representatives of all that was truly Catholic, the beacons of the greater reformation that was impending.

But we are wandering a little from the direct consideration of Puritanism. We have said that it was a political as well as a religious movement. If, however, in seeking to know precisely what it was that Puritanism stood for in matters of State, we go to an author such as Dr. Long, we shall not be much enlightened, for on one page we read, "Cromwell stood like a rock for religious tolerance" (*p. 186*) and on the next page we are told, "In the triumph of Puritanism under Cromwell severe laws were passed, many simple pleasures were forbidden, and an austere standard of living *was forced upon an unwilling people.*" And this is Cromwell, to whom, Dr. Long states, "humanity owes most for its emancipation from the tyranny of kings and prelates." (*207.*) It would not seem that the people in question was very much emancipated in the true sense of the word. Rather, from Dr. Long's own words, there was merely a transfer of tyranny from kings and prelates to Cromwell himself. A just appreciation of this Cromwellian emancipation may be had from such passages as the following from Cunningham, an accepted authority on the history of English industry:

With the fall of Stafford, the steady prosecution of the scheme for carrying on the planting of Ireland came to an end: the rebellion of 1641 and the reconquest by Cromwell interrupted all the industrial life that was beginning to

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appear; and the scheme for the settlement which commended itself to the wisdom of Parliament was different in kind from that which had been adopted by James and Charles.

It was devised by Parliament chiefly as a means of getting rid of that pressing difficulty, the victorious army, to which such large arrears of pay were now due; this could be most easily done by giving them allotments of land as "servitors" in Ireland; and for this purpose a great project of transplantation was carried out. All who had not shown constant good faith to Parliament were to be forced to migrate from their lands to new possessions in Connaught, where they could be hedged in by the rivers and a few forts and this transplantation was to apply to Englishmen who had recently settled as well as to the men who had Irish blood in their veins; the grandson of Edmund Spenser suffered the confiscation of the estates which had descended to him and failed in his plea for exemption. The project was devised so as to produce the greatest possible shock to property; laborers were allowed to remain, that they might till and herd for those to whom the lands were newly assigned, but the old proprietors were to go; and this ukase applied not only to land owners but to the citizens of Waterford, Kilkenny and Galway. The inhabitants of these towns were English in every respect, but they had not shown active sympathy in the proceedings of the Puritan Parliament and hence the towns were cleared of English merchants and artisans; some continued to pick up a miserable existence in the neighborhood, and some were driven beyond the seas to Ostend, S. Malo and Nantes; but the deserted towns did not attract new settlers either from among foreign Protestants or from the American plantations. The clearing of the country was carried out ruthlessly; the thousands of women, girls and boys were sent as slaves to Barbados and Jamaica. A careful survey of the districts thus evacuated was made by Petty; but the re-peopling was not easily effected and at the time of the restoration the country was little better than a wilderness. No social reconstruction of any sort had been effected, but



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the claims of the Cromwellian assignees presented a formidable barrier against any attempt to replace the former inhabitants in their homes. The "innocents" and "ensigns" who had been dispossessed were not restored, and gradually sank into utter misery as outcasts who still hung about the neighbourhood of the lands of which they and their fathers had been deprived. (*Cunningham, The Growth of English Industry and Commerce, pp. 137-139.*)

It is very true that slavery in Cromwell's day was not considered so great a wrong as it is now. But when we are told "The Puritan fought for liberty and justice, he overthrew despotism and made a man's life and property safe from the tyranny of rulers," (*Long, p. 187*) we can hardly be blamed if we find it difficult to reconcile the statement with historical facts such as the one reviewed in the preceding and following quotations:

The great blot upon all the European nations at this time was their recklessness in regard to the traffic in slaves. Individuals in many countries raised their voices against it, but there is no one Christian nation which can afford to condemn another in this matter; still there was a special callousness in the development of slavery during Puritan ascendancy. There was a popular prejudice against subjecting Christians to slavery or selling them into foreign parts, but Cromwell did not draw any such distinctions. Not only did his agents systematically capture Irish youths and girls for export to the West Indies, all of the garrison who were not killed in the Dreggheda massacre were shipped as slaves to Barbados and a most touching petition has been preserved of seventy Englishmen who had been shipped to the West Indies from Plymouth and sold for "1550 pound weight of sugar a piece, more or less." It is unnecessary to dwell on the tale of cruelty, but it is not unnecessary to call attention to the source of many of the worst evils of our modern English civilization. Neither the per-

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sonal character nor the political success of the Puritans need lead us to ignore their baleful influence on society. (*Cunningham, p. 109.*)

The tyranny practised under Cromwell was not excluded from England itself. An excellent idea of his "rule by the people" may be had from the following excerpt:

Cromwell had plunged into depths of discredit. He had exhibited himself to his subjects, to Parliament, and to the army as a "double minded man"; and they knew that a "double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." He had approved himself to be a great dissembler; and they may have anticipated Mr. Morley in his opinion, that "it is the worst sort of politicians that are the great dissemblers." The hundred officers had heard him, when he charged against them that they "would have Major-Generals," justify their demand and his obedience, by attributing the institution of the Major-Generals to the "late general insurrections"; although they knew that it was his "privity and allowance," that they had brought about those insurrections. He rejoiced before Parliament over "the erection of the Major-Generals"; he had declared that they had done more "towards discountenancing vice and settling religion than anything done these 100 years"; and then, although the Major-Generals had discharged their duties in an altogether decent fashion during about a year and a half, he joined with Parliament in the rejection of their bill; thus showing his concurrence in the arguments on which it was opposed, namely that the provisions of the bill were contrary to the principles of common justice and fair dealing between man and man. Then he turned round once more, and sided with the men who sought to establish their sway by legislation based on injustice; and he placed England once more under the yoke of the Army.

His shifty ways pursued after him. Though his second

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Protectorship was founded on a statute; though he ruled no longer as nominee of the army, but had received his authority from Parliament; of what account was a ruler called to power by three voices? The supremacy of the sword was as supreme as ever; and as a sign of the time it may be noticed that, according to the opinion of his subjects, Cromwell sought to propitiate the army men by enabling them "to lord it over us" by seating in his House of Lords a group, about fourteen in number, of generals, lieutenant-generals, and major-generals who commanded "22 or 23 regiments, divers garrisons, and the Tower of London."

The conditions under which Cromwell held the Protectorate compelled him to pile deception upon deception, the crowning deception, though in effect it uncrowned him, being that national fraud the insurrection of March 1655. To hinder his subjects from perceiving that he ruled them not in their behalf, but as drudge of the army, he sought to "acquire merit" by exhibiting himself as the savior of society. To use the words of two of his subjects, he conjured up "at pleasure some terrible apparition of agitators, levelers or such like, who . . . shall affright the people to fly to him for refuge"; and he "provided for his security by making the most of all plots and designs whatever."

The disgrace, contempt and misery that Oliver Cromwell brought upon himself by his enslavement to the army may seem impossible to those who have admired the bright, firm face lighted up with the flush of victory, and the flash of strong resolve, as revealed by Cooper's miniature. But, on the other hand, they should recall to mind the likeness of the Protector by the sculptor Bernini. The features of Cromwell, as impressed upon the marble, though the bust is shaped upon the lines of Cooper's miniature, quiver with impotent rage, suspicion and alarm, with emotions that befitted Samson in bonds, striving to loose himself in vain.

The delineation also of the Protector's features by the brush and the chisel reveals an underlying coarseness of aspect. The nature of the man was thus far truthfully portrayed. Commanding as was his personality, his intellect was of a commonplace texture. He was a martial,

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not an all-round genius. He conquered men, scolded men, drove them to and fro, but to lead them upwards was beyond his power. Raised as he was head and shoulders above his fellows, his judgment, his view of life was not on a higher level. He was thoroughly a soldier among soldiers. Hence his strength and his weakness. (*Sir Reginald Palgrave, "Oliver Cromwell the Protector," pp. 86-90.*)

There is another highly idealized Puritan portrait in Dr. Long's representation of Milton as a man. He quotes a sublime passage from Milton's own writings in which we read: "He that would hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and most honorable things." (p. 203.) That Milton, who "held aloof from the strife of sects" did not only strive toward this exalted ideal, but actually attained it in his life, is very reasonably inferred from the words, "Milton is like an ideal in the soul, like a lofty mountain on the horizon. We never attain the ideal; we never climb the mountain; but life would be inexpressibly poorer were either to be taken away." Not content with this, our author assures us that Milton realized his dependence upon God, for He prays, depending as he tells us, on "devout prayer to the Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge." (p. 203.) Nor must we think that Milton's prayer went unanswered. "There is a spirit in man," says the old Hebrew poet, 'and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding.' Here, in a word, is the secret of Milton's life and writing."

Anyone who is even slightly acquainted with Milton's prose works, will be very quick to realize that such a portrait is more than historically false,—it is blasphem-

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ous. Is it possible that when Dr. Long explains "the secret of Miltons life and writing," by attributing it to the fact that "the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding," he has forgotten Milton's political and domestic life and such writings as the pamphlet, "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce Restored," in which Milton scoffed at Christian marriage and advocated divorce? If Dr. Long had written at a time when the practical evils of divorce were less evident than today, there might be some excuse for his excessive praise of one who advocated it and tried, in characteristic Puritan fashion, to prove the validity of his arguments from Scripture. Can it be that Dr. Long, in describing Milton's aloofness, is familiar with his scurrilous attacks upon those who disagreed with him, especially Salmasius? When he tells us of Milton's superiority to "the strife of sects," has Dr. Long forgotten such statements as the following from the pamphlet, "On True Religion, Heresy, Schism, Toleration"?—"Popery, as being idolatrous, is not to be tolerated either in public or in private." This is but one of many similarly intolerant statements that we read in Milton's pamphlets published after 1640. "His pamphlets exhibit all the distortion of facts, injustice to opponents, and narrowness of view, which are the inevitable if often unconscious vices of the man who writes in the interest of a party." (*Baily, Milton.*) Boynton, in "The World's Leading Poets," gives a more detailed picture of these vices,—"The truth is, he (Milton) was naturally pugnacious and in controversy his dignity often left him as completely as it may leave the stateliest of men who finds himself involved in a street scuffle. Milton often vies in shrillness and coarseness with the least

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humane of his adversaries." Nor would a study of Milton's work at this time, lead one to think that he "held aloof from the strife of sects." (*Long, p. 205.*) He plunged into the ecclesiastical struggle that was going on in 1641 and in a single year, wrote five pamphlets "fiercely demanding the abolition of episcopacy and the establishment of a Presbyterian system in England."

There is another trait in Milton's character that is conspicuously Puritan about which Dr. Long says very little,—his inconsistency. It is difficult to treat briefly of this chameleon trait in Milton's religious sentiments, for he was, in early years, an Anglican; later, a Presbyterian; and, finally he found even Congregationalism too formal so that in his last days he seems to have arrived at that degree of spiritual "perfection" that requires no formal creed. Nor was he less shifting and inconsistent in politics, for at one time he exalted the indefeasible rights of Parliament and later supported Cromwell's attitude toward it; he grew very angry in denouncing Charles I. because of his refusal to approve certain bills submitted to him and was equally zealous in supporting Cromwell's dismissal of Parliament for denying the same right to the Protector; he was successively an enthusiastic advocate of free printing in *Areopagitica* and a vigorous censor of "seditious" publications under Cromwell.

In putting the finishing touch to his portrait of Milton, who, in "the last part of . . . life is a picture of solitary grandeur unequalled in literary history," (p. 208) Dr. Long is unfair to Milton's daughters who "rebelled at the task of reading to him and recording his thoughts." There are reasons for that rebellion, which Dr. Long does not tell us. The explanation of this omission may

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be that the facts concerning Milton's relations with his daughters will not help to show that he was "the most sublime . . . figure in our literature," but we are more concerned with truth than idealism in matters of history. Frankly, Milton was a very despotic father. "He gave them (his daughters) no education; the eldest, it is said, could not write her name. Yet he did not scruple to make servants of them, training them so that they could read five or six languages to his satisfaction, without in the least understanding what they read. The youngest, Deborah, was more like himself, and it is said that he taught her Latin, and had a regard for her above her sisters. But in his old age he included her in a sweeping condemnation of them all." (*Boynton*, p. 231.) Again, Bailey speaks of Milton's domestic life as "the ugliest thing in the story of his life." That the actual story of his life is very different from Dr. Long's account of it, is evident from the contrast between the historical facts to which we have called attention and the appreciation given us by Dr. Long, of which the following may be taken as a summary: "Milton is the poet of steadfast will and purpose, who moves like a god amid the fears and hopes and changing impulses of the world, regarding them as trivial and momentary things that can never swerve a great soul from its course." (p. 202.) There is hardly greater dissimilarity between Cooper's miniature and Bernini's sculpture than there is between Dr. Long's idealistic presentation of Milton's character and that same character as it is known from history.

But, accepting these facts, how shall we explain Milton's greatness? Certainly we must admit, with G. K. Chesterton, that Milton was "a poet whom we cannot

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help liking, though a man whom we cannot like." To some, the unstinted praise given "Paradise Lost," even by Catholic critics of repute, may seem to present a difficulty that it is hard to answer. However, when we recall the fact that the beauty of Milton's writing is rather the result of his Christianity than his Puritanism, we shall find less difficulty in explaining such comments as Chateaubriand's,—“Had Christianity produced no other poem than 'Paradise Lost' . . . still we might insist that it is highly favorable to the muses.” But, if we may borrow a parity from this same author,—just as paganism could never have produced “a Tartarus as awful as Dante's Inferno,” neither could Christianity, hampered by the false tenets of Puritanism, have done so.

The task of proving the inferiority of Milton, would, of course, be unnecessary if everyone admitted the falsity of Milton's religious views and the truth of the Catholic Faith, for then it would be sufficient to call attention to the fact that Milton built upon a false foundation while Dante built upon truth. Prescinding therefore, from the intrinsic merits of Protestantism and Catholicism as religious systems, where shall we find instances in Dante and Milton to illustrate the fact that, even as a purely literary inspiration, the Catholic faith was much superior to Protestantism, and that therefore, Milton, working under the influence of Protestantism, was, though a great natural genius, less a poet than he would have been had the tone of his work been entirely Catholic?

First, we notice that Milton has pictured no Purgatory. The intense poetic possibilities of this subject, forbidden Milton because of his religious belief, are well put by Chateaubriand in “The Genius of Christianity.” (c. XV.)



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That the doctrine of Purgatory opens to the Christian poet [we may substitute the word Catholic for Christian] a source of the marvelous which was unknown to antiquity [and, we may add, rejected by Puritanism] will be readily admitted. Nothing, perhaps, is more favorable to the inspiration of the muse than this middle state of expiation between the region of bliss and that of pain, suggesting the idea of a confused mixture of happiness and suffering. The gradation of the punishments inflicted on those souls that are more or less happy, more or less brilliant, according to their degree of proximity to an eternity of joy and woe, affords an impressive subject for poetic description. In this respect it surpasses the subjects of heaven and hell, because it possesses a future, which they do not.

But what of the subjects that both poets have treated? Are there instances of Milton's inferiority in such cases? Our answer is affirmative and the first example of it, we shall borrow from Alfred Austin. Comparing Dante's respectful regard for women with Milton's contempt for them, he says:

The life and poetry of Milton contain nothing (if exception be made of his beautiful sonnet, written in the very spirit of the "*Divina Commedia*," on his second wife) to compare with Dante's love, at once real and ideal, masculine yet mystical, for Beatrice. The language used by Eve in addressing Adam in *Paradise Lost*,

My author and disposer, what thou bidst  
Unargued I obey so God ordains,  
God is thy law, thou mine . . .

and the very choice of a subject the dominating incident of which is described by the well known words, "The woman did give me and I did eat," would almost seem to indicate that Milton's conception of woman, and his attitude towards her, were such as can be attributed to no other poet. It is the attitude of unqualified domination. Again, in

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"Samson Agonistes" the very center and pith of the poem is the incorrigible frailty and inferiority of woman, a thesis that would be extraordinary, even if true, for a poet. Samson starts with a reproof of himself for weakly revealing the secret of his strength to the persistent subtlety of a woman, "that species monster, my accomplished snare" as he calls Delila, since "yoked her bond-slave by foul effeminacy," a servitude he stigmatises as "ignominious and infamous," whereby he is "shamed, dishonored, quelled." When Delila, profoundly penitent for what she has done, thereby incurring his displeasure, prostrates herself before him and sues for pardon, he spurns her from him with these words: "Out, out, hyena; these are thy wonted arts," and goes on to say that they are the arts of every woman, "to deceive, betray, and then to feign remorse." With abject humility she confesses that curiosity to learn all secrets, and then to publish them, are "common female faults incident to all our sex." This only causes him to insult and spurn her yet more fiercely; and he declares that God sent her to "debase him."

What a different note is this from that struck by Dante, when he speaks of "that blessed Beatrice, who now dwells in heaven with the angels, and on earth in my heart, and with my soul is still in love." Far from thinking that severe command on the part of the one and the unquestioning submission on the part of the other, form the proper relation of lover and maiden, husband and wife, Dante avers that

*Amor e cor gentil son' una cosa,*

that love and a gentle heart are one and the same thing.—

(*"The Bridling of Pegasus," pp. 64-66.*)

That Dante's sentiments, such as these, were the result of the Faith that has exalted a woman to the first place of honor among created beings, and that Milton's conception of woman's inferiority, follows quite naturally from his fervid rejection of this Catholic belief and its

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effect in dignifying woman, will hardly need to be proved to anyone who has felt the influence of devotion to Mary in his life, though it may seem very far-fetched to others.

But there is another point of contrast between the two poets that is more fundamental and more clearly the result of their religious convictions. Anyone who knows Catholicism and Protestantism in theory or in practice, will, I think, admit that there is a certain vagueness in Protestantism that forms a very striking contrast to the definiteness of Catholicism. There is in Catholicism, very little sympathy with those forms of Protestantism in which religion is a great, general, "brotherhood of man," with few if any of its obligations defined. To this "broadness" the Church opposes the commandments of God and the Church and very clear obligations that all who wish to be Catholics, must fulfil. I do not, of course, wish to make the offensive statement that Protestants as such, disregard God's commandments. I merely desire to call attention to the indefiniteness of Protestantism as contrasted with the decided definiteness of Catholicism. That this difference is reflected in the works of Dante and Milton is stated very clearly in the following passage from Symonds, where, however, it is made to account for the defects as well as the virtues of the poets we are discussing.

Dante and Milton may be taken as the types of two opposite qualities of genius, breadth and detail, extension and intensity. Descending to a lower level of genius, and seeking an illustration from the sister art of painting, we might compare them respectively to Fuseli and Blake. Blake attracts us by the pregnancy of meaning he conveys, by the

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intensity and compression of his thought. The absence of vagueness in Blake prevents our calling his designs sublime in the highest sense; they startle our imagination rather than dilate it. On the other hand the vagueness of Fuseli is excessive; it degenerates into feebleness. A sort of grand vacuity is the fault of one master; grotesqueness, smallness, and a tendency to confusing detail are the blemishes upon the other's work. . . .

Dante's definiteness was partly idiosyncratic, partly medieval. He belonged to an age of subtle questions, of mechanical art, of party politics, of intense individuality, of distinct beliefs. . . .

Milton, on the contrary, was a northern giant of the renaissance, cultivated in the classics, and inheriting from his Teutonic ancestry the sense of an infinity obscurely felt, rather than prominently apparent in his works.

(Symonds, "Introduction to Dante," pp. 234-235.)

In other words, when we read Milton, "we simply understand that the poet means we should spurn Satan to follow Christ; or avoid evil and pursue virtue; and this is really vague." (*Albert Mordell, Dante and Other Waning Classics, p. 64.*) On the other hand, "Dante in describing all human passion and emotion, all moral states and qualities, is truly sublime. He is tragic, piercing, thrilling, touching, intense as no other poet, except Shakespeare, ever has been." (*Symonds.*)

Another striking contrast between Milton and Dante that may readily be traced to their religions, is found in their descriptions of Satan. There is nothing heroic or admirable in Dante's conception of Satan, but many readers find it difficult to avoid being attracted by Satan's character as portrayed by Milton.

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What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost—the unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield;  
And what is else not to be overcome.  
That glory never shall his wrath or might  
Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace  
With suppliant knee, and deify his power  
Who, from the terror of his arm, so late  
Doubted his empire—that were low indeed;  
That were an ignominy and shame beneath  
This downfall. (*Paradise Lost*, Bk. I., ll. 105-106.)

Clearly, Milton here concedes a ray of comfort to Satan in his punishment. This would be utterly inconsistent with Dante's conception of him, who,

If he were beautiful,  
As he is hideous now, and yet did dare  
To scowl upon his Maker, well from him  
May all our misery flow. (*"Hell," XXXIV., II., 32-35.*)

And again, he who had "upon his head three faces" while "at six eyes he wept," in the realm of suffering where, "over a portal's lofty arch inscribed" we read, "All hope abandon, ye who enter here," (*"Hell," III., 9*) is a black picture of despair and wretchedness with no line of light or comfort in its painting. Such, certainly, is the truer picture of Satan. That this stern picture is Catholic while Milton's comparatively comforting portrayal is Protestant, is evident to anyone who knows the unchanged doctrine of the Catholic Church concerning hell, and the constantly shifting belief of Protestantism that has either denied the existence of hell entirely, or has gradually eradicated most of the punish-

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ments there, until it is really quite a comfortable place to spend eternity.

Finally, the greatest difference between the respective religious opinions professed by Dante and Milton is this: Dante believed in the doctrine of free-will and Milton believed in a predestination that renders freedom of the will impossible. It is very important in estimating the relative greatness of these poets and their work, to realize this difference. For, predestination makes hell the monstrous foible of a monster God who punishes innocent victims for sins they could not avoid, while the doctrine of man's free-will makes it a place of unspeakable torment, created by an omniscient God for the just punishment of those who have deliberately sinned against their Creator and Redeemer.

Supreme of gifts, which God, creating, gave  
Of his free bounty, sign most evident  
Of goodness, and in his account most prized,  
Was liberty of will. (*"Paradise," V. ll. 18-20.*)

Deny liberty of will, and hell, as described by Milton, is a monstrosity; believe in it, and hell, as Dante describes it, is the awful reality created by Divine justice, outraged.

Instances of the differences between "Paradise Lost" and the "Inferno" might be continued without number, but these will suffice to suggest others. In conclusion, it might be well to repeat and emphasize the fact that the most sublime passages in Milton's work are not the result of any characteristically Puritan inspiration. Rather, their source is to be found in that remnant of the Catholic Faith that is common to all forms of Christianity

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and that may be found in the heart of Milton as in the heart of every Christian. This, together with the external influence exercised upon Milton by the Catholic poets Dante and Vondel, are factors in Milton's life that might, of their nature, have had a great influence on his writing. That they did actually have this influence, and that in those instances in which Milton's "emancipated" Puritanism was the source of inspiration, his work was of a lesser grade of excellence, we have tried to prove.

The material given here aims, as is stated in the introduction, at furnishing students a suggestive line of thought for considering a movement that is at present engaging the attention of the public in this country and in England. When students have thought over a particular period such as Puritanism and have identified the remnants of Catholic belief in this particular movement, it will be an easy matter for them to follow out the same plan in their future study of history and literature. The cultivation of this habit of mind cannot but lead to a realization and appreciation of the beauty and power and strength of the Catholic Faith as it manifests itself in the history of man and his work. This appreciation will necessarily arouse in Catholic students a lively enthusiasm for the Church, that must replace the apathy that so often characterizes the Catholic during his college days and afterwards. Radical schools throughout our country that are built upon false systems of philosophy and distorted interpretations of history, are conducted and attended by Socialists and Bolsheviki whose enthusiasm verges on madness. This element can no longer be disregarded by Catholics. Enthusiasm must be met by

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enthusiasm—not apathy. It is to encourage this enthusiastic appreciation of their Faith that the suggestions in these pages are offered.









